

FROST & SULLIVAN

# BEST PRACTICES

AWARDS

FROST & SULLIVAN

2020 BEST PRACTICES AWARD



PLUS ONE  
ROBOTICS

**2020 NORTH AMERICAN ROBOTICS AND  
COMPUTER VISION SOFTWARE FOR LOGISTICS  
CUSTOMER VALUE LEADERSHIP AWARD**

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## Background and Company Performance

### *Industry Challenges*

The industrial sector is fast emerging as a key area where major digital investments are being realized. Factories have become smarter, processes and operations are faster and more efficient, and workers are increasingly more productive with the advent of Industry 4.0. Despite all of these rapid developments, Frost & Sullivan notes that the industrial sector still views digital investments with a conservative mindset and significant skepticism. Industrial enterprises are typically not as open to change as their counterparts from the information technology (IT) industry. Moreover, rapidly evolving technologies, process complexities, and budget restraints make it quite difficult for market players to make swift decisions. As a result, less than 20% of the industrial sector has made a shift to advanced digital systems, including robotics. Instead, a large portion of the manufacturing industry continues using conventional legacy systems.

Convincing these users to adopt modern technologies on the factory floor is a clear challenge that technology solution providers currently face. Despite a high comfort level with the status quo, Frost & Sullivan observes that the manufacturing sector is starting to realize the additional value digital investments can bring about. Moreover, the pressure of competition spurs both manufacturers and the industrial warehouse and logistics market participants to explore ways to leverage technology's benefits.

Robotics, in particular, is emerging as a critical development in the industrial sector, with the majority of solution development centering on the robotic arm and gripper markets for the automotive and electronics industries. Frost & Sullivan analysts point out that only a handful of companies have properly realized robotics' potential in the warehouse and logistics market. Furthermore, vendors often use buzzwords that fail to create an impact as industrial companies still do not trust artificial intelligence (AI)-based systems. AI remains an abstract concept that industrial companies fail to relate to - unless a solution provider can reassure their faith in the technology. Moreover, AI-based technologies such as computer vision that can best serve industrial applications are relatively underdeveloped. A lack of awareness among users - coupled with many developers' lack of technical expertise - leads to a significant market gap.

Frost & Sullivan analysis concludes that successful vendors will effectively communicate and support the benefits of computer vision solutions while ensuring the ability to integrate the technology into robots and legacy factor equipment, which is otherwise a complex task for manufacturers.

### *Customer Impact and Business Impact*

Founded in 2016, San Antonio, Texas-based Plus One Robotics develops computer vision software to automate robots in warehouse and supply chain applications. The company's unique approach to human-robot collaboration ensures flexible and fault-tolerant operations.

Plus One Robotics' solutions empower robots with AI-powered computer vision. Moreover, the company's cloud-based monitoring solution enables robots to complete monotonous

tasks such as package sorting, parcel induction, or piece-picking. Unlike traditional robots that can only perform pre-programmed tasks, Plus One Robotics' systems can adapt to dynamic industrial environments and accommodate unpredictable situations such as volume surges and packages of variable types, shapes, and sizes. The offering is supplemented by human experts who monitor the robots to ensure tasks are accomplished correctly. In an industry constantly scrutinized for its potential to eliminate human jobs, Plus One Robotics' operational model empowers the human workforce to perform sophisticated tasks versus the mundane jobs that robots perform.

Moreover, Plus One Robotics realized early on the market was flooded with robotic arm and gripper market participants, with a minimal focus on computer vision capabilities. The company identified the need to develop a gripper-agnostic perception stack to augment its entrance into the computer vision software market. While the robotics market has traditionally been heavily dependent on the automotive industry, Frost & Sullivan notes that overreliance on a single end-market is a major business risk. For example, any setback in the automotive industry will have a direct impact on the robotics market. Plus One Robotics' founders identified and turned this gap into a business opportunity by identifying the North American supply chain and logistics market an alternate end-market.

