

# Buell Motorcycle Co. Accelerates Purchasing With Aptean Intelligence as a Service

At its Grand Rapids, Michigan, facility, Buell Motorcycle Co. manufactures hand-assembled, high-performance motorcycles powered by a proprietary engine and backed by decades of American racing heritage. The company produces multiple models across a range of production volumes, from a high-volume flagship to lower-volume, highly customized variants, with the complete powertrain and vehicle built in-house.

As a U.S. motor vehicle manufacturer, Buell has to meet homologation requirements that go well beyond what's typical in discrete manufacturing. Every motorcycle is built to an individual work order carrying its own vehicle identification number, and components carry lot codes that Buell has to track for tread-wear regulations and potential recalls. That kind of traceability is not optional; it's the foundation the rest of the business runs on.

It's also a big reason why Buell has stuck with Aptean Industrial Manufacturing ERP *Intuitive Edition* for more than a decade. Purchasing engineer Ed Laban, who consults with Buell today, was part of the original team that selected and implemented the system back in 2013. They were drawn in large part by the solution's ability to handle serial-numbered and lot-identified components, a capability he says few ERP systems can match.

Precision is also critical for Buell's bills of materials, which run up to seven levels deep and include roughly 900 components in the powertrain assembly alone. Every one of those components has to be planned, tracked and purchased correctly. It's a lot of complexity to manage by hand, and a persistent challenge that Buell's purchasing team was facing every day.

# Buell®

## Industry

Motorcycle Manufacturing

## Product

Aptean Intelligence as a Service

## Challenges

- » Manual, click-heavy purchase order creation process
- » Operational data not updated in real time, requiring MRP reruns
- » Multi-level bills of materials up to seven levels deep

## Benefits

- » A conversational agent that creates and reviews purchase orders in far fewer steps
- » Instant, filtered views of vendors, parts or bills of materials
- » Projected time savings of three to four hours a week per buyer

## Challenges: A Purchasing Interface That Could Not Keep Up

Buell's purchasing team relies on Aptean Industrial Manufacturing ERP to plan and execute purchasing, but the tool built for that job inside the ERP, Buyer's Workbench, wasn't designed with motorcycle manufacturing's complex bills of materials in mind. Creating a single purchase order meant jumping between screens: reviewing a suggested order, backing out to an item card to make a change and then resetting the system for the change to be reflected. What could have taken two minutes routinely took seven, and the tool would occasionally freeze, necessitating a logging out and back in again.

Complicating matters further, operational data also was not live. If a buyer needed to see how a change rippled through the plan, they had to rerun material requirements planning (MRP), a process that could take up to 30 minutes with the roughly 3,900 active parts Buell was managing at the time.

Multiply that across five models and multiple variants, each with its own multi-level bill of materials, and the math got heavy fast. Some of Buell's team had built workarounds outside the ERP just to get by, which meant less confidence in the system of record and more manual reconciliation.

Procurement manager Amanda Berends, who joined Buell in part to modernize its systems and processes, went looking for a simpler way to work within Buyer's Workbench. That search was the starting point of something bigger.

## Experience: From a Reporting Question to an AI Agent

Buell's original ask was modest: better reporting to replace the manual exports and spreadsheet work the team had been relying on. During that conversation, Aptean suggested a different path: an artificial intelligence (AI) agent built specifically for Buell's purchasing workflow.

Enter Aptean Intelligence as a Service (AlaaS), a program through which Aptean's AI and industry experts work with customers to create, deploy and optimize agents to solve customers' toughest problems. The AlaaS team set up and shared a demonstration to show what that could look like, and that did more than answer the original question.

