












A Comprehensive Guide to Digital Commerce for B2B Enterprises

Revitalize your core business components and enhance your B2B operations by adopting the digital commerce narrative

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Executive Summary

The COVID-19 chaos has induced a dramatic shift in consumer behavior, and this calls for an urgent rearchitecting of the B2B sales platform. While the shift to new platforms may sound surprising, as B2B commerce has always relied on direct relationships between buyers & sellers, wholesale distributors, and intermediary partners, it is mandatory to meet the changing buyer needs, to stay relevant, and sustain business growth.

From identifying prevalent trends in the industry & how they're impacting consumer decisions to how B2B buyers are expecting buying behaviors like those of B2C - the whitepaper explores several facets that are involved in the domain of B2B commerce. There are two kinds of drivers for businesses that are considering B2B, these include business and technical drivers. Both the drivers are essentially important in terms of how your business enterprise adopts the B2B commerce arena. It is also important that we look at some of the B2B platform capabilities as you need to identify which platform works best for your specific business. An in-depth comparison between platforms can help you identify your business's specific needs.

So, the B2B leaders of the world need to realize that it's time to adopt a digital approach rather than relying on traditional working models for commerce.

Industry Trends

Top 3 Trends for B2B Commerce

1. B2B buyers are moving online and expect a B2C-like user experience

- Frictionless ungated navigation
- Product discovery
- Personalized landing pages
- Mobile friendly
- Personalized content
- Price transparency, promotions, and discounts (including loyalty discounts)
- Self-service order and account management options
- Quick order and easy reordering
- Multiple payment options
- Flexible and quick product delivery
- Easy online access to customer service or product assistance



2. B2B buyers are moving online and expect better visibility w.r.t product availability

- The product needs to be available where and when required
- The product needs to be delivered in the most cost-efficient manner possible

3. Retailers & Manufacturers are concerned about platform security and fraud

- Data and Platform access needs to be secure
- Account and other pre- and post-purchase fraud

4. In order to keep up with B2B trends and Buyer/Seller expectations, a B2B platform needs to support

- An easily updatable front end decoupled from business logic or backend systems.
- Integration with a product information management system for catalog management.
- An easy-to-use content management system/digital asset management system for content operations teams.
- Flexible composable UX with configurable content gating as required.
- Content and Assets are easily accessible and shareable across all customer touchpoints.
- AI or workflow-based personalization of user experience.
- Integration with an omnichannel pricing or promotions engine.
- Integration with an Order Management System.
- Integration with an ERP system for managing inventory, accounts, and operations.
- Integration with ESP, CRM, and Marketing systems for managing prospects and customers.
- Integration with an omnichannel payment provider with multiple payment options.
- Integration with a logistics provider for fulfillment and delivery.
- Integration with customer service tools for pre and post-purchase assistance.

5. Technical Architecture required for a seamless integrated stack to support a B2B operation

- API based modular architecture (headless)
- User Experience should be composable by accessing relevant functionality using an API

Top trends for B2B Commerce

B2B buyers are moving online and expect B2C like user experience

Traditional means of Business-to-Business interaction (cold calling, physical catalogs, order forms, emailed excel spreadsheets) for prospecting, onboarding of new customers, and supporting existing customers are being rapidly augmented by digital marketing, online customer verification, and validation, online ordering, and scheduling. Expectation from both buyers' and sellers' employees is that B2B transacting becomes as easy as B2C transactions. Remote working arrangements are here to stay, and it looks like B2B commerce will need to adapt or transform to support this way of transacting.



In 2023, an estimated 17 percent of B2B sales are expected to be generated digitally. In 2019, this share was 13 percent. Overall, U.S. B2B online sales are projected to reach 1.8 trillion U.S. dollars in 2023.

B2B digital commerce is growing at a rapid pace and its eCommerce landscape is continuously expanding. According to Statista, "In 2020, US B2B e-commerce sales nearly doubled that of B2C e-commerce, reaching an estimated \$1.3 trillion, compared to \$668.5 billion for B2C e-commerce."

The Gartner Future of Sales 2025 report states "By 2025, 80% of B2B sales interactions between suppliers and buyers will occur in digital channels. Chief sales officers (CSOs) and other senior sales leaders must accept that buying preferences have permanently changed and, as a result, so too will the role of sellers."



Mobile Friendly

As with B2C sites, consumers and employees expect similar functionality for basic browse/buy functions for B2B sites. This requires the website to be rendered flawlessly on devices with different form factors.



