



Promotion Optimization Institute, LLC

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# POI 2021 Enterprise Planning Vendor Panorama

(This document supersedes the 2020 POI TPx Vendor Panorama)

**This is an excerpt from the POI 2021 Enterprise Planning Vendor Panorama.**

The full report is available for download from the POI membership pages, or contact the POI Institute at: [jmalin@p-o-i.org](mailto:jmalin@p-o-i.org).

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## Visualfabriq

 [Visualfabriq.com](https://visualfabriq.com)

# visualfabriq

**Vendor Profile:** Visualfabriq's mantra is to unleash the excellence of its clients in the CPG industry. An integrated TPX vendor focused on taking the manual processing out of enterprise planning through SaaS automation and advanced AI optimization of sales planning, cross-functional Sales and Operation Planning (S&OP) cycle, and digitalizing the Strategic Revenue Management process.

**Geographic Presence:** Current: North America (30%), LatAm (5%), Europe (50%), Asia/Pacific/Africa (15%).

**Total Consumer Goods Users (Seats):** Visualfabriq utilizes an enterprise subscription model (unlimited user) vs. per user/seat model. Estimated users is 3000 across the integrated platform.

**Tiers Represented:** Tier 1 (95%), Tier 2 (5%), Tier 3 (0%).

**Solution Offerings:** TPM, ROI, TPO, & RGM.

**Major Product Sub-Segments Not Covered:** Tobacco, consumer semi-durables, and durables.

**Data Management:** In preparation for an implementation, Visualfabriq will discuss all interfaces with the customer and see where customizations are required. Visualfabriq's practice is to have the client cleanse the data, since most data interfaces are recurring. Visualfabriq does allow filtering of data that is loaded and cleans the data from that perspective. For initial data loads performed as part of the implementation system configuration, the Visualfabriq engagement manager will work with the customer to find the most effective solution to data cleansing. As it relates to managing data integrations, Visualfabriq has launched Bifrost, a fully configurable, real-time, and highly scalable data integration service, enabling their customers to take their data-exchange and analytical capabilities to the next level. Bifrost transforms the data integration process from an inefficient, manual, vendor (developer) controlled activity, into a real-time, self-service configuration interface, controlled and driven by the client.

**Baseline Creation:** The platform contains a module that uses advanced AI pattern recognition and prediction to automatically create baselines for the user. These can be adjusted top down and bottom up. Visualfabriq has baseline evaluation capabilities to see the accuracy of the baselines-human and machine.

**Headquarter Capabilities:** Visualfabriq facilitates the creation of a next year plan with one press of a button to create a new revenue plan or copy an existing one. This newly created version can then be adjusted as preferred: top down, incorporating all the growth drivers for next year on a higher level, or detailed, using the input in the Pricing Module and Demand Plan for next year. HQ users can manage global pricing structures & GSV changes directly in the system via a download excel table that automatically updates the Trade Spend Master. The "ghosting" feature is also very useful

on the calendar. It allows a user to see the prior year or a competitor's promotions as a shaded box as a reference point when evaluating or planning a promotion. This can also be used with HQ teams for Go to Market strategy development. Visualfabriq is in early pilot with customers on new (Customer) Marketing Events planning, evaluation, and optimization capabilities that impact the plan and forecast, but they do not generate an immediate short-term uplift at the plan account level (sell in nor sell out). The event can be planned with multiple (partly) overlapping tactics, which can be tracked in a Gantt. This enables Headquarter Marketing Teams to align planning for marketing events and trade promotions. Based on the planned marketing events (SKU's and dates) the system allocates sell out (and corresponding sell in) data to the events.

**Marketing:** Shopper marketing events are planned in the Plan & Track module. All functionality available to plan promotional events is also available for shopper marketing events: configurable shopper marketing spends, workflows, approvals, interfacing, etc.

**TPM:** The planning process within Visualfabriq is simple, scalable, and configurable. The system has the capability to plan regular and EDLP pricing strategies, register risks and opportunities, and create revenue plans, which provide bottom-up input into budget creation and LE's that can be tracked. Planning for wholesaler/indirects has been simplified and users can plan multiple indirects at the same time. Visualfabriq has planning capabilities at the SKU level. Automated matching of deduction and according to settlements can be configured within Visualfabriq using mapping of attributes. There is a new claims dashboard coming soon that will simplify and streamline the way the user manages claims. Visualfabriq continues to advance capabilities to meet the needs of the user.