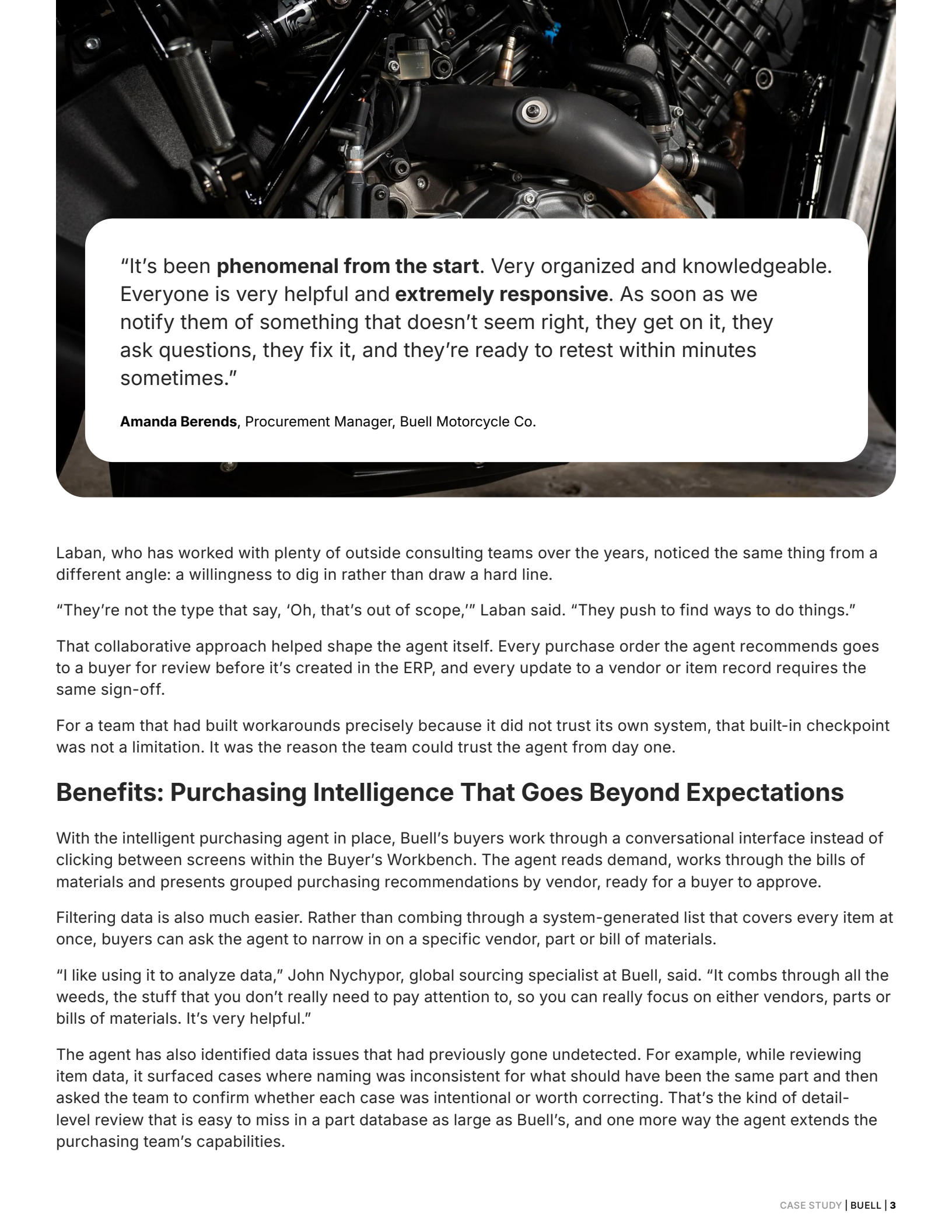
It showed Berends and her team a set of capabilities they hadn't yet imagined.

**"The pre-built AI purchasing agent opened up a lot more opportunity for us than just what we were looking for. And after seeing the demo, everyone here got pretty excited about the opportunity."**

**Amanda Berends**, Procurement Manager, Buell Motorcycle Co.

That excitement carried through the build. Aptean's experts worked with Buell's purchasing team to shape an agent around how they actually plan and buy: reading demand from the master production schedule and released work orders; working through Buell's multi-level bills of materials; and surfacing what needs to be purchased and from which vendor. The result is information that is grouped and ready for review.

What stood out to Buell's team was not just what the agent could do, but how Aptean worked with them to get there. The team moved quickly and stayed close to the details.



"It's been **phenomenal from the start**. Very organized and knowledgeable. Everyone is very helpful and **extremely responsive**. As soon as we notify them of something that doesn't seem right, they get on it, they ask questions, they fix it, and they're ready to retest within minutes sometimes."

**Amanda Berends**, Procurement Manager, Buell Motorcycle Co.

Laban, who has worked with plenty of outside consulting teams over the years, noticed the same thing from a different angle: a willingness to dig in rather than draw a hard line.

"They're not the type that say, 'Oh, that's out of scope,'" Laban said. "They push to find ways to do things."

That collaborative approach helped shape the agent itself. Every purchase order the agent recommends goes to a buyer for review before it's created in the ERP, and every update to a vendor or item record requires the same sign-off.

For a team that had built workarounds precisely because it did not trust its own system, that built-in checkpoint was not a limitation. It was the reason the team could trust the agent from day one.

## Benefits: Purchasing Intelligence That Goes Beyond Expectations

With the intelligent purchasing agent in place, Buell's buyers work through a conversational interface instead of clicking between screens within the Buyer's Workbench. The agent reads demand, works through the bills of materials and presents grouped purchasing recommendations by vendor, ready for a buyer to approve.

Filtering data is also much easier. Rather than combing through a system-generated list that covers every item at once, buyers can ask the agent to narrow in on a specific vendor, part or bill of materials.

"I like using it to analyze data," John Nychpor, global sourcing specialist at Buell, said. "It combs through all the weeds, the stuff that you don't really need to pay attention to, so you can really focus on either vendors, parts or bills of materials. It's very helpful."

The agent has also identified data issues that had previously gone undetected. For example, while reviewing item data, it surfaced cases where naming was inconsistent for what should have been the same part and then asked the team to confirm whether each case was intentional or worth correcting. That's the kind of detail-level review that is easy to miss in a part database as large as Buell's, and one more way the agent extends the purchasing team's capabilities.

"It's much smarter than I am as far as detecting anomalies and finding funny stuff in the data," Laban said. "And it's bringing a lot of things to our attention that we wouldn't have otherwise recognized were even out there."

