


9 Critical Steps to Launching a Robust B2B Ecommerce Website

A Guide for Manufacturers and Distributors

Guide



A woman with curly hair is sitting at a wooden desk, smiling while looking at a laptop. She is also holding a smartphone in her left hand. The laptop screen displays a dashboard with charts and data. A calculator and some papers are also on the desk. A large red circle is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing text.

According to Forrester, **more than 70 percent** of B2B buyers prefer the convenience of purchasing from a website vs. buying from a sales representative, proof that the appetite for online tools is growing in B2B.

Introduction

Consumers have grown used to modern, intuitive online shopping experiences with rich content and interactive functionality, so it's no wonder digital trends are impacting the business-to-business landscape as well.

This heightened interest for more robust digital experiences is causing some manufacturers and distributors to panic. Most are realizing that in order to survive, they must significantly enhance their digital commerce offering. Expectations for seamless, Amazon-like experiences are certainly causing many B2B companies to rethink digital, but mirroring B2C experiences in their entirety creates expensive, if not dangerous misalignment within B2B ecommerce. If they want to succeed, manufacturers and distributors must understand that B2B and B2C ecommerce have important distinctions and fundamental differences. B2B ecommerce has to create an intuitive experience for each customer – it must also maximize sales and increase internal efficiencies.

So how can you launch your B2B ecommerce strategy to meet the needs of everyone involved in the complex B2B buying cycle?

Consider these nine steps before re-platforming or launching a new B2B commerce site for your organization.

1. Talk to your customers before planning.

It's such a simple step yet many will go to market with an ecommerce platform without ever asking their customers some critical questions. What are they coming to your site for? What do they believe the site is currently lacking? What resources are they looking for? Your customers are the key to unlocking the best ecommerce experience you can offer. Make sure you know what they need and be sure to anticipate future needs as well.

2. Invest time in an official launch plan.

It's critical to have a well-defined site launch plan and onboarding strategy as these phases are often overlooked during the intense testing and implementation processes. Remember that an effective ecommerce solution should enable your organization to scale to meet market demands and grow your sales channels.

3. Don't use a B2C site template to build a complex B2B experience.

As buyer behavior and marketplace expectations have risen, it is now, more than ever, apparent that B2B requires a completely different solution than B2C. Understanding the core differences between a B2C platform and a B2B platform and how that translates to your end customer's needs is crucial to your long-term success. That means ensuring your site is flexible enough to enable complex B2B capabilities like workflows, customer-specific pricing, multiple ship-to locations and more.



4. Go beyond basic search capabilities.

To borrow a popular idiom from SEO: “The best place to bury a dead body is the second page of search results.” Users expect to find what they’re looking for very quickly. Site search requirements should mirror and surpass user experiences on major search engines. As B2B buyers head online to find the best prices, manufacturers and distributors can leverage the power of search—and therefore, ready to index—pages of their site to locate new conversion opportunities.

5. Design an experience customized to each buyer’s specific needs.

A robust B2B site is more than just an engaging visual experience, it’s also designed to make navigating complex products, pricing and purchasing options easier for buyers. The average B2B company can have thousands of products and SKUs, many of which have multiple variations and are typically bought in volume with discounts or pricing set at the customer level. Your site should allow access to selfserve portals with special log ins, pricing, account, order, history and tracking information. It should also include automated cross-sell and up-sell recommendations to encourage customers to purchase related items that will make their jobs easier.

6. Include detailed product information.

The foundation of a successful B2B ecommerce site is providing customers with the information they need to make a purchase decision. It’s not good enough to push syndicated content or offer minimal data points. The right ecommerce site should have detailed product specifications – including features, benefits and measurements – that follow industry standards so finding the right product is extremely easy. A robust resource center with installation tips, blog posts and how-to videos can also serve as a valuable add on.

7. Enable every person on your team to be more efficient.

By using a robust B2B ecommerce platform, companies enable their customers to complete many common B2B tasks online, on their own. Most of these tasks were traditionally completed by visiting, calling, emailing or faxing a customer service representative. Building these functions into your site means your sales and customer service team’s time can be freed up and your customers can self-serve. Your site design should improve the sales teams’ visibility into customer orders, pricing and history, while enabling customer service to focus on actual customer service functions rather than simply taking orders and rekeying data.

8. Don’t underestimate the importance of measurement.

Through a comprehensive analytics campaign, organizations can easily measure, evaluate and most importantly, keep improving upon marketing campaigns, sales effectiveness, product mix, inventory turns, customer sales effectiveness and customer engagement. Google Analytics offers ecommerce tracking, but your own transactional data gives you much more valuable data with actionable insights. Through integration and other back-end business systems, ecommerce provides marked efficiencies for B2B organizations.

9. Buy into a platform with multisite capability.

Launching channel-specific or co-branded ecommerce sites is easy with the right platform. This capability allows you to offer co-branded websites or microsites for each of your distributors or key clients. Plus, you can launch sites that cater to a specific international audience by presenting content in alternate languages or currencies.



Whether you are looking to spin up an ecommerce site for the first time or you've outgrown your current solution, these 9 steps will help get you started on the right path. B2B ecommerce is complex and nuanced so manufacturers and distributors must be strategic about digital transformation. If you're looking to launch your own B2B ecommerce experience, consider conducting a full ecommerce assessment beyond these 9 considerations to identify your unique business needs.

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