**General Analytics:** Visualfabriq covers the entire planning process end to end. They facilitate the creation of a next year plan incorporating all the growth drivers at a high level or detailed using the input from the Pricing Module and Demand Plan. This includes setting of revenue and profit targets and trade rates. These are auto allocated based on their fair share from prior years. POI still sees the need for rollups for enterprise reporting as well as actuals vs. target tracking. From planning to evaluation, Visualfabriq integrates predictive models for optimized promotion planning while showing the full financial effects. The platform's dashboard is intuitive and signals user action. It is easily configurable with drag and drop capabilities. It provides standardized template reports, which can be enhanced or adapted by the user. The ROI promo scatter chart is a nice way to look at the "Top" and "Flop" promotions in a matrix. It shows causal data such as forward buy in a graphical way. It has the ability to proxy a prediction based on similar promotions or solely based on historical data for companies that change their assortment frequently. It has waterfall charts for both the retailer and manufacturer perspectives. The fully automated post event analytics is very strong because of how it compares actual to expected, highlights forward buy, and provides a copy of the ad for reference. In particular, we like how the ROI is graphically represented, while also providing the standard revenue/ROI data field in chart/grids. Visualfabriq also has some unique KPIs, like "bang for the buck" ratio, to provide deeper insights.

**TPO:** Optimization within Visualfabriq is intuitive and simple. Scenarios can include, but are not limited to: pricing strategy, trade investment, promotional strategy, and volume development. New product prediction capabilities help to create sell out predictions for new product introductions. The zero-touch planning functionality automatically creates a library relevant to the current selection and suggests the outcomes for the user using the AI prediction models in real time. This capability shortens time spent planning and users should not be apprehensive of the AI technology that enables it. Users still have the ability to evaluate ROI, what-if, and plan promotions themselves. The platform just reduces substantial early planning burden.

**Analytics Modeling:** The platform utilizes web based HTML5 (React). The platform incorporates all OS machine learning libraries out of the box, allowing client data science teams to generate cleansed data sets by the platform and use those to directly develop predictive models with these familiar libraries and roll them out directly into production, effectuating predictions directly for all the users. It does volume prediction on the fly through standard machine learning. Visualfabriq utilizes a unique approach to embedding AI in TPx; predicting shopping behavior, forward buy, and phasing patterns delivering zero-touch planning. The underlying data structures are once again improving to increase speed and ensure future scalability. They use a combination of linear Scikit-learn, statsmodels; random forecast Scikit-learn models, Scikit-learn, xgboost, lightgb gradient models and are one of the few vendors to utilize advanced neural networks using pytorch and tensorflow. Visualfabriq is continually upgrading their AI implementation methodology to provide even greater results and robustness of models.

**RGM Analytics:** Visualfabriq planning and analytics is a suite of Revenue Management capabilities with the power of applied AI, which enables holistic planning (TPM/TPO/ROI in the moment of planning). The RGM capabilities boast highly automated analytics that enable the user to very simply interact with the dashboards to make business decisions. For example, the Visualfabriq Revenue Plan is where all the bottom-up input from the platform comes together. Visualfabriq automates the full calculation of the outlook – there is no manual calculation required. Every night, the outlook is refreshed. The Revenue Module is built on a highly flexible Pricing Waterfall, that can incorporate any profit calculation required. As a standard it includes Gross Profit, with an option to even calculate EBITDA if all costs are provided. The Visualfabriq Platform can create cross-customer, cross-portfolio, and cross-channel analysis and aids in driving to faster decisions.

**User Experience (UX):** There is significant investment by Visualfabriq into the future design of the UX and it is intended to solve problems for the user. Currently the platform has an intuitive and action-oriented tile-based landing page. It is very graphically oriented with both charts and grids being exposed simultaneously based on preferences. A favorite calendar aspect is the ability to visually see which promotions drive more profit/incremental volume, incremental sales/less incremental profit, and simply more net sales. A key benefit is the evaluation can highlight unprofitable stacked consumer discounts. Best practice sharing across the client base is facilitated by the integrated Zendesk tool and hosting two user groups a year. Joint Customer Business Planning is facilitated by enabling a sales person's ability to present "in-mode," hiding manufacturer cost, etc., and also through exportable PDF proposals. Visualfabriq has recently enabled a client SaaS University to support client learning and engagement, create discussion, schedule trainings, and drive user adoption.

