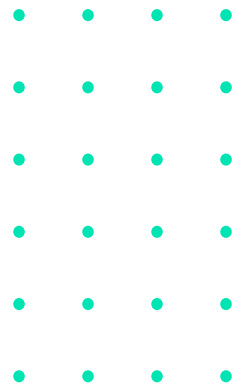




B2B ECOMMERCE GUIDE

**How to Create an Experience
Buyers Will Love**





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The key to all of this, of course, is having the right technology (set up in the right way). This chapter explores the technical side of things.

Introduction: The B2B Buyer

The common perception is that B2B purchasing is highly functional. That buyers are short on time and there's little emotion involved in their decisions.

As a result, online B2B experiences have tended to lean towards being practical only, just making the process of finding and ordering products as quick and efficient as possible.

But let's not forget: the people working in these businesses are the same people who use consumer websites to buy personal products. They have come to expect more from any online experience. Especially as more digitally savvy buyers enter the B2B world. B2B sellers need to provide buyers more than just an efficient journey when ordering and look at the wider experience as a whole.

In this guide we'll cover some areas and specific examples where B2B businesses can bolster that experience. Where the addition of more content and the right technology can give them the ability to deliver a richer, more streamlined buying experience.

These are the things that if implemented would create greater customer loyalty and nurture a better sales pipeline, ultimately keeping buyers (and businesses) happy.

Read on to find out more.



Right Products Right Content Right Time

While some B2B businesses are offering opportunities for their buyers to interact and purchase more online, there are plenty more ways they can use their commerce systems and redesign their processes to get the full benefit from them. There are definitely opportunities for growth, especially when it comes to cross selling and up-selling.

With the right technology, like a centralized digital experience platform (DXP) and product information management (PIM), serving the right content and products to buyers at the right time can increase the likelihood of conversion.

This concept isn't new to eCommerce but it's only recently starting to make its way into the B2B space. Many buyers are looking for hyper specific parts or pieces so by displaying relevant and contextual products at a time when B2B buyers are most receptive to it, you're guaranteed to increase confidence that the buyer won't need to return an incorrect part or service.

Centralizing your catalog and segmenting based on buyer behavior also gives B2B brands the opportunity to cross or upsell products they know the buyer might be interested in.

Let's walk through a few examples...



For Manufacturers

PARTS GUIDES AND SPECIFICATION SHEETS

Raw product content such as specification sheets can leave B2B buyer frustrated. Many don't integrate spec sheets with the product information online so buyers are forced to spend precious time manually navigating through a PDF or Excel spreadsheet, often with thousands of line items.

Buyers must check themselves whether the part they're looking at is compatible with the machinery they currently own or with ones they are looking at purchasing. And they may have to do this for multiple parts or accessories.

PARTS DIAGRAMS

This is another example where the lack of integrated content and product information can be a barrier to purchase.

When a buyer needs to find a specific part that perhaps has broken and needs replacement, for a machine that may have hundreds if not thousands of parts, having to find that one item in an enormous PDF can be time-consuming and tricky to say the least.

PARTS IMAGERY

Many B2B businesses aren't incorporating or displaying all this information with accompanying product imagery. This imagery can help buyers again by letting them see what they're buying and whether it matches what they were searching for in the first place.

A more efficient and streamlined way to help current and prospective buyers is to only display compatible products when they're navigating or searching online. And display all supporting content in an easily readable, digestible format with imagery to support the product items.

It should be a given now that when a buyer searches for a certain machine, or has already purchased a specific item, you should only display the compatible parts and accessory products that go with that item. And buyers should be able to access all supporting content instantly, seeing the products as they go.



For Consumer Product Goods/Retailers

COLLECTIONS AND LIFESTYLE IMAGERY

This is a perfect example of a situation where content and product recommendations can be served to buyers in-situ to encourage orders. By highlighting new items in a collection as recommendations, buyers can easily see accompanying products that they might not have known about or been searching for.

To do this, you can use “hotspotting” type capabilities whereby imagery and other content is made shoppable and links to products, allowing buyers to go from browsing to buying even faster. This is especially effective when displaying lifestyle imagery or when showing prospective buyers what an in-store vignette could look like on a retail floor plan guide, for example.

ASSORTMENTS OR PACKAGING

If you're a smaller B2B buyer you may not have the infrastructure to support large scale pallet delivery, especially if you're in a period of growth and your inventory needs are starting to outweigh your current setup.

The ability to display the packaging specifications for medium-to-large quantity orders could therefore be highly beneficial and increase purchase rates: relevant, specific information that gives buyers the certainty they need when ordering. All while decreasing the risk of them not ordering altogether or having to pay a restocking fee for returning items back to the warehouse.

How To Make It All Happen

Knowing what to do is one thing, of course. Being able to do it is another thing entirely, especially with the sheer volume and scale of some of these projects. We're talking about potentially thousands upon thousands of product items in some industries, let alone all the added complexities of different combinations in which parts and products can be configured.

But there is a way.

Without going into specifics, as many businesses will have their own requirements and logistics, it will likely involve integrating your raw data with your PIM platform, linking product information with your ERP (enterprise resource planning) platform and having it indexed by search tools as well as connecting with a digital asset manager (DAM) so you can serve imagery too.

That's a lot of technology and a lot of acronyms. But it certainly make B2B product content and imagery management a much less difficult task to undertake.

“Knowing what to do is one thing, of course. Being able to do it is another thing entirely, especially with the sheer volume and scale of some of these projects”

Shying away from that initial complexity will only create frustrating customer experiences in the long run, forcing buyers to do all the hard work themselves when browsing and ordering.