Content Management

Site merchandisers and content operations teams need to be able to create landing pages that have content relevant for their customers without IT or specialist resources.



Frictionless Ungated Navigation

Consumers are now used to comparison shopping, researching, and learning about a product online and this behavior is also being carried into the workplace. The current generation of buyers prefers to have information about the product or service they are looking to purchase, upfront, before initiating the next step of the process, like signing up for an account or contacting a sales rep. Besides creating friction in the product discovery process, having useful, public-facing content behind a gate, also affects digital marketing efforts, since search engines and other tools used by customers to learn about the product, cannot easily index this content for rendering in their results.



Easy online access to customer service or product assistance

On-demand customer service using online chat, click to call options on mobile are standard offering on B2C sites. B2B customers also expect the same level of service during their product purchase journey. The platform operators need the ability to use virtual agents to answer standard questions with the ability to escalate to a real person. Customer service agents need to have complete visibility to all customer interactions across channels, be able to order on behalf of the customer, and have enough information at their fingertips to be able to provide exceptional customer service throughout the purchase cycle.



Flexible and quick product delivery

B2C consumer experience with same - day pickup or delivery has raised the bar on B2B fulfillment expectations. B2B Customers and supplier employees expect to have visibility to inventory and status of an order at a very granular level. B2B customers also expect to schedule delivery or pickup online without having to go through customer service or talking to logistic companies. To meet these expectation B2B suppliers need to have tighter integration between backend systems (ERP, Inventory Management, and Warehouse/ Logistics management) and front end B2B systems. They not only need to expand their distributor footprint but also need to have better integration and direct fulfillment options from their distributors to their customers.



Price transparency, promotions, & discounts (incl loyalty discounts)

B2B customers would like to have the same level of price transparency they experience on B2C sites. They would also like to have personalized pricing, promotions, and discounts applied at the point of purchase, so they know the exact price they are paying for the product or services. On the supplier side, the Sales Reps and marketing would like to be able to configure personalized pricing, discounts, and promotions and use existing B2C paradigms for promoting stickiness using loyalty and rewards mechanisms.



Product discovery

Easy product discoverability using search, search suggestions, filters, faceted navigation, and search is essential for B2B sites, especially those with a large catalog. B2B site operators need the ability to configure appropriate dimensions or attributes as facets or filters so their customers can easily find the products they are looking to purchase. The ability to configure and display related products, accessories and replacement products is also a must-have.



Self-service account and order management options

Account management, tracking order status, order history, receipts, tracking loyalty points are all standard as part of a B2C experience. B2B customers also expect similar ease of self-service account, invoice, and user management using the account dashboard. They also expect to have invoice and accounts payable reports at their fingertips instead of interacting with a sales rep or customer service agent.



Personalized content

Studies have shown that personalized content results in a greater level of engagement. Site Merchandisers and Marketing will need the ability to configure recommendations based on past behavior and other aggregated sitewide data, throughout the purchase funnel. Personalization also allows sales reps to play the

role of an advisor rather than an order taker and help guide purchase decisions, post-purchase service and, support.



Quick order & easy reordering

An extension of the digital self-service trend, B2B buyers prefer to place orders and reorder directly through the B2B eCommerce website, rather than through a sales rep. They would also like to order samples and ask for quotes online.



Multiple payment options

B2B buyers prefer online payment options either using a credit card, digital wallets, and electronic payment options like ACH or electronic checks moving away from traditional paper checks. Integration with online instant credit options is also becoming mainstream with B2B marketplaces. Electronic payments also benefit B2B suppliers due to improved cash flow and account payable tracking efficiencies. Pay-on-account/credit options, early payment discounts are easier to track online, and account balances are visible to the customer instantly.

B2B buyers & sellers expect better visibility into product availability

Product availability

B2B suppliers need to have better tools to access demand and have the product ready at the point of purchase. Robust order brokering capabilities in complex omnichannel work must have the technical capability of the B2B tech stack. As in B2C commerce where a customer can choose to have a product shipped to their home, office, or nearest pickup location, OR picked up from a store or curbside, B2B buyers expect similar flexibility when it comes to having their products available to the end consumer. Some supplier organizations may have complex requirements (B2B2C) with service components and platforms' ability to integrate easily with third-party tools and services is a plus.