**Foodservice:** Currently, Foodservice events are planned directly using specially configured plan accounts or using Distributor plan accounts with sub-accounts selection.

**IBP:** Visualfabriq supports both the annual planning as well as monthly business cycles (S&OP) in an integrated manner, using the results from annual planning to set targets for the monthly reviews. The platform builds a full forecast in the Revenue Plan, integrating input from the different teams involved without requiring any manual calculations, such as promotional volumes and spend, the impact of marketing campaigns, trade spend drift from sales, and manual adjustments to the baseline from demand. The Revenue Plan Breakdown shows the building blocks of baseline, promotion, contractual spend, and adjustments, enabling fast understanding of what is happening and triggering action-oriented discussion. Add to this a standardized calculation method for Risks and Opportunities in one place, and business review conversations move from "what are the numbers" to "so, what do we do next?"

**Configuration/Customization:** As a SaaS solution, no hard coding customization is allowed. Client needs have been able to be met through development that is shared across the install base and through the extensive configuration possibilities that include custom KPIs, entry fields, workflows, reports, and screens which all can be altered by the client administrators.

**Technology Architecture/Delivery Options:** All cloud-based, multitenant SaaS for functionality but database is individual. The platform is moving to Python 3 which will enable different aspects of their platform to be upgraded at different times depending on the elements of the upgrade involved. This will enable more agile developments and an increased release cycle. Hosting is with Amazon Web Services; data can also be covered by Azure if legally required. Visualfabriq is continually monitoring and managing scale by using specific microservices to automate elastic scaling, setup through the front end, and general performance improvements of components. This has resulted in speed improvements for the largest scenarios (500+ products; data tables of 1bln+ records). Visualfabriq is driving to scalable maintenance, so organizations don't need developer support. Visualfabriq's platform is a 100% SaaS solution, where new releases are available to all clients without extra implementation effort or costs, allowing their clients to have an evolving platform that always uses the latest technology. This also facilitates a 100% remote working implementation and engagement process.

**Service Partners:** Strategic Solutions (LatAm) and BPX for advancing smoother integrations.

**Technology Partners:** Amazon AWS and Microsoft Azure for cloud services.

**Vendor Trend:** Very positive growth trend and a strong roadmap going forward. Visualfabriq has added more than 60 to the workforce in the past year as they have grown from international to global provider and they have been voted as a great place to work. Investment in people and product have been steady. The company has consistently been able to win deals with companies across the 3-tier structure. POI believes the work it is doing on machine learning and the REACT front end capabilities will pay dividends as an early mover advantage. Most recently Visualfabriq gained PSG as an equity partner which enables the organization to continue driving innovation, invest in additional resources to support manufacturer deployments, and grow internal talent.

**Strengths:** Visualfabriq is resonating with client needs to unlock their data sources, generate relevant insights, and empower their teams to make better/faster decisions—at a lower cost of ownership. A very robust trade management tool that enables price management, promo what-if optimization, promotion planning, internal/external sell out predictions, improved baseline creation, and volume forecasting. Visualfabriq is a forerunner in AI usage for trade management. 80% of a tier one client's planning is accomplished through new AI capabilities and models. There is flexibility to utilize the AI models or have users input baselines, lifts, etc. The value is in the flexibility as an organization learns to trust the system. This is especially true with clients that don't have robust historical data. One customer was able to reduce their demand cycle from four weeks to one. It has transformed the cross-functional process to lite-touch and is now a 90% automated process. Visualfabriq utilizes a standard templated blue print deployment process that drives successful system implementation between 2 and 7 months depending on the data availability, quality, and change management. It has the ability to handle significant amounts of data. Additionally, the blue print deployment process aids in successful global deployments. Visualfabriq offers two major and two minor releases per year.

**Challenges:** Visualfabriq has a tremendous passion for optimization and advanced topics but must also remain focused on those CG companies that use spreadsheets and just need to move to TPM. There is a high level of change management that accompanies system implementations, even more

so with AI. Visualfabriq will need to continue to work with clients to move an organization through the transformative change.

**Adjacent Offerings:** Demand Forecast Manager; Trade Spend Master- Pricing Module and marketing event planner.

**Key Differentiators:** The expertise and passion for TPM/TPO/ROI and machine learning to deliver their clients the tools they missed while working in the industry aids in Visualfabriq's growth and client retention. Visualfabriq is one of the few organizations that allows access to the predictive models and enables a client to get under the hood and understand, align, and facilitate the modeling in a repeatable way (note: model review is by key client members and not all users). Visualfabriq gives back through Net 4 Kids philanthropic program to support disadvantaged children.

