



EBOOK

Key steps encouraging B2B companies to engage in digital commerce

Embark on your B2B e-commerce journey in four steps



Introduction

B2B e-commerce is rapidly booming as companies are increasingly dependent on online channels for their purchases. This comes as no surprise: e-commerce increases efficiency, speeds up sales processes and improves customer service. So why not transform your business into e-commerce? Choosing the right B2B e-commerce platform appears to be one of the challenges.

B2B digital commerce can bring enormous benefits to organizations of all sizes. However, there are still a number of key factors discouraging B2B companies from launching digital channels or testing new and online business models. These uncertainties can easily be overcome when B2B companies are relying on proven technologies, best practices and a straightforward four-step approach.

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Key factors to overcome for successful B2B commerce

E-commerce impact on existing channels and customer experience

First of all, many B2B companies feel fear or uncertainty about the impact of these e-commerce changes on their existing customers and distribution channels. They may unintentionally create a channel conflict by trying out new sales models such as D2C (direct sales to consumers) for B2B2C sales. In addition, they are often reluctant to change the existing customer experience as one B2B customer can generate substantial revenues. This raises the question by many B2B companies if an e-commerce platform offers the same personal approach and opportunities to build lasting customer relationships as face-to-face sales. By involving the existing distribution channel in your project from the first minute and showing them what's in it for them, this factor can be overcome.

Resistance from the sales organization

This brings us to another challenge that may hold back B2B e-commerce projects: companies may feel resistance from the sales organization because they have the perception that an e-commerce platform will replace them. You can avoid this resistance by explaining the benefits to your sales team and involving them in the change process.



E-commerce projects without digital experience

For B2B companies without e-commerce expertise or digital experience, these uncertainties are even harder to overcome. They often do not know where and how to start as the digital world of e-commerce is an entirely new territory. By choosing the right partner to guide them in this transformation project with the necessary digital experience, this hurdle can be easily removed.

Fear of uncontrollable budgets

Their lack of experience is also increasing the fear of losing control of an unpredictable and never-ending technical execution. However, technology has changed and evolved tremendously during the last five years. The era of long IT projects with exploding budgets is over.

B2B e-commerce best practices to the rescue

The same goes for all the other fears and uncertainties you might have as a B2B company willing to invest in an e-commerce platform. B2B digital commerce is no longer a new phenomenon: it has proven its worth and best practices have been developed to help overcome any uncertainties or challenges.

B2B companies tend to make strategical decisions faster than ever because they realize their old approaches and channels no longer work or no longer are sufficient. A good example is the case of a Dutch beverage distributor that opted for a future-proof, flexible, and scalable platform for an improved and rich customer experience. A leading worldwide supplier of heating products and hot water solutions even built a customer loyalty portal that allows them to understand their customers better, as the e-commerce portal gives them access to data about how products are used, and how and where customers are installing them.

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Do you consider yourself a novice in e-commerce or rather an early adopter?

Clearly, any B2B company will need to reconsider its existing approach, whether they are a novice in e-commerce or an organization looking for a new e-commerce platform replacing their current e-commerce solution.

Organizations that are more advanced in their digital transition journeys are able to cope better with changing market conditions than those that lag behind. This is especially the case in times of economic crisis: organizations that will recover fastest will be the ones that had a head start in their digital transformation journeys, but it is not yet too late to turn around.

B2B e-commerce solutions: which one is right for you?

When it comes to developing your e-commerce strategy and choosing a B2B digital commerce platform, it is essential to make the right decisions. The goal should be to determine the optimal minimum viable product (MVP) for you. With an MVP, you can start quickly and easily add more options along the way. This is much more efficient than investing in an e-commerce platform with lots of functionalities that you might not need or never will use.



Four essential steps to engage in digital commerce

Step 1: the data

A strong foundation is everything, so first of all, you need a minimum set of data to provide a digital catalog for your customers. Your online catalog should contain information about your products, pricing and availability tailored and personalized to your end customers and distribution channel.

Step 2: the customers

For a quick and successful start of your online sales, you pick the low hanging fruit first. This means you have to carefully choose the first customer segment you want to target online.

Step 3: the business processes

You will have to make minimal organizational changes, leveraging your sales organization for your new online business. Think of the necessary processes you need to install, such as delivery and customer support. Make sure you obtain customer and internal feedback from day one and use it to improve your online business processes continuously.

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Step 4: the technology & technology partner

Last but not least, you need to choose an e-commerce platform and a reliable e-commerce implementation partner. These are a few important questions to ask when selecting an e-commerce partner:

- Does the team have experience with a fast start-up of B2B e-commerce projects?
- Is the technology platform facilitating a quick start and does it support future growth?
- Is it an open platform that allows me to build an extensible ecosystem for digital commerce?
- Does the platform fit my business model and company size?
- What is the minimum size, what are the minimum user scenes?
- What are the minimum integrations needed to be made with the existing ecosystem?



Keep future growth in mind

Even if you start with the minimum, it is crucial to select the right e-commerce platform from the start. Choosing the right platform can prevent many issues, allowing you to keep control of your data on customer behavior. Obviously, you only want to share this kind of data with a trusted, long-term partner. Therefore, your e-commerce technology partner should also be well aware of how to organize project management in an agile approach. Make sure that all goals, teams and responsibilities are clearly defined. Besides, it can be useful to divide the whole project scope into smaller, simple tasks with straightforward deliverables.

The conclusion: use e-commerce technology that fits not only in the beginning but also afterwards. You might start small, but the idea is to aim for the sky.

Looking for more inspiration on how to transform your B2B business to digital?

[download the B2B digital commerce transformation checklist](#)



About Virto Commerce

Virto Commerce is a worldwide leader in B2B digital commerce software and was founded in 2011 by industry experts with decades of e-commerce experience. Virto Commerce provides robust digital commerce technology, services, and expertise to over 100 companies worldwide. Customers of Virto Commerce strategically use the open source Virto Commerce platform to build stronger customer relationships and rapidly increase global online sales.

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