The product needs to be delivered in the most cost-efficient manner possible last-mile delivery and B2B buyers' ability to schedule or pick up their order is an important feature to have in the technology stack. Missed or late deliveries increase costs resulting in lost opportunities both for the buyer and supplier.



Retailers and Manufacturers are concerned about platform security & fraud

Data and Platform Access

Customers on any platform expect their accounts to be secure and data protected. With phishing and social engineering attacks on the rise, the platform should have robust account protection features like two-factor authentication, suspicious login activity audit trail, without causing too much friction in the sign-up and login process.

Account and other pre and post purchase fraud

B2B platform operators need the ability to not only protect the customers against account fraud but also the B2B supplier against a type of purchase and post-purchase fraud (discounts, returns, etc.). Appropriate AI-based loss prevention reports and tools are big win for businesses.



Technical Architecture required to support B2B operations



API-based modular architecture

Capitalizes on modularity / API economy components to quickly put together component interactions to deliver an enhanced user experience to end customers.



Headless microservices-based architecture

In Headless microservices-based architecture, isolation of specific services can be implemented so that each service can be grown separately from the rest of the apps. It basically decouples aspects of your application and gives them the ability to work independently.



Functional composability to deliver enhanced experience

Capitalizes on modularity / API economy components to quickly put together component interactions to deliver an enhanced user experience to end customers.

Tabular Comparison

Features a Digital Commerce for B2B should have B2B e-commerce roadmap

B2B eCommerce roadmap





Composable Commerce

Composable Commerce capitalizes on modularity / API economy components to quickly put together component interactions to deliver an enhanced user experience to end customers. Let's discover the ins and out of why composable commerce is the future for business enterprises and who the primary target audience is:

The whitepaper is designed for IT / Business Decision makers who are working in Enterprise Retail Brands / Business Units looking to expand B2B / B2B2C / B2C engagements or facing stiff challenge from competition to retain customers for brand loyalty.

Customer Journey of B2B user

Crafting a customer journey of a B2B user is an extremely important phase in digital commerce transformation as it can enhance your entire operations. The following are some of the steps that pave the road for an effective customer journey.



Loyalty / Rebates

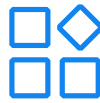
A vital component of customer journey of a B2B user includes loyalty programs or rebates. Loyalty rebates are discounts provisioned on the basis of whether the customer depicts a loyal purchasing behavior.





Self-service options

This is a highly delicate feature of creating an effective customer journey as self-service options such as customer portals can elevate your customer's experience without relying too much on technical support.



Product discoverability

Product discoverability is the next phase where a deep understanding of customer requirements is carried out in the form of knowledge which is then implemented in the development of the product.



CRM (Sales / Quote) process and sales agreements

The first step is geared towards identifying the CRM sales process. Quotes and sales agreements are finalized where a certain quote is agreed upon by both parties, the buyer and seller.



Post-sales Support

The customer journey doesn't end with the purchase of a product, you need to craft an effective experience by providing post-sales support that includes training, regular updates, and repair. This ensures that the customer remains connected to you and helps provide a better all-around experience.

Business Drivers for Enterprises to consider Digital Commerce for B2B



The following business drivers for enterprises are considered vital for propelling your B2B operations for digital commerce.



Redefining Customer Journey

Developing effective customer journeys is integral to a successful B2B commerce implementation. The mechanism is similar to B2C customers as digitization of all digital touchpoints is essential. This also improves your customer's retention rate the same way as in the B2C industry.



Improved customer service

Elevating customer service is a vital business driver for your B2B operations as it allows you to streamline internal B2B processes as well as external. This also allows you to improve customer retention rates and can dramatically reduce your sales cycles.



Optimize fulfillment & inventory

Another important business driver for business enterprises is the optimization of fulfillment and inventory. The two are vital proponents of an effectively driven eCommerce channel and enables faster order fulfillment and enables a seamless experience.



Retention Rate

Your B2B digital commerce solution should be optimized to increase the retention rate of your customers. This also includes taking advantage of incremental revenue from your existing customer base.



Operational efficiency

Driving operational efficiency is a wider category that includes a holistic mechanism of workflow. This includes customer support, order fulfillment and streamlining of processes so that maximum efficiency can be obtained.



Technical Drivers for Enterprises to consider Digital Commerce for B2B



TCO reduction

The first technical driver for Enterprises looking to adopt B2B commerce is the Total Cost of Ownership of an asset. This needs to be reduced in order to formulate a sustainable model. Reducing TCO is a vital part of maximizing your profit.



