



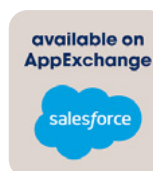
e-book

Unlocking the Secrets to an Outstanding Commerce Operation

Combining Best-in-class Solutions to Offer Enhanced B2B and B2C Customer Experiences

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Ecommerce usage has exploded since the onset of the pandemic, accelerating the growth of several key digital trends. One of these is the elevated expectation for a seamless digital customer experience. Today, business buyers expect the same frictionless, easy-to-navigate shopping journey when they make purchases for their business that they have when they're buying for themselves as consumers.

This is having dramatic impact on B2B transactions. [Gartner](#) predicts that “seismic shifts in B2B buying will dramatically reconfigure B2B commerce over the next five years.”

For many B2B sellers, much work still lies ahead. Current B2B shopping experiences largely fall short of the high bar set by many business-to-consumer (B2C) sites.

It's not simply a matter of priorities. While elevating ecommerce has not been a focus for many B2B businesses, those that have invested in this area needed to overcome challenges including: heightened regulatory attention to B2B transactions; the increased complexity and specificity of B2B purchases; and the fact that their customer's decision-making processes are getting longer and more complex.

The right planning and tools can overcome these challenges, and the payoff is worthwhile: [McKinsey](#) found that companies that embed digital sales into their go-to-market model saw **five times** faster revenue growth compared with previous levels, as well as 30% higher acquisition efficiency, and cost reductions of 40% to 60% percent within sales.



What B2B Buyers Want

The influence of the digitization of commerce is pervasive, already changing how buyers expect to research and transact purchases, whether personal or professional. Here are some of the many ways B2B buyers want their ecommerce experience to mimic B2C experiences

1. Easy search

Customers don't want to comb through static, text-only lists of products to find what they're seeking. They want multiple photos as well as intelligent search based on smart taxonomies that can help them navigate quickly to their desired product. Ideally, these tools use AI, machine learning and account data to quickly display highly relevant results specific to the customer's needs.

2. Simple, easy-to-navigate site design.

Research is a huge part of the B2B buying process. According to [Gartner](#), 18% of a buying group's purchase time is spent on independent research offline, and another 27% is spent researching online. To make sure that research happens on their own sites and leads to a transaction, B2B sellers need to ensure relevant content is easy to find and consume, with a clear path to next steps. Designs must also be device-aware.

3. Detailed product information.

Buyers want access to all the information they need to make an informed, accurate purchase decision. Detailed specs — along with multiple photos, options, related products, shipping information, and even customer experiences and reviews — provide many of the answers buyers typically pose before purchase, helping to shorten the sales cycle. B2B buyers also favor sellers who offer pricing information on their sites over those who do not.

FACT:

“86% of B2B CMOs consider CX very important, but 57% of those reported only marginal CX performance in their own organizations.”

Source: [Accenture](#)

4. **Personalized experiences.**

Like consumers, B2B buyers increasingly seek purchasing experiences tailored to their needs. When product recommendations, promotions, pricing, tax calculation and shipping quotes are offered based on customer history, the customer experiences less friction and a more enjoyable experience. According to [Gartner](#), the most effective personalization helps customers through their customer journey in a brand-agnostic fashion.

5. **24/7 self-service options.**

Customers accustomed to completing personal purchases on their own want the same options at work. This is particularly the case for younger buyers; Gartner found that 44% of millennials prefer no sales rep interaction in a B2B purchase setting. The COVID-19 crisis has accelerated this trend by forcing more B2B buying onto digital platforms.

6. **Accurate tax calculation.**

Buyers accustomed to rapid tax calculation in B2C bring these expectations to B2B, even though B2B calculations are more complex. They're also highly sensitive to tax error, because sales tax liability can have a costly impact on the bottom line. Sellers must understand the details of jurisdictional rules and proper documentation to ensure that their determination of tax-exempt status is correct and prevent later accounting issues and a poor B2B CX.

7. **Quick order processing and delivery.**

Like consumers, B2B buyers want efficient order tracking and email communications to plan their business and meet customer deadlines. Shipping options and terms should be clear and offer anticipated delivery dates whenever possible.



Challenges to Delivering a Better B2B CX

But realizing this elevated B2B experience can be challenging. There are distinct differences in the buying process that B2B sellers must overcome to deliver the easy, frictionless ecommerce experience buyers expect.

Heightened Regulatory Attention

Sales tax is charged to the final consumer of the product. On B2C sites, a well-designed, integrated tax calculation tool accurately determines the tax based on jurisdictional rules for the product and shipping address. While B2C buyers barely pay attention to this step, it gets lots of attention from B2B buyers.

