

# What B2B Retailers Can Learn From B2C Experiences

Digital transformation is familiar for business-to-consumer (B2C) retailers. But a successful formula can apply to B2B companies as well.



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B2C retailers have invested heavily in e-commerce channels to meet the evolving needs of consumers, innovating with a customer-centric approach. Business-to-business (B2B) companies, however, have often taken the reverse, more product-centric, approach.

Far from ignoring digital transformation, B2B companies have invested heavily in [cost-reduction strategies](#), process efficiencies and IT modernization, with less emphasis on sales and customer experience and more focus on support and back-office optimization.

It's time for a change of focus.

Traditionally, the product-centric approach of B2B was more suitable for industries defined by their products. But, as a consequence, the online channel is often used as little more than digital brochures, with the sales workflow relying heavily on offline processes. B2B sales teams get limited support from digital, despite an increasingly complