# University of East Anglia unveils digital toolkit to boost SME manufacturers' growth



Academics at the University of East Anglia (UEA), supported by the InterAct programme, have developed an innovative digital servitization toolkit aimed at helping small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) manufacturers grow by adopting new business models. The toolkit, known as InterAct DigiServe, is an interactive website designed to educate and support SME manufacturing leaders in exploring and implementing digital servitization strategies capable of delivering substantial business benefits.

InterAct DigiServe incorporates guidance on using cutting-edge digital technologies including the Internet of Things (IoT), Blockchain, and Artificial Intelligence (AI). These technologies offer opportunities for manufacturers to transform their operations, enhance their competitiveness, and reduce their environmental impacts. The resource is freely accessible and represents the culmination of eight months of pioneering research led by UEA academics Dimitrios Dousios and Tony Karatzas under the auspices of InterAct, a £4.4m programme funded by Made Smarter Innovation and coordinated by the Economic and Social Research Council.

Tony Karatzas, Associate Professor in Supply Chain Management at UEA, explained the motivation behind the toolkit, saying: “Over 90% of UK manufacturers are SMEs, yet there’s been little guidance on digital servitization. This toolkit helps SME leaders unlock its potential and embrace the future of industry. It’s a great example of Government-backed research providing practical solutions for digital transformation. We aim to encourage more industry engagement, research, and policy support to help SMEs thrive in the digital age.”

The research underpinning the toolkit examined how SME manufacturers select digital servitization business models and the factors influencing their success. Four primary digital servitization models were identified: - Add-on: offering extra services alongside existing products - Use-based: providing company-owned products for customer use - Solution-oriented: entering outcome-based contracts - Platform: creating connections between users and services

The investigation highlighted seven key factors affecting performance, including demand unpredictability and digital maturity. A survey of 352 UK SMEs contributed further insights, helping to pinpoint which factors correlate with improved business outcomes.

The InterAct DigiServe package includes a self-assessment toolkit enabling SME leaders to evaluate the suitability of various digital servitization models for their organisation. It also offers expert guidance on choosing the most profitable model and is supported by educational videos and an accompanying training manual. Dimitrios Dousios, Associate Professor in Entrepreneurship at UEA, elaborated: “Our research shows that SMEs can achieve high performance across all digital servitization models, depending on how well the model aligns with the organisation’s context and design. There is no single formula for success. SMEs with different characteristics can still thrive.”

The InterAct programme itself has been a major collaboration involving economic and social scientists, manufacturers, policymakers, and digital technology providers to address the human implications of adopting new industrial technologies. Over its course, InterAct organised more than 70 events attended by over 2,000 stakeholders and grew a network exceeding 750 members, fostering meaningful connections among academia, industry, and government.

In addition to this digital servitization initiative, InterAct supported over 30 research projects on topics ranging from digital change management to sustainable steel production and public perceptions of manufacturing. The network also conducted research missions engaging 150 leaders in manufacturing and digital technology across countries including Singapore, Malaysia, India, Australia and Sri Lanka.

Professor Jillian MacBryde of the University of Strathclyde, co-director of InterAct, praised the project’s impact, stating: “This project is a prime example of how pioneering research can generate valuable insights and practical tools that support SME manufacturers in their digital transformation.”

The InterAct DigiServe toolkit is now available to SME manufacturers seeking to understand and leverage digital servitization to enhance competitiveness and innovation within the UK manufacturing sector.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://interact-digiserve.co.uk> - Corroborates the existence of the InterAct DigiServe toolkit, detailing its purpose in helping UK manufacturing SMEs adopt digital servitization strategies.
2. <https://interact-hub.org/2023/09/01/sme-servitization/> - Supports claims about the toolkit's components, including the self-assessment questionnaire and video training manual, as part of UEA's research on digital servitization business models.
3. <https://interact-digiserve.co.uk/about> - Validates the toolkit's focus on improving productivity and delivering value-added services for manufacturing SMEs.
4. <https://interact-hub.org/2024/08/06/digital-transformation-sme-manufacturers/> - Confirms InterAct's broader role in digital transformation initiatives supported by Made Smarter, including policy frameworks and partnerships mentioned in the article.
5. <https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2024/09/sme-digitalisation-to-manage-shocks-and-transitions_735fc44d/eb4ec9ac-en.pdf> - Provides international context for SME digitalization challenges, aligning with the article's emphasis on digital maturity and operational transformation.
6. <https://interact-hub.org/2023/09/01/sme-servitization/#:~:text=developed%20in%20an%20illustrative%20manner%2C%20the%20microsite%20provides%20a%20visual%20overview> - Reinforces the toolkit’s design approach, particularly the use of visual data representations and anonymized questionnaires mentioned in the article.
7. <https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMirgFBVV95cUxNT2trZEtEMEdpNGdvUXZYSkpnMXYtVmdhLS16aDN5QWZjeFlMdUhjeGlBQTJVa29aR2NQM0ZLTV9iSkx5dGNrT21iWGZBTktIcDZHUW1KUUdjbDVReWdsRXlBLXNvT3dBY3g1UVlVYW9faHlmaFNHcEFWa0c4QUlmdk1EaE43cGRzUmdQalViTjE2YTZQT09Mc2ZsdnBIWENJTHpVRlpXNnJSc1ZZRWc?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en> - Please view link - unable to able to access data