Since most B2B transactions do not involve the final consumer, they are typically exempt from sales tax. However, this is only the case if the seller has the correct documentation. Over the past several years, state and local regulators, under pressure to make up for budget shortfalls, have begun scrutinizing these transactions, seeking to collect revenue for improperly exempted transactions. Without accurate documentation, B2B sellers are subject to audit penalties that can have a major impact on a business' bottom line.

Errors in tax calculation or exemption documentation management may force a B2B customer to overpay the invoice and ask for reconciliation later. Or a customer may short-pay the invoice, forcing the B2B seller to adjust its books. It can also force the generation of a new invoice and add backend process changes for the B2B seller.

B2B companies have relied upon internal tax teams to manage tax exemption documentation, typically via manually built spreadsheets, shared storage on internal networks and tax rates hand-keyed into their financial systems. This process is slow, error-prone and cumbersome, even for repeat customers. Managing multiple vendors on varying purchase cadences adds to the complexity. This approach does not scale for the fast, automated transactions of ecommerce.



The Complexity and Specificity of B2B Purchases

Most B2B sellers have large databases of part numbers and detailed specs on every aspect of each part, complexity that must be masked from buyers to avoid overwhelming them—including ensuring they are taxed correctly. For example, a customer of a fastener company does not want to have to comb through endless listings of screw lengths, widths and types to identify the correct item that fits its needs. The customer expects the B2B seller to predict these needs based on its history and streamline the search process, such as displaying only the right compressor parts for a particular model.

In addition, the many parts in an order may need to be shipped to different locations and arrive on specific days in the right sequence to support a manufacturing or repair process. Delivery logistics must be visible, flexible to respond to last-minute changes, and compliant with shipping contracts and regulations.

These are just a few of the ways that the B2B environment makes it challenging to both create a fast and frictionless shopping experience and to deliver the right parts to the right locations on time, taxed and billed accurately. It's up to B2B sellers to tame that complexity.

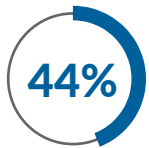
FACT:

96% of B2B selling leaders increased profitability, and 97% increased market share by offering services infused with technical understanding and empathy for buyer needs.

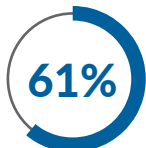
Source: [Accenture](#)

Long, Complex Purchasing Processes

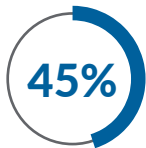
Often, consumers are the sole decision-makers in their B2C purchases. If consumers want a second opinion, they simply send the potential purchase to friends using share buttons or email. But B2B purchases involve multiple decision-makers and approval processes. Buying teams may include as many as 20 members, making approvals increasingly complex. According to a [Demand Gen Report](#) on B2B buying:



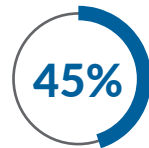
44% of companies have formal buying groups or committees that review purchases;



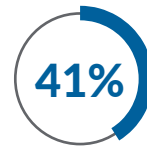
61% say their sales cycle has grown even longer since last year;



45% are spending more time researching purchases than in the previous year;



45% are using more sources to research and evaluate purchases; and



41% are conducting a more detailed analysis of ROI before they make a purchasing decision.

The use of buying teams from across departments not only complicates the customer's purchase experience; it also makes marketing to B2B buyers more challenging.



What's Behind the CX Gap

For many B2B companies, there is considerable distance between their current B2B ecommerce CX and customer expectations. It doesn't seem that long ago that B2B customer expectations were more distinct from B2C, with sales transactions largely driven through personal relationships and transacted via in-person visits, phone calls and email.

Those differences have steadily been eroding as online marketplaces began serving the B2B community, and B2B buyers began bringing digital expectations formed in their consumer lives to their work purchasing experiences. The pandemic accelerated this transition, quickly forcing more aspects of the sales process online, sometimes before sellers were well equipped to offer the appropriate capabilities.

These forces have not just driven the need to match the B2C experience online; B2B buyers are also shifting their preference from traditional sales relationships to digital selling, particularly as millennials assume more purchasing responsibilities.

This puts pressure on B2B sites not only to appear and function like B2C sites, but also to increase the value of the relationship they provide to their customers during the digital CX. It shifts the role of the salesperson away from the details of the sales process and further toward prospecting, building and deepening relationships to nurture long-term partnerships. Instead of driving the purchase process, salespeople will increasingly guide and educate buyers and build their confidence that they are making the right decisions for their businesses.