### **What Makes Plus One Robotics Stand Out?**

Industrial robots traditionally excel at repetitive tasks, whereas warehouse and supply chain tasks have a high degree of variability. Therefore, robotics vendors seeking to crack the warehouse and supply chain market require offerings that can sense and respond to variations in the flow of work. Frost & Sullivan notes the classic approach to robotic perception is via AI. While similar market solutions leverage AI alone, Plus One Robotics' process employs a human-in-the-loop (HITL) approach along with the AI algorithm. The company understands AI by itself cannot solve complex problems. By adding a human expert, the company facilitates machine learning. For example, if a robot picking and placing objects at an Asian warehouse encounters an object that it has never experienced before, it raises a flag over the company's cloud-based software.

At that point, a person based in San Antonio will observe what that robot is experiencing and can subsequently show it how to perform the operation remotely. The robot then learns the new technique and returns to autonomous work until it runs into another scenario that it cannot understand, in which case another flag will be raised. The company's HITL approach differentiates Plus One Robotics from competitors, as indicated in its name (i.e., the human is the "plus one".) Specifically, Plus One Robotics' HITL comprises specialized personnel who are available 24/7 and can offer services to the world's most remote locations.

In an industry known to be sluggish in adopting new technologies, Frost & Sullivan feels that Plus One Robotics' solution is truly fresh and unique. For example, the warehouse industry is traditionally reticent to technology adoption and may not even have an engineering staff. Therefore, there is a need for exceedingly reliable and user-friendly solutions. Plus One Robotics nicely meets this need, as reflected in its above-average industry growth and growing market share. For example, vendors who claim a virtually

fail-proof autonomous solution using deep learning and reinforcement models will typically be met with skepticism. But when a company acknowledges the current shortcomings of the robotics field while also providing a solution to mitigate risk, they will experience higher market penetration. Plus One Robotics does precisely that by involving a live human being that resembles the client's workforce.

### **Putting Customers First**

Plus One Robotics understands that the sales cycle can be lengthy and involved, especially concerning emerging technologies such as computer vision in a traditional legacy space. Even though the company has a direct sales team, Plus One Robotics believes in intensive account management. Unlike the majority of other competitors, Plus One Robotics' sales personnel ensure that customers receive dedicated attention and service. The company also cooperates with systems integrators to deploy robots at larger clients. Once a product is deployed at the customer's site, Plus One Robotics abides by a contractual maintenance agreement to ensure ongoing support. In addition, Plus One Robotics' unique HITL approach allows continual client support throughout the product lifecycle. Therefore, there is never a time when a customer is unattended. Finally, robots' upkeep and AI upgrades are performed by Plus One Robotics during the entire product subscription period, thereby optimizing the customers' ownership experience. Frost & Sullivan's own research reveals that this unique client-centric approach clearly sets the company apart from its competitors.

Despite only four years since the company's inception, Plus One Robotics has been named one of the top places to work for in San Antonio for two consecutive years (2019 and 2020.) With a current headcount of 40, Plus One Robotics plans to double its workforce in the next year.

The company consciously supports a positive and healthy corporate culture. Empathy for customers, respect for others, frugality with resources, and creativity before compromise are key tenets on which the company runs. Plus One Robotics believes that innovation results from employing individuals with diverse backgrounds and viewpoints. Empathy is another quality that is constantly stressed within the company. For example, Plus One Robotics recognizes that the conservative warehouse and logistics industry is often sensitive about new technology adoption (due to a lack of familiarity and proven ROI). To that end, the company assumes significant ownership in making sure that its robotics is successful for customers. Finally, the company exhibits an extraordinary and uncompromising commitment to creativity, preferring a resourceful problem-solving approach - rather than changing target metrics.

Such an approach is clearly driving growth. Frost & Sullivan notes that Plus One Robotics' customers are currently large multinationals, potentially spurring the need for a global footprint beyond North America. Even though the company can handle global operations remotely at present, Plus One Robotics is mindful that it will need to expand sales and support efforts into Europe and Asia in upcoming years.

