

AI Can Transform B2B Pricing, but It Isn't Plug and Play

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B2B organizations have bold goals to deploy AI, but the actual outcomes frequently fall short of ambitions set for pricing teams. Many companies hope that fast deployments of off-the-shelf agentic pricing tools will lead to cost savings and short-term task-specific efficiency gains. In our experience, this approach creates limited impact.

To achieve long-term value creation, companies must redesign their processes with agentic AI tools at their core and focus on pricing effectiveness. When deployed for effectiveness and not just efficiency, AI can deliver three immediate benefits for pricing teams:

- **Real-Time Responsiveness.** AI can surface recommendations to sales, pricing, and other decision makers within the negotiation process in configure, price, quote (CPQ) software and other tools in real time, not in thick reports that teams review only after deals close. Teams can shift from episodic price reviews to continuous and governed adjustments powered by machine learning, with scenario modeling to pressure-test changes before they are rolled out.
- **Faster, Deeper Analyses.** AI makes teams more efficient, cutting the time for diagnostics from weeks to hours. But, more importantly, it creates opportunities for richer insights and stronger pricing effectiveness by making a wide variety of once-impractical analyses feasible without large, specialized teams. These include dynamic cross-elasticity modeling, true machine-learning-powered recommendations with direct and indirect feedback, and thousands of automated data cuts to uncover exceptions and patterns.
- **Better and Less Risky Pricing Decisions.** Instead of fragmented observations, the patterns that AI agents contextualize and extract hold up to scrutiny. They lead to more robust recommendations that improve value capture or help identify sales or margin opportunities teams could not have seen on their own. AI-based insights also mitigate the risk of pushback from other parts of the organization.

We have already seen the impact that deploying AI for pricing effectiveness can have. A distributor with about \$1 billion in revenue recently deployed an AI pricing agent that analyzed price elasticity at the customer level across thousands of SKUs. Margins increased by 2 percentage points not because of efficiency gains, but primarily because the sales team trusted and used the resulting real-time pricing recommendations.

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Most large organizations can already deploy capable AI. The tools are especially promising for organizations that are coping with unorganized data, older tools, and rigid pricing rules, because these organizations can leapfrog to a new level of pricing effectiveness without having to build a new platform or remove humans from the loop.

How to Deploy AI for Enduring Pricing Effectiveness

B2B organizations experimenting with the most sophisticated off-the-shelf AI pricing tools currently available have not experienced the true potential of AI for pricing, because those tools don't improve decision making in real time. They tend to restate the obvious, lack commercial context, remain reactive and rule-based, and focus on narrow tasks rather than improving end-to-end workflows. They don't help teams address the foundational design choices that will ultimately allow them to realize the sustained value of pricing with AI.

Greater pricing effectiveness with AI depends on an integrated approach that combines business context, market knowledge, best-in-class pricing algorithms, the right tooling platform, redefined processes and governance, and adoption support. This approach in turn requires pricing teams to take four actions.

Architect for adaptation. The best AI pricing systems tolerate unorganized data, structural gaps, and exceptions rather than forcing the business into a simplified, inferior copy of itself. If the AI deployment is not engineered for adaptability and scale, traditional systems risk becoming overwhelmed by data volumes, which can reduce accuracy or increase latency.

Flexibility means that AI tools can adapt to users and their data, not the other way around.

The flexibility with which AI tools ingest data and absorb inconsistencies means that they can adapt to users and their data, not the other way around. This allows organizations to optimize data pipelines, analytics, reasoning, and audit trails independently while avoiding latency or cost blow-ups. The systems also have a cohesive end-to-end design built on enterprise-grade security and cost controls. This ensures that outputs connect consistently across the business rather than fragmenting into isolated point solutions.

These characteristics combine to yield recommendations that update automatically as conditions change, with effective refresh and change detection mechanisms to ensure outputs stay current as inputs evolve.

Pricing is not an abstract numerical exercise. It is a contact sport.

Anchor intelligence in commercial reality. Pricing is not an abstract numerical exercise. It is a contact sport where decisions trigger competitive responses, customer reactions, and channel dynamics that define the organization's commercial reality. Best-in-class platforms also encode strategic intent directly into decision logic.

This commercial reality goes beyond transaction history to include business rules and priorities, where to create or relieve pricing pressure, and what customers truly value versus what they claim to value. It also includes "tribal" knowledge that only experienced team members will have. In most organizations, valuable contextual intelligence and insight remain trapped in email threads, reports, spreadsheets, and tribal memory. AI can unlock the power of this existing knowledge by taking it out of slide decks and personal experiences and making it actionable.