But it's not just about making life easier for your customers. You'll also miss the many opportunities that come from serving digital content in a much more intuitive, user-friendly way. This is the kind of change that can help you compete in a fiercely competitive industry.

How to Make the Buying Journey Faster

Key to the customer experience for B2B buyers is speed. Getting them what they need when they need it. You need to streamline the ordering process so buyer's get back valuable time for other tasks, letting them order however they want, be it on their mobile, through an app, whatever, and ensuring the website isn't the only channel.

In short: not much different to the consumer experience.

We've already mentioned above how displaying contextual and relevant products can help this, especially as buyers navigate and search through the site. But another example where B2B businesses can create more efficiency is through account personalization in the form of one-click and prepopulated carts.

Suggested orders are already in the cart and ready to go. You can use order history from customers to anticipate their needs, doing some of the heavy lifting for them.

To elevate this to the next level, however, you should be looking at factoring in a range of other data and intelligence. This can include current inventory levels to ensure stock is ready to go, anticipating customer stock levels so quantities in the cart match their needs going forward and making it a true one-click process so purchasing is as easy as possible for the buyer.

And this isn't just about automatic reordering. It can include suggested orders too, giving you the chance to automatically cross and upsell again with relevant products you know will benefit customers.

Another area you can use technology to empower buyers is when looking at the overlap between buying and merchandising. Especially when it comes to small stores or consumer goods stores and their buyers, offering a fast and easy way to help them merchandise and then letting them easily order those items can improve their experience and add to your sales.

Being able to do it all within the same platform or application gives the customer a much more immersive experience and helps them get to checkout quicker. And thanks to the improved merchandising experience they've had, they're arguably more likely to reorder sooner.

“One way to speed up and optimize the buying journey is by using digital ‘endcaps’, which derive their name from those promotions you see on the ends of shelf units in real-world stores.”

Using a Digital Endcap

One way to speed up and optimize the buying journey is by using digital ‘endcaps’, which derive their name from those promotions you see on the ends of shelf units in real-world stores.

Essentially it's a promotion you push to someone while they're browsing other things. It could be something like automatically offering suggested products based off the buyer's previous order history.

It means you can optimize the digital space and use it to cross and upsell more products, while buyers are left without the hassle of figuring it all out themselves. And it can also speed up the approvals and quote process given it's already recommending products for the buyer with potentially customized pricing as well.

Again, aligning the technology and intelligence needed for these types of projects isn't always the easiest of things to do. But the benefits from them and the overall experience for the customers outweigh any potential drawbacks.

How to Make The Most of Your Platforms

B2B businesses typically have a lot of platforms and systems, especially when two businesses come together through acquisition, for example. And internal business units are often using totally different systems from each other.

By using a single platform to centralizing certain tasks like product and merchandising, content and asset management, you can make internal teams and workflows much more efficient. That platform can serve information, content and data to all the different business applications, allowing you to add and integrate new applications and frontend content faster.

This might seem like more of an internal benefit at first glance. But buyers will see the benefits in the long run, especially when all business units can access and use product information that was previously unavailable and/or speed up the purchase process behind the scenes for buyers.

It doesn't matter which team the account sits under. It doesn't matter how many brands a business is selling under. The customer just gets the best experience possible.

Where Do You Start?

Making big changes happen within any business is hard. And the thought of updating and consolidating technology can feel daunting, potentially disruptive and, frankly, risky.

But you don't have to overhaul everything at once. You can deliver these new and better online experiences by using an iterative development approach, taking it step by step rather than completely ripping and replacing everything.

That approach comes in the form of investing in headless applications, ones that support catalog and content and will allow you to implement digital offerings across all devices.

A starting place could be updating the framework for the end user experience with a lightweight, modular frontend technology (like a React App) that can support web, mobile, and tablet experiences. This framework essentially lets you build the foundation for repurposing content and code for delivery or field service apps that can all derive from an experience management platform.

The next step would be to invest in a headless PIM and search platform. This solves having to migrate multiple ERPs into a single solution, which could mean a massive headache. Leveraging a federated search platform like Algolia means you can keep on managing manufacturing or distributing across business units within your existing ERP while creating customer experiences that bridge multiple business units.

A real-life example of this would be a consumer packaged goods company that sells food service, health and safety equipment and chemical cleaning supplies. Each business unit would maintain its existing ERP, but an API-first, federated search platform would allow a buyer to type in a term like "quick food service" and the customer-facing application would return products across all those business units without making the buyer log into three separate applications.

Next Steps

Ready to Transform Your B2B Buying Experience? Get in touch with our expert team by emailing contact@amplience.com or visiting amplience.com

Amplience powers digital-first brands and retailers with the freedom to do more. Our low-code CMS, DAM and Digital Experience Management platform allows more than 350 of the world's leading brand teams to manage content, not code. The result is a rapid ROI for our clients who are delivering data and insight-driven customer experiences that drive deeper, more valuable customer relationships. Amplience supports the industry's transition to Microservice, API-first, Cloud and Headless (MACH) technologies, is MACH certified and an executive member of the MACH Alliance.

Named a Strong Performer, Amplience was recognized by Forrester in The Forrester Wave™: Agile Content Management Systems (CMSes), Q1 2021 report with the highest possible scores attained in the criteria of decoupled delivery, deployment and system performance, components, and marketplaces.

Powering customer experiences for the world's most innovative brands, Amplience's customers include Ulta Beauty, Coach, GAP, Crate & Barrel, Harry Rosen and Missguided.

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