Electronic Data Interchange (EDI)

Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) can largely influence how your business operates. It is one of the most commonly used technologies in B2B commerce that standardizes digital communication between trading partners and serves as the medium to exchange electronic documents such as purchase orders and invoices.



Standardized workload in Best-in-Class platform

Standardized workload in Best-in-Class Platform can create immense value for your business including the provision of use case scalability, enabling data governance and instilling confidence in data and the platform to users.



Comparison of B2B Platforms



Pros

- Easy to configure
- Rapid time launch
- Excellent technical support
- Includes a wide range of payment options
- Low cost in terms of ownership
- Ability to extend native functionality for multiple apps
- Wide range of available apps to extend the native functionality

Cons

- Inconsistent flexibility in development
- Less number of native product types
- No local staging environment



Pros

- Exceptional B2B Commerce capabilities
- Multiple options available for on business types and needs
- Flexible API architecture
- An established community of developers
- Multiple payment options

Cons

- Complicated to manage
- Cost of upgrading or patching is high
- Cost-prohibitive for feature development or maintenance



Pros

- Out-of-the-box solutions
- Strong native APIs
- Specifically designed B2B features
- Language agnostics available
- Provisioning of local staging environment
- Rapid time to launch

Cons

- Lacks scalability
- Fewer options for add-on availability
- Less user base and community



Pros

- Simplified integration with third-party apps
- User-friendly
- B2B commerce plugin
- Control product visibility with user roles
- Restrict shipping methods with user roles

Cons

- Costly updates
- Low scalability
- Plugin additions can at times get complicated
- Lacks scalability



B2B Commerce platform capabilities

To keep up with B2B trends and both buyer and seller expectations of a B2B Operation the platform has to support the following:

An easily updatable front-end decoupled from business logic or backend systems

The capability of having an updatable front-end decoupled from business logic or backend systems is quite viable and relevant in the case of web applications and mobile apps that want an elevated user experience. User Experience takes precedence in the current digital age where increasing the value of customer's experience is considered essential.

An easy-to-use content management system/digital asset management system for content operations teams

A digital asset management system of a content management system empowers the content

operations team to be apt in managing digital content assets that include photos, artwork of any kind and source files. A CMS is a unified solution that renders a foolproof way to organize all your assets and manage them from a single point of control.

Integration with a product information management system for catalog management

Product Information Management is a set of processes and tools that empower an eCommerce business platform by providing catalog management. Such an information management system also ensures a unified and accurate view of product data which enables ease of use in information management.

Flexible composable UX with configurable content gating as required

Content gating is an essential part of content marketing within the B2B and B2C domains. A flexible composable UX with configurable content gating enables you to spearhead your content marketing as they are a powerful tool for lead generation. A flexible composable UX allows you to streamline your content gating requirements.

Content and Assets easily accessible and shareable across all customer touchpoints

All content or digital assets are easily accessible and shareable across all customer touchpoints. The digital touchpoints are important in a customer's buying journey hence an eCommerce

platform should have the capabilities to share content across all customer touchpoints.

Integration with an ERP system for managing inventory, accounts, and operations

eCommerce platforms that are integrated with an ERP system are efficient in terms of managing inventory, accounts and operations. Enterprise Resource Planning or ERP enables sellers to manage day-to-day activities including procurement, project management, compliance and supply chain operations.

Integration with an Order Management System

An Order Management System's role is to enable sellers to fulfill orders with adequate information usage. Order tracking, order status and shipping information all are viable information parameters for a seller and even a buyer to have.

Integration with an omnichannel payment provider with multiple payment options

Integration with an omnichannel payment provider with multiple payment options provides a consistent user experience across all channels. It can be seen as a branding component as consistency in branding is the key.

AI or workflow-based personalization of user experience

Advanced AI/ML techniques enable eCommerce platforms to leverage data that is insightful

and can personalize user experience of your customers. This enables a smooth transition of buying for the sellers as personalization instills trust.

Integration with an omnichannel pricing or promotions engine

Omnichannel is the future for eCommerce as it enables all digital touchpoints to be interconnected with each other. This ensures that a consumer's journey consists of efficient touchpoints be it on the online store and promotions engine. ECommerce capabilities can fully be envisioned once omnichannel solutions with pricing or promotions engines are integrated.