Deploying generative AI (GenAI) can make the knowledge available with the right level of clarity and nuance for decision makers in real time. Sales and pricing teams no longer need to remember extensive guidelines and rules, recall the justifications for price actions and escalations, or retrain frequently using reference materials that might be outdated. At the same

time, these process flows incorporate market feedback from real interactions and from deliberate controlled tests that can expose new patterns rather than codifying and projecting the past.

Without mechanisms to continuously capture feedback, conduct tests, and adjust the context, AI-based pricing recommendations may seem analytically sound, but they ignore the realities that determine whether a price decision will be effective. They risk creating unintended consequences or becoming shelfware.

Earn trust through transparency. When users understand the rationale behind a recommendation, they are more likely to implement the guidance rather than second-guess or work around it. In trustworthy systems, the rationales behind decisions are defensible and traceable, because decision makers can see the underlying decisions, drivers, sources, assumptions, and constraints clearly. Once users understand the AI agent's logic, they can supervise, override, and guide the decisions based on experience.

A hybrid approach that combines rules with agentic AI avoids the pitfalls of each element. Rules-only approaches become unscalable when sales and pricing teams are unwilling or unable to keep following them; meanwhile, unconstrained AI processes risk hallucinating and fueling uncertainty that can lead to a lack of trust.

In the hybrid approach, AI proposes and orchestrates, while rule-based components—such as rules engines, solvers, contract parsers, compliance checks—enforce precision, auditability, and nonnegotiable guardrails. Controlled supervision and override workflows come into play when AI recommendations deviate from pricers' expertise and intuition. If confidence falls below accuracy thresholds, the system automatically reruns, adapts its approach, or escalates rather than delivering unreliable guidance.

Deliver insights where they can change pricing behaviors. Organizations create the most tangible and lasting value with pricing when they shift insights from back-end processes to live sales or customer-facing decision points inside their existing tools and process flows. They receive the insights when they need them rather than in dashboards or reports that arrive after the fact.

Successful enablement starts by defining the expectations and ways to measure success across offerings, channels, locations, and accounts. Teams can then make clear pricing decisions regarding list prices, discounts, promotions, terms and conditions, rebates and incentives, and bundles or packages.

Every insight should map to a downstream decision owner and execution point. That could be the deal desk, approvals, field guidance, or another function such as marketing, finance, or product management. Having specified decision owners, defined actions, and a path to execution give AI-generated insights the clear “so what?” they might otherwise lack.



Building trust requires investment in change management plans

Building trust requires investment in change management plans that include champions, review cycles, and reinforcement to keep pricing, sales, finance, and product teams aligned through shared logic. Supporting these plans is a program of training, enablement, coaching, and incentives. Tracking and measurement need to link key metrics such as adoption rates, override reasons, and cycle times to margin impact. AI enables teams to apply more advanced techniques to measure or validate success, such as AI-supported randomized and controlled trials, that shift the analysis from correlation to causation.

Integrating pricing professionals with decision makers requires process changes supported by a change management program. In our experience, this change management represents 70% of the effort to achieve sustained pricing effectiveness with AI. The algorithmic pricing recommendations represent roughly 10% of the effort and the tools themselves represent about 20%—which is where many companies overinvest, while underinvesting in the enablement, governance, and behavior change.

How to Get Started

Rather than tackling every pricing opportunity at once, we recommend first applying the four-step integrated actions to an opportunity that will generate meaningful measurable value while preserving or bolstering the organization's AI ambitions. This opportunity could be a segment or class of offerings or a focus on a specific part of the process such as list price setting, discount guidance, or deal desk approvals. Ideally, it would be the organization's highest ROI opportunity or biggest bottleneck.

Success will have three important benefits:

- It will establish a quality bar for pricing effectiveness that future initiatives must meet or beat.
- It will allow the organization to automate some tasks to a measurable standard of accuracy.

- Success will build internal buy-in and create momentum to take on more opportunities, as the lessons from change management become habits instead of isolated or localized changes.

Waiting for perfect data or for the promised capabilities in the next generation of an application will put an organization further behind competitors that are already implementing AI and upskilling their teams on new processes and tools.

Agentic AI can drive significant long-term value in pricing for B2B companies that treat it as a coordinated strategic effort, not plug-and-play analytics or a “buy it and try it” experiment. Companies need to prioritize scalable architecture, encode commercial context, and earn trust through explainability and guardrails. Useful guidance for decision makers needs to surface within the tools they use when they need it. Relying on tools alone may generate gains in efficiency, but that reliance can undermine pricing effectiveness and reduce margins when AI recommendations lack commercial context, get overridden, or go stale.

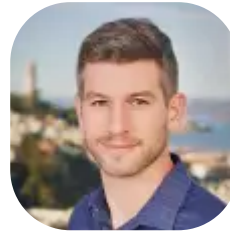
The window to build these capabilities is now open. Organizations that decisively engineer AI into their pricing operations, rather than simply deploying tools, will define the next era of B2B commercial performance.

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