Creating Great Buying Experiences

The good news is that B2B and B2C buying processes have more commonalities than differences, particularly now that there are more tools and solutions to help sellers streamline the buying process. Here's how to overcome these barriers and provide engaging customer experiences no matter whether the buyer is a consumer or a corporation.

1. Leverage powerful ecommerce tools.

A well-designed ecommerce platform, such as Salesforce Commerce Cloud, can be used for both B2B and B2C. It combines the design and conventions of a great B2C platform with features specifically designed for B2B, including fast reorders, account hierarchies, contract pricing and custom catalogs. Many offer industry-specific modules to tailor the platform to the unique needs of businesses in those markets, along with an ecosystem of partner apps to customize the functionality to a business' specific requirements. Integrated marketing tools help B2B companies personalize buying experiences to each customer's needs — such as displaying negotiated, account-specific pricing and terms, and incorporating transactions seamlessly into the sales process — to support a seamless multichannel relationship with business buyers.

32% of B2B buyers have increased their sales experience expectations in the past 12 months. Source: [Accenture](#)

Another important step is to ensure the B2B ecommerce provider offers platforms for both B2B and B2C. That makes it easy for B2B companies to add direct sales channels using familiar tools and ensures tight integration for both sales channels with the business' other solutions. Vertex, for example, has B2B and B2C connectors for Salesforce Commerce Cloud that seamlessly incorporate tax calculation into those platforms. Quick-start tools help B2B companies easily add B2C channels to respond to market demand.



2. Automate tax calculation and exemption management.

B2B ecommerce requires fast, accurate tax calculation and exemption management. A well-designed, expertly managed tax technology solution scales with the needs of the B2B seller. Expert tax researchers such as those at Vertex provide and maintain global rate and rule content across thousands of jurisdictions to ensure tax law compliance regardless of the complexity of the transaction or where the B2B seller does business.

Hallmarks of a strong tax calculation solution include 24/7 self-service access to the tax solution; tax compliance and audit support; and consulting, implementation and managed services to ensure fast time to value. Another important feature is pre-integration with hundreds of ERPs, ecommerce, Salesforce and other financial applications.

As a Salesforce ISV partner, Vertex tightly integrates its sales tax compliance solutions with multiple Salesforce products, including Salesforce CRM, Billing, CPQ, Order Management and Commerce Cloud, enabling accurate B2B and B2C tax calculation to occur rapidly and seamlessly as part of their workflows. These connectors are now conveniently available for self-serve download via links in Salesforce AppExchange, making it easy to add this function to the end-to-end B2B CX, including both purchases and returns.

Vertex for Salesforce Commerce Cloud supports both B2C and B2B Value Added Tax (VAT) for international transactions. It also allows businesses to comply with Wayfair laws that impose sales tax on out-of-state B2C transactions if certain economic nexus thresholds are met. This is key for both B2B and B2C sales channels, because in addition to ensuring B2C sales and use taxes are properly collected and reported, states are closely scrutinizing B2B transactions to ensure exemption compliance, and more states are requiring extensive filing related to these exemptions.



3. Help customers simplify internal purchasing processes.

Ecommerce tools to help automate research sharing, approvals and collaboration help address some of the complexity of B2B team buying. When the digital experience easily ushers B2B buyers through the funnel, they can access all of the research, product and purchasing details they need right on the ecommerce platform, removing time and hassles from the process. Tailoring digital content to specific personas within the buying team can also streamline the purchase experience.

But Gartner recommends B2B sellers go further. It recommends offering “change enablement” processes that don’t just enable the buying decision, but help businesses enact better approaches to purchasing. This means providing customers with a vision for change and a means of determining the key challenges to address as part of that change, coupled with a framework for prioritizing competing considerations.

“Over the next five years, the best suppliers will support broader organizational change in addition to supporting purchasing decisions, because when customers’ change uncertainty is left unresolved, large-scale solutions through complex buying decisions become less likely,” [Gartner](#) says.





B2B Buying That Delivers a Competitive Edge

B2B buyers' ecommerce expectations were already on the rise before the pandemic accelerated the need for contactless ways to keep business moving. Despite the additional complexity of B2B purchasing, businesses looking to compete must find ways to make the buying process fast, easy, and consistent — as well as relevant, accurate and personalized. With the right tools and a thoughtful, customer-centric approach, B2B sellers can deliver buying experiences that keep their customers coming back, driving both customer satisfaction and a growing bottom line.

Fast, accurate tax calculation is an essential part of ensuring that B2B and B2C transactions flow smoothly, every time, for a truly engaging CX.

[Click here to learn more](#)



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