Integration with ESP, CRM and Marketing systems for managing prospects and customers

An eCommerce platform must be integrated with an ESP, CRM and marketing system to efficiently utilize data in delivering actionable insights as an ESP is customized to your unique business needs. It also provides an angle of personalization for managing prospects and customers the right way.

Integration with a logistics provider for fulfilment and delivery

For B2C businesses, logistics are an essential component as it enables order fulfillment and delivery. An eCommerce platform must be fully integrated with a logistic provider so that a seamless buying experience can be developed in a consumer's journey.

Implementation Options

POC

A Proof of Concept (POC) is a small exercise to test the design idea or assumption. The main purpose of developing a POC is to demonstrate the functionality and to verify a certain concept or theory that can be achieved in development.

Phased Approach

A phased approach refers to a company rolling out one part of an ERP system at a time, oftentimes beginning with the core features and functionality most important to their company and then deploying additional applications or modules in different phases.

Big Bang

Big Bang Implementation is used to describe a go-live scenario where a business switches from its existing ERP system to a new solution at a single point in time. This means all the company's modules and offices go live simultaneously. Also, robust ERP system testing and data validation techniques are a must-have with a big bang implementation, as they can help identify and resolve bugs or compatibility issues before go-live.

Criteria for selection:



Best of Class vs Best of Breed



Licensing



Build In house vs partner with digital agency



Catapult

Catapult by Visionet offers rapid commerce adoption for business enterprises. It is a solution recommended by Microsoft for its abilities in terms of transforming your direct to consumer (D2C) business to be the front and center of where your customers are. Catapult comes with a comprehensive, multi-tier commerce implementation plan that leverages Microsoft and Salesforce technologies to rapidly adopt a holistic eCommerce solution.

Take a look at our packages:



Silver

Ready in 2 weeks

- Includes out-of-box feature B2C or B2B track
- One webstore with single language
- Design and UI tweaks based on standard theme
- Standard attributes, discounts, and coupons
- Adyen or any certified payment gateway
- Standard OOB tax configuration
- Basic email templates
- Leverage the existing fulfillment and returns process
- 12 hours of CMS/Data Loading trainings

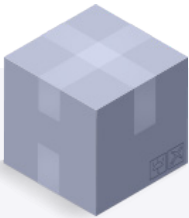


Gold

Ready in 6 weeks

In Addition to silver

- Theme-Driven design
- PLP and PDP tweaks
- Static content pages
- B2C/MyAccount, Wishlist
- Google analytics tagging
- Product data import utility
- Cross-sell and upsell
- Paypal integration
- Tax service provider integration
- Captcha
- 3PL Integration / Enterprise system via partnerlinQ (ISV)
- 20 Hours of CMS / Data loading training



Platinum

Ready in 12 weeks

In Addition to gold

- Client - Driven creative
- Enhanced customer journey
- Checkout flow changes localization
- Shipping carrier integration
- Omni merchandising
- integrated call center
- Omnichannel - wishlist and loyalty



Titanium

Ready in 16 weeks

In Addition to platinum

- Full creative services
- Multiple web stores
- Third-party integration (tax, payment, shipment)
- Advance eCommerce G4 Implementation
- Marketing automation integrations
- legacy data imports
- PIM/PLM Integration
- OmniChannel - BOPIS
- Power BI Integration
- Advance analytics by AcuitySpark (ISV)

Catapult as a digital agency for composable commerce might be the best decision your business enterprise makes.

PartnerLinQ

PartnerLinQ is designed for rapid implementation. Its scalability and flexibility make it a perfect data interchange solution for any organization. Capable of processing thousands of transactions per hour, PartnerLinQ can transmit data between large enterprises. It supports both VAN-based and direct-to-partner connections, allowing it to interface easily with existing EDI investments.

With support for either cloud-based or on-premises deployment, PartnerLinQ gives businesses the freedom to choose their preferred method of implementation. While most organizations prefer the “access anywhere” convenience and low ownership cost of cloud deployment on Microsoft Azure, others require on-premises deployment for reasons such as enhanced security compliance. PartnerLinQ is the perfect choice for both scenarios.



How Visionet can help?

Visionet believes in innovation that leaps for the future and provides a secure transition to business enterprises. Composable commerce allows business enterprises to deploy a technical strategy where adoption of commerce-based applications can be made possible in a quick and an iterative manner. Composable commerce allows for a swift transition in terms of gaining additional functionalities as well.

Contact one of our experts today and witness the power of composable commerce!