**Case Study: MSC Industrial****Who is MSC?**

A leading distributor of metalworking, maintenance repair, and operational products and services for North American industrial enterprises.

**What was implemented?**

In 2019, MSC deployed Plus One Robotics' 3D-vision and AI-enabled robotic packaging system at its customer fulfillment center in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania to enhance efficiencies. Its successful implementation has encouraged MSC to implement the system across a number of sites in other major cities.

**What was MSC able to achieve?**

Plus One Robotics supports MSC's growth by acting as a force multiplier for labor. Previously, the company struggled to find enough people to pack all the orders and meet cutoff times. Plus One Robotics MSC solves this issue effectively. As a result, MSC plans to adopt the company's computer vision software systems, along with Plus One's cloud-based monitoring service.

**Case Study: FedEx****Who is FedEx?**

FedEx invented express package distribution and is the industry's global leader, providing delivery to more than 220 countries and territories. FedEx Express, the world's largest express transportation company, providing fast and reliable services for more than 3.6 million shipments each business day.

**What was implemented**

In 2020, FedEx installed four robotic arms at the company's World Hub in Memphis, Tennessee to automate its small package sorting. FedEx's robotic arms are mounted inside protective cages on the upper floor of the small package sort, where incoming parcels are inducted into high-speed parcel sorters. The robotic arms are powered by Plus One's 3-D machine vision and artificial intelligence. Yaskawa Electric supplied the robots arms, grippers, and system integration.

**Future Potential**

The arms were installed in the small package sort facility at the Memphis hub in March, when the COVID-19 pandemic was hitting the US. The robotic arms help FedEx manage the surge in e-commerce demand by maintaining warehouse throughput and mitigating labor shortages. The robots are improving efficiency and creating new roles for workers, as former package-sorters can now manage the team of robots. FedEx stated plans to expand beyond these four robots.

## *Conclusion*

While the North American industrial sector is rapidly evolving in the face of Industry 4.0, technology adoption is hindered by budget restraints, legacy infrastructure, and a lack of proven return on investment.

Plus One Robotics' couples technical excellence with high-touch customer service to help clients quickly and cost-effectively and optimize operations. The company's innovative human-in-the-loop approach provides 24/7 expert support while ensuring that robots perform to their maximum capacity, spurring Plus One Robotics' rapidly-growing brand equity and market share.

With its advanced technology, uniquely client-centric focus, and disruptive potential, Plus One Robotics earns the 2020 Frost & Sullivan Customer Value Leadership Award.

## Significance of Customer Value Leadership

Ultimately, growth in any organization depends on customers purchasing from a company and then making the decision to return time and again. Satisfying customers is the cornerstone of any successful growth strategy. To achieve this, an organization must be best in class in 3 key areas: understanding demand, nurturing the brand, and differentiating from the competition.



## Understanding Customer Value Leadership

Customer Value Leadership is defined and measured by 2 macro-level categories: Customer Impact and Business Impact. These two sides work together to make customers feel both valued and confident in their products' quality and performance. This dual satisfaction translates into repeat purchases and a lifetime of customer value.



## Key Benchmarking Criteria

For the Customer Value Leadership Award, Frost & Sullivan analysts independently evaluated Customer Impact and Business Impact according to the criteria identified below.

