



MAKING THE B2B COMMERCE JUMP

Why B2B companies must embrace ecommerce and create end-to-end experiences.



It's Time to Close the Gap With B2C



Saying that B2B customers are demanding equivalent experiences to B2C customers is easy, and not exactly noteworthy. With customer experiences at the forefront of leaders' minds – and due to the effect Amazon and other B2C brands have on these B2B buyers who engage with them every other aspect of their lives – **the expectations for B2B companies have reached a new, heightened level.** Whether it be professional services or manufacturing organizations, buyers want better visibility, ease of use, and personalization.

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What's more challenging is actually making these B2B experiences equal (or closer to equal). And there are a few reasons. One is that B2B transactions typically involve longer sales cycles, larger quantities and costs, and greater complexity in both products and services. Of course it's easier to order a new vacuum for your home online than it is to stock a factory full of equipment. But data suggests that many B2B buyers are willing to do just that. Sixty-two percent of B2B decision makers are now willing to spend \$50,000 or more on online purchases—and one in five would spend more than \$500,000, up to \$5M.

The bigger challenge is that the B2B commerce tech stack and experience has largely been ignored. Companies continued to rely on sales people and manual, spreadsheet-oriented processes the same as it had for decades without seeing a need to update. Was it really worth the investment when the old way isn't broken? That was the mantra of many executives. Meanwhile, brands with both B2B and B2C sides of the house focused their efforts on the B2C side, both because it was seen as more valuable and because expectations and changing behaviors moved more quickly on the B2C side. Is this ringing a bell?

Picture the evolution of commerce as a staircase. For B2C, the climb upward over the past few years – while still dramatic due to the pandemic – was like starting midway up and stretching up two stairs. A bit of a reach, but doable. Catching up to rising expectations for B2B organizations is like trying to jump up to the seventh step from all the way down at step two. It's a lot more ground to cover and if you're not careful, you'll fall on your face.

Thankfully, all is not lost. And this ebook will help you know where to start.

B2B Commerce's Two Universal Truths

Let's start here: commerce, like many aspects of business, is largely contextual. The approach, systems, strategies, and execution of your commerce experiences must be based on the specific needs and behaviors of your company and customers. And in the B2B space, one company's operations are quite different from another. Still, the commerce foundation can be largely the same for many B2B companies, and yet some organizations take the need for customizations to an extreme.

Despite taking a variety of approaches, the expectations of buyers and goals of companies are largely the same. We have found in our engagements with companies across the space that there are two universal truths influencing how B2B organizations need to look at and approach their commerce challenges.



Truth 1: Time is of the essence, because B2B buyers are no longer willing to put up with bad experiences.

The companies that need to hear and heed this truth are those who have consistently kicked the can down the road when it comes to enhancing and modernizing its commerce experience. These organizations are still exclusively using manual processes and face-to-face-engaging sales people. They are at serious risk of losing market share, especially as Millennials and Gen Z buyers become the majority. And it's already happening, as [74% of millennial B2B buyers](#) have switched vendors for improved consumer-like experiences.



Truth 2: Commerce must cover the complete buyers' journey, and until you start thinking of the experience from end to end, you won't be as successful as you want.

For those who did take steps to move online in the wake of the pandemic, these actions were largely done in a rush – understandably – and singularly focused on the point of sale. It was moving the inventory catalog to a storefront and adding a checkout button just to keep things afloat. But now, because of the continuously evolving expectations, these platforms and systems are not working the way companies want, and they are still struggling to get the most out of their technology and strategies.

The Climb to Truth 1:

Embracing B2B Ecommerce

The excuses for delaying a robust and digitally led commerce presence have been uttered time and again.

Our products are too complex to be sold online like common goods.

What are we supposed to do with our sales people?

Is it really going to make enough of a difference in sales to cover the costs?

As we mentioned earlier, successful commerce programs are designed using the key insights of what your customers need from you and how they behave. Your technology stack and strategies should be based on how your customers buy and the context of their relationship with you. For example, if you sell parts and equipment for large construction jobs, chances are your buyers are in the field and not always at their desk when urgency calls, so a mobile app would be critical to their (and your) success.

Once you know what your customers need and how commerce needs to align to your business objectives and goals, disproving those excuses becomes easier.



Quantifying ROI

You may be thinking, our customers will be buying from us regardless of how they do it, so why do we need a costly platform? It's true that it's more difficult to quantify an increase in sales by having a more efficient system in place. Which is why you will have more success reframing the problem differently.