Buell originally expected the agent to save each buyer three to four hours a week on ordering alone. The team is still exploring the agent's full potential, but Berends said its impact is already proving greater than that first estimate.



"We originally expected this to save each buyer about three to four hours a week for ordering alone. However, this **AI agent goes beyond what we originally thought it would do**, and it will therefore save the company additional time and money overall."

**Amanda Berends**, Procurement Manager,  
Buell Motorcycle Co.

## Outlook: A Time-Saving Tool With Lasting Value

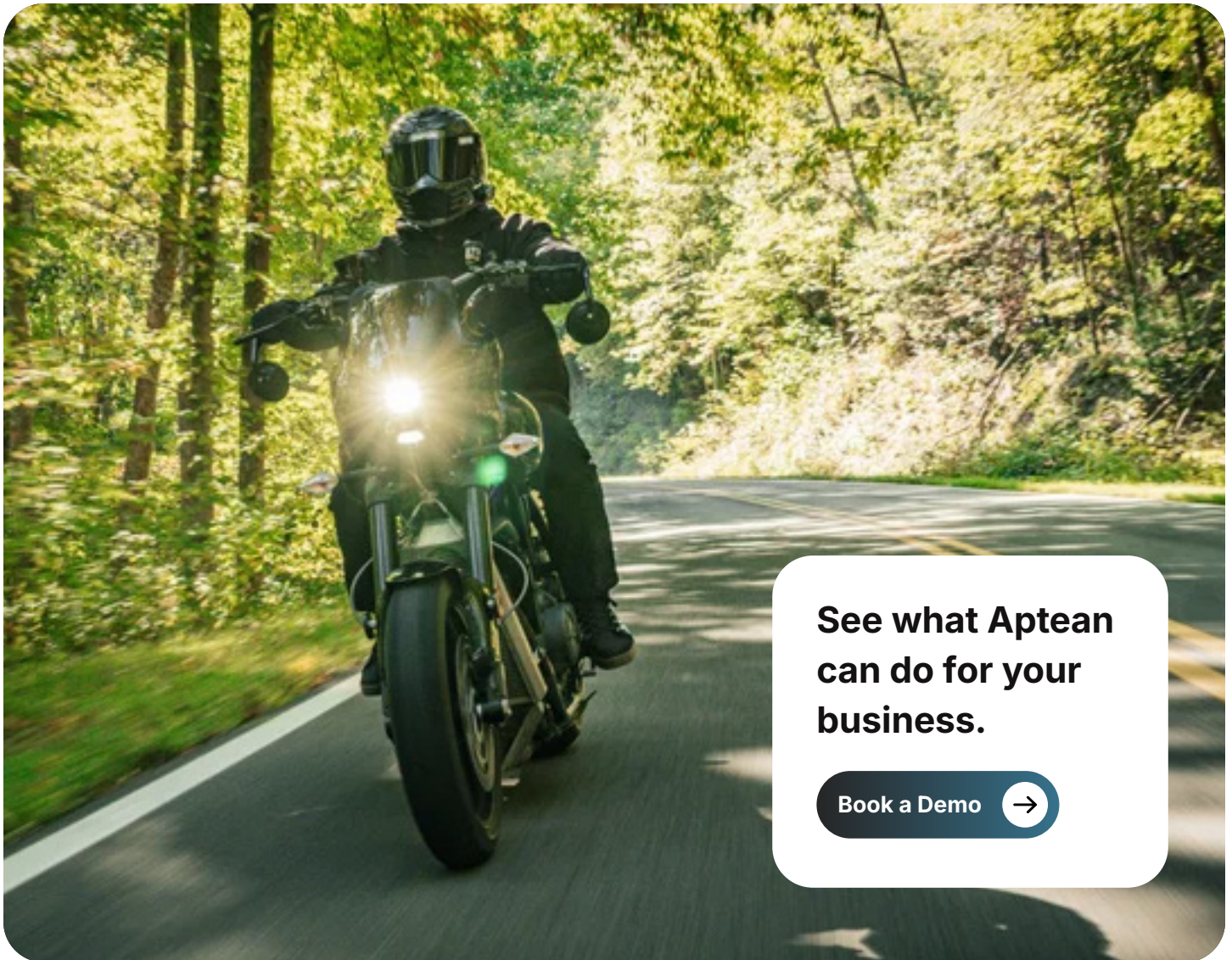
For Berends, the value of the purchasing agent is readily apparent and represents an opportunity for other organizations.

"I think it's a **great tool for any purchasing team**. To have the ability to ask the questions and get the data without even having to open the system is extremely helpful. I believe it would help anyone in a purchasing role."

**Amanda Berends**, Procurement Manager, Buell Motorcycle Co.

While Buell is still in the early stages of putting the agent to work across its full purchasing cycle, the team continues to work with Aptean to refine it as real-world use reveals new opportunities.

What started as a request for better reporting has become a purpose-built agent that reads Buell's production schedule, works through some of the most complex bills of materials in the industry and puts recommendations in front of buyers who still make the final call. It's saving users time that they can reallocate to critical decisions and even helping the company keep data clean—exactly what Buell was looking for, and then some.



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