### Customer Impact

- Criterion 1: Price/Performance Value
- Criterion 2: Customer Purchase Experience
- Criterion 3: Customer Ownership Experience
- Criterion 4: Customer Service Experience
- Criterion 5: Brand Equity

### Business Impact

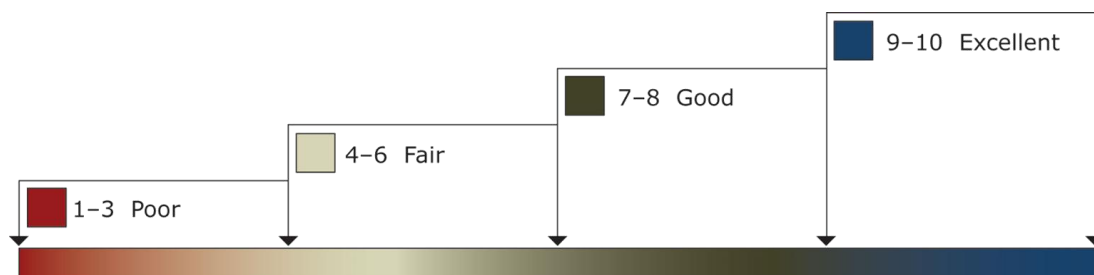
- Criterion 1: Financial Performance
- Criterion 2: Customer Acquisition
- Criterion 3: Operational Efficiency
- Criterion 4: Growth Potential
- Criterion 5: Human Capital

## Best Practices Award Analysis for Plus One Robotics

### Decision Support Scorecard

To support its evaluation of best practices across multiple business performance categories, Frost & Sullivan employs a customized Decision Support Scorecard. This tool allows research and consulting teams to objectively analyze performance according to the key benchmarking criteria listed in the previous section, and to assign ratings on that basis. The tool follows a 10-point scale that allows for nuances in performance evaluation. Ratings guidelines are illustrated below.

#### RATINGS GUIDELINES



The Decision Support Scorecard considers Customer Impact and Business Impact (i.e., the overarching categories for all 10 benchmarking criteria; the definitions for each criterion are provided beneath the scorecard). The research team confirms the veracity of this weighted scorecard through sensitivity analysis, which confirms that small changes to the ratings for a specific criterion do not lead to a significant change in the overall relative rankings of the companies.

The results of this analysis are shown below. To remain unbiased and to protect the interests of all organizations reviewed, Frost & Sullivan has chosen to refer to the other key participants as Competitor 2 and Competitor 3.

<i>Measurement of 1-10 (1 = poor; 10 = excellent)</i>			
<b>Customer Value Leadership</b>	Customer Impact	Business Impact	<b>Average Rating</b>
<b>Plus One Robotics</b>	<b>9.5</b>	<b>9.0</b>	<b>9.25</b>
Competitor 2	7.0	5.0	6.00
Competitor 3	6.0	5.0	5.50

### *Customer Impact*

#### **Criterion 1: Price/Performance Value**

Requirement: Products or services offer the best value for the price, compared to similar offerings in the market.

#### **Criterion 2: Customer Purchase Experience**

Requirement: Customers feel they are buying the optimal solution that addresses both their unique needs and their unique constraints.

#### **Criterion 3: Customer Ownership Experience**

Requirement: Customers are proud to own the company’s product or service and have a positive experience throughout the life of the product or service.

#### **Criterion 4: Customer Service Experience**

Requirement: Customer service is accessible, fast, stress-free, and of high quality.

#### **Criterion 5: Brand Equity**

Requirement: Customers have a positive view of the brand and exhibit high brand loyalty.

### *Business Impact*

#### **Criterion 1: Financial Performance**

Requirement: Overall financial performance is strong in terms of revenue, revenue growth, operating margin, and other key financial metrics.

#### **Criterion 2: Customer Acquisition**

Requirement: Customer-facing processes support the efficient and consistent acquisition of new customers, even as it enhances retention of current customers.

#### **Criterion 3: Operational Efficiency**

Requirement: Staff is able to perform assigned tasks productively, quickly, and to a high quality standard.