**Outlook & Prognosis:** Given solid growth, excellent vision, clients of all sizes, and a strong/insightful user experience, we expect Visualfabriq to continue to be a very strong option for manufacturers.

**Evaluate Visualfabriq When:** When your organization is looking for full enterprise planning and revenue management from a company that has deep expertise. Also, consider Visualfabriq if your organization would benefit from reducing the burden of sales planning, forecasting (S&OP), analytics, and is open to automated promotion/plan "intelligent" recommendations through AI.

**Avoid Visualfabriq If:** If you wish to customize and create a one-off solution, or want a basic/transactional TPM for the long term.

**Distinctions:** HQ Analytics & Insights, Financial Orientation & Simulation, TPO Ergonomics, IBP/S&OP Capabilities, AI

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### About the Authors



**Pam Brown** is POI's Chief Commercial Officer. In this role she creates and executes POI strategy, advisory, and research. She elevates practices and CPG and Retailer relationships. Pam has 29 years in the CPG industry. She began her career executing at retail and, through promotions, advanced to leading retail execution & key account teams for Unilever. For Kayser-Roth she led all Sales and Broker teams west of the Mississippi. In her 13 years with Del Monte, she carried many roles. She was the Director of Sales Strategy and Operations, which included: Sales Systems and Reporting, Sales Operations, BI Analytics, Sales Training, and Sales Policy. Pam's final role at Del Monte was the Director of IT Governance and PMO, which included planning and leading enterprise-wide technology engagements. Pam has current, extensive knowledge in TPM, TPO, ROI, Revenue Management, Advanced Analytics, Change Management, Sales and Sales

Effectiveness, Demand Planning, Supply Chain, Organizational Effectiveness, and other relevant best practices areas. Over the years she has researched, designed, and deployed enterprise-wide solutions to meet business needs. She understands how to execute and gain user adoption of new systems for physical retail and E-commerce. She has advised solutions providers on enhancements to core capabilities and partnered with other CPG manufacturers to share, learn, and drive best practices in today's challenging retail and consumer goods environment for mutual benefit.

Pam Brown can be reached at [pambrown@p-o-i.org](mailto:pambrown@p-o-i.org)  
or connect with her on LinkedIn [linkedin.com/in/pam-brown](https://www.linkedin.com/in/pam-brown)

A special thank you to **Sarah Meyer** who is a POI Affiliate and supports POI Manufacturer Advisory with Pam Brown. She participated in the Enterprise Planning vendor process and helped to support the creation of the document you have enjoyed. An Affiliate for POI, Sarah works with companies to optimize profit through effective planning and specifically in TPM and TPO. Sarah has over 18 years of experience in the CPG and Food industry. She worked for 15 years with Rich Products Corporation, where she began her career in Finance and transitioned over to Sales to lead the trade management practice and TPM. She has led Sales Account Planning and business implementations of TPM process and technology. She has worked closely with Retailers to lead collaborative planning efforts and drive insights to change.



### About the Promotion Optimization Institute

POI brings together manufacturers, retailers, solution providers, analysts, academics, and other industry leaders with the specific objective of collaboratively improving the promotion and distribution of consumer goods. Members of POI share cross-functional best practices in both structured and informal settings.

Additionally, members benefit through our industry alliances, the Certified Collaborative Marketer (CCM)<sup>™</sup> program, and industry-leading summits around the globe.

POI aims to instill a financial and metrics-based discipline not typically found with other trade groups. The goal of our innovative approach is collaborative promotion optimization. The focus is on the customer/shopper through sales, marketing, and merchandising strategies.

Executive advisory boards keep us apprised of industry needs and help us provide desired outcomes for members, sponsors, and academia.

#### **For more information:**

Visit [poinstitute.com](http://poinstitute.com)

#### **Contact information:**

##### **Michael Kantor**

Founder & CEO

Promotion Optimization Institute (POI)

914-319-7309

[mkantor@p-o-i.org](mailto:mkantor@p-o-i.org)

##### **Pam Brown**

Chief Commercial Officer -Partner

Promotion Optimization Institute (POI)

707-332-0450

[pambrown@p-oi.org](mailto:pambrown@p-oi.org)