Instead of looking at the ROI solely in terms of sales revenue, focus on the cost of a sale. The value of a holistic ecommerce solution is not just selling items faster, it's decreasing manual labor and time when it comes to processing sales, customer service, order management and delivery, and so on. When orders can be placed, billed, serviced, and delivered more quickly, and then that efficiency is scaled, the savings skyrocket.

This is especially true since, instead of hiring extra sales or customer service members to handle these manual processes, you can keep the team you have while still growing the business. Which brings us to the second excuse.

What to Do With Your Sales Team

Just like how AI has not put millions of humans out of work, an ecommerce solution won't make your sales team irrelevant. Rather, look at this program as a tool that will make them more effective. You just need to adjust how you use your team.

Ecommerce platforms are a value add for B2B sellers. Sales teams spend less time on order administration tasks and instead are free to make better use of their time actually selling. Leave the servicing of existing buyers to the system and have your team work to bring in new business.

Sales people also voice concerns over not getting credit or commissions for sales if those take place online. But that also doesn't have to be true. Processes can be implemented to credit certain sellers on ecommerce sales, which again provides them with money they didn't have to work as hard to generate. And if your business case makes sense to set up automatic reorders, that optimizes a sellers' efforts even further.

Plus, the big elephant in the room is the potential of the "Silver Tsunami" – the mass retirement of the longest-tenured employees – to completely transform your sales team and take all their institutional knowledge with them into retirement. How do you replace decades of experience and expertise on your products? The truth is, technology is likely to serve that role and getting ahead of it will be critical for manufacturers.

Selling Complex Products Online

Complexity in products is not a detriment to B2B ecommerce. It just requires customization, which a partner like Studio Science can help you set up. But first, it's important to have a strong foundation. There are still not a ton of quality B2B commerce platforms in the market, so choosing the right one is key, and we recommend Salesforce Commerce Cloud, which has specific B2B functionality. In order to add customization, you first need the right out-of-the-box functionality for which to work.

Once you have that, finding the right 3D configuration platform to integrate with your existing tech stack becomes critical. We work with a partner – Threekit Visual Commerce – who specializes in just this. Threekit provides an extensible portfolio of visual experiences (think 3D configuration, but also virtual photography, augmented reality, and AI applications) and a robust business rules and logic engine that enables beautiful product experiences at incredible scale. This combination of expert service and technology takes the complexity out of selling complex products.

Maybe this all sounds too simple, but if you're skeptical, answer this: would you rather a sophisticated system tailored for your company and products handle these complex orders or leave it in the hands of humans who are more prone to mistakes?



A woman in a light-colored business suit is walking up a modern glass staircase. She is seen from behind, looking out over a city skyline with tall buildings under a bright, hazy sky. The scene is set in a high-rise building with a glass facade.

The Climb to Truth 2:

Building Out the Full End-to-End Experience

Expanding and optimizing your ecommerce program, while still challenging, is not quite the burden of starting from scratch. If we go back to our staircase analogy, you're starting from a few steps higher than those without any sort of ecommerce presence to this point.

Still, cohesive, holistic experiences that span the entire customer journey are not easy to execute well. Moving from a point-of-sale storefront to a comprehensive solution can mean also having to make multiple operational changes to your business in order to accommodate them. End-to-end commerce capabilities require centralized data, platforms that talk to one another, connected marketing, and order management logistics.

You also need to consider the experience outside your ecommerce site. B2B buyers today use as many as nine channels to research and shop for solutions. It is essential that your customizable product can live in all the places your buyers are likely to research. This means on distributor sites, sales portals, retail sites, and even social media.

And any kinks in the journey is going to result in a poor experience. It's great if the checkout experience is great, but if your inventory data isn't synced and you're constantly having to refund due to out-of-stock issues, your customers won't be happy.

One of the biggest struggles for B2B brands historically has been disparate, **siloed systems**. The marketing team is doing their thing with email and the website, the sales team is doing their thing with the CRM, and the inventory management team has their own operation for fulfillment and **none of them knows what the other does** nor talks to one another.

Understand Your Operations

Adding new features and capabilities is meaningless if they don't align with your business. That's why the first step should be to complete an internal evaluation of your operations and processes. Do you know what steps your customers take from engaging with your company through them receiving their products or services? It's important to have every touchpoint accounted for and the systems, processes, and data that are needed to work smoothly.