#### **Criterion 4: Growth Potential**

Requirements: Customer focus strengthens brand, reinforces customer loyalty, and

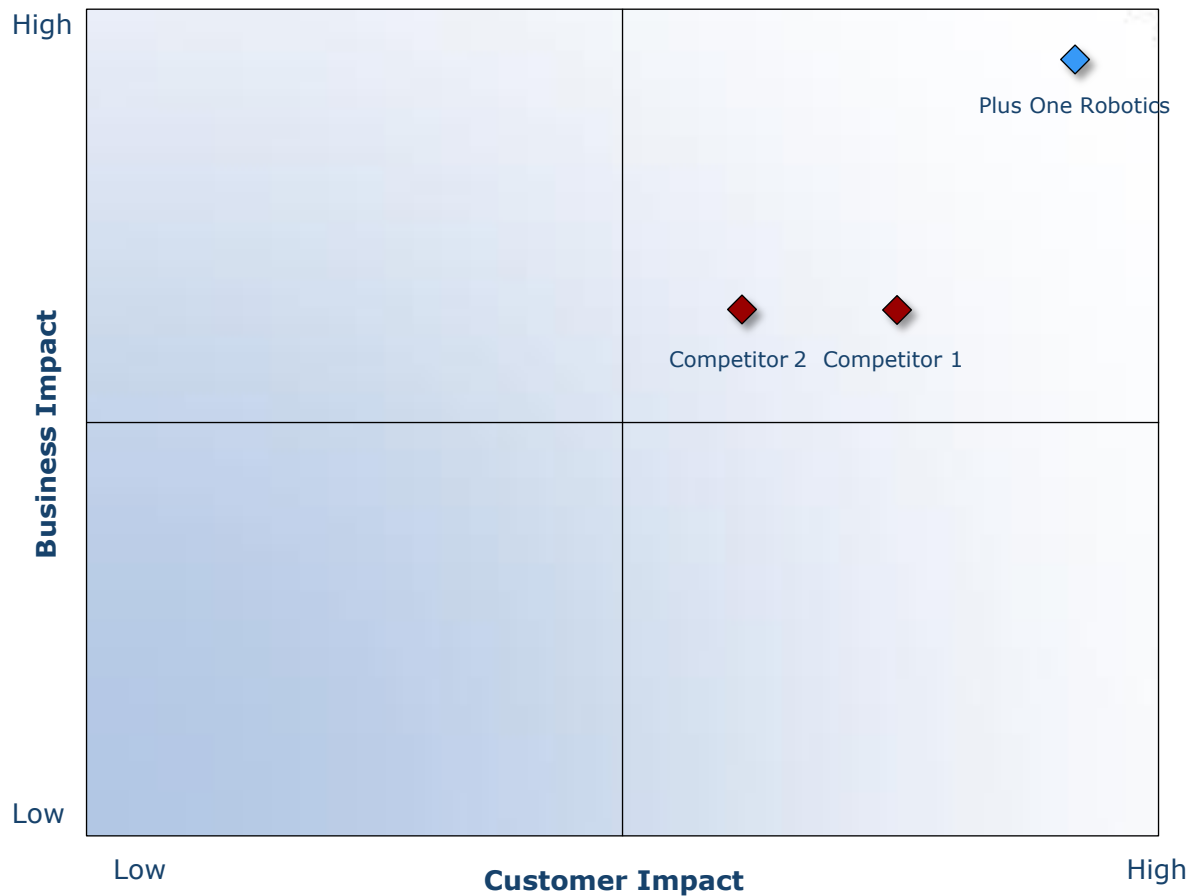
enhances growth potential.

**Criterion 5: Human Capital**

Requirement: Company culture is characterized by a strong commitment to quality and customers, which in turn enhances employee morale and retention.

*Decision Support Matrix*

Once all companies have been evaluated according to the Decision Support Scorecard, analysts then position the candidates on the matrix shown below, enabling them to visualize which companies are truly breakthrough and which ones are not yet operating at best-in-class levels.



## Best Practices Recognition: 10 Steps to Researching, Identifying, and Recognizing Best Practices

Frost & Sullivan analysts follow a 10-step process to evaluate Award candidates and assess their fit with select best practices criteria. The reputation and integrity of the Awards are based on close adherence to this process.