This has to change. Your sales team should know how a prospect found out about you and what they've been engaging with/searching for before you reach out.

Similarly, customers want transparency into every step of the order process, from order confirmation to delivery. It's one of the other behaviors Amazon has bestowed the public. We want to know that our order has been placed, that it's being packaged up, and when it's arriving. This only happens if your data and systems share the same centralized information.

Expand Your Reach

Part of building the necessary holistic program is covering off on all your use cases. If you were one of the organizations who stood up a commerce storefront quickly in the aftermath of the pandemic, now is the time to expand your capabilities and experience. How do potential customers find your brand? In what channels do they engage with you? What devices are they using? Do you need a mobile-first site for your contractor audience who is on the go? How much education around your products do you need to provide before buyers are ready? All of these questions are critical to answer before going any further.

Both B2B and B2C buyers are using more channels than ever to engage with brands and buy products. More, easier avenues for revenue are a positive, but this growth also opens the door for more mistakes. It just takes one or two negative experiences at any point in a many-touchpoint journey for customers to decide it's time to find a different company in which to do business.



This also prevents what is one of the easiest ways to disappoint customers: **not being relevant.**

Buyers expect you to know how they're engaging and what they have bought and to use that information to make it easier for them, not harder. But without centralized and connected systems, you could be targeting a buyer with a sale for a product they have no use for or pushing a product they just bought the week before.

Make Customers' Lives Easier

Once the foundation is set from a technical and operational standpoint, the strategies implemented should all be centered around making it as quick and seamless as possible to buy with you. A few considerations that can go a long way include:

01

Dynamic Product Recommendations

This is another area where the B2C behavior of your buyer is expecting a similar experience. Leverage AI to showcase relevant products on the page based on past search and purchase history, and also consider including recommendations at checkout for complementary products that are relevant to what is in the cart.

02

Visual Configuration

CPQ (Configure, Price, Quote) tools have long been the solution for configuring complex products online. But seeing is believing and CPQ on its own tends to fall short when it comes to showing exactly what your complex product will look like. 3D configuration platforms are much more successful when it comes to convincing customers because they get the full view of the product itself, along with the list of features and capabilities.

03

Automatic Reorders

Don't make it more difficult to buy from you multiple times. If yours is a company whose same products or services are needed on a continuous basis by the same clients, offer the option to automatically reorder products on a set timeframe.

04

Customer Support

Especially when dealing with complex products and high-volume deals, your customers are going to have questions. Make resolving issues and getting information easy. This is another area where AI can come into play with chatbots to guide visitors to the right page of the website or to answer the most frequently asked questions so that your people can be left to take on the most complex issues.

You can likely sense a theme, and that's because the after-sale portion of the journey is one of the easier ones to implement, and is also incredibly important to the user. While due-diligence is important leading up to a purchase, customers also care a lot about their products after spending a great deal of money.

Conclusion: Just Keep Moving Forward

Part of the challenge of effective commerce experiences – whether in B2B or B2C – is the fact that there are so many strategies, tools, and features available that it's hard to know where to start. It can become overwhelming quickly. Don't stress. You don't have to be everything to everyone, at least not at first. It's all about prioritization, which we've helped with here.

Now, the key is don't stand still for too long. The B2C space is already seeing a wave of trends and innovations that will soon be expected in B2B as well. You don't need to reach the top of the staircase in the next three months or even a year. Just keep moving forward so you and your customers remain eye to eye.



About Studio Science

Studio Science is a CX consultancy creating better commerce, customer, and brand experiences through the union of human-centered design and leading technology to make people's lives better. Our creative, strategy, and technical teams work as an extension of our clients, enabling them to activate their true purpose. We work with some of the world's largest organizations across a diverse set of industries, using people-centered insights to create end-to-end experiences that truly make a difference. And we leverage our expansive Salesforce expertise as a long-time partner to amplify experiences with the right platforms.

About Threekit

Threekit is a leading provider of visual commerce technology, creating immersive and interactive product experiences for manufacturers worldwide. With a commitment to innovation, Threekit empowers businesses to increase sales, improve customer engagement, and reduce costs by leveraging cutting-edge 3D configuration, Augmented Reality, and Virtual Photography solutions. Threekit helps leading global manufacturers like Sloan, Hyster-Yale, Kohler, Steelcase and Therma-Tru Doors sell their complex products online. For more information, visit [Threekit.com](https://www.threekit.com).