STEP	OBJECTIVE	KEY ACTIVITIES	OUTPUT
1 <b>Monitor, target, and screen</b>	Identify Award recipient candidates from around the world	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct in-depth industry research</li> <li>Identify emerging industries</li> <li>Scan multiple regions</li> </ul>	Pipeline of candidates that potentially meet all best practices criteria
2 <b>Perform 360-degree research</b>	Perform comprehensive, 360-degree research on all candidates in the pipeline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interview thought leaders and industry practitioners</li> <li>Assess candidates' fit with best practices criteria</li> <li>Rank all candidates</li> </ul>	Matrix positioning of all candidates' performance relative to one another
3 <b>Invite thought leadership in best practices</b>	Perform in-depth examination of all candidates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Confirm best practices criteria</li> <li>Examine eligibility of all candidates</li> <li>Identify any information gaps</li> </ul>	Detailed profiles of all ranked candidates
4 <b>Initiate research director review</b>	Conduct an unbiased evaluation of all candidate profiles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brainstorm ranking options</li> <li>Invite multiple perspectives on candidates' performance</li> <li>Update candidate profiles</li> </ul>	Final prioritization of all eligible candidates and companion best practices positioning paper
5 <b>Assemble panel of industry experts</b>	Present findings to an expert panel of industry thought leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Share findings</li> <li>Strengthen cases for candidate eligibility</li> <li>Prioritize candidates</li> </ul>	Refined list of prioritized Award candidates
6 <b>Conduct global industry review</b>	Build consensus on Award candidates' eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hold global team meeting to review all candidates</li> <li>Pressure-test fit with criteria</li> <li>Confirm inclusion of all eligible candidates</li> </ul>	Final list of eligible Award candidates, representing success stories worldwide
7 <b>Perform quality check</b>	Develop official Award consideration materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Perform final performance benchmarking activities</li> <li>Write nominations</li> <li>Perform quality review</li> </ul>	High-quality, accurate, and creative presentation of nominees' successes
8 <b>Reconnect with panel of industry experts</b>	Finalize the selection of the best practices Award recipient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review analysis with panel</li> <li>Build consensus</li> <li>Select recipient</li> </ul>	Decision on which company performs best against all best practices criteria
9 <b>Communicate recognition</b>	Inform Award recipient of Award recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Announce Award to the CEO</li> <li>Inspire the organization for continued success</li> <li>Celebrate the recipient's performance</li> </ul>	Announcement of Award and plan for how recipient can use the Award to enhance the brand
10 <b>Take strategic action</b>	Upon licensing, company is able to share Award news with stakeholders and customers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinate media outreach</li> <li>Design a marketing plan</li> <li>Assess Award's role in strategic planning</li> </ul>	Widespread awareness of recipient's Award status among investors, media personnel, and employees

## The Intersection between 360-Degree Research and Best Practices Awards

### Research Methodology

Frost & Sullivan's 360-degree research methodology represents the analytical rigor of the research process. It offers a 360-degree-view of industry challenges, trends, and issues by integrating all 7 of Frost & Sullivan's research methodologies. Too often companies make important growth decisions based on a narrow understanding of their environment, resulting in errors of both omission and commission. Successful growth strategies are founded on a thorough understanding of market, technical, economic, financial, customer, best practices, and demographic analyses. The integration of these research disciplines into the 360-degree research methodology provides an evaluation platform for benchmarking industry participants and for identifying those performing at best-in-class levels.



### About Frost & Sullivan

Frost & Sullivan, the Growth Partnership Company, helps clients accelerate growth and achieve best-in-class positions in growth, innovation and leadership. The company's Growth Partnership Service provides the CEO and the CEO's growth team with disciplined research and best practices models to drive the generation, evaluation, and implementation of powerful growth strategies. Frost & Sullivan leverages nearly 60 years of experience in partnering with Global 1000 companies, emerging businesses, and the investment community from 45 offices on 6 continents. To join Frost & Sullivan's Growth Partnership, visit <http://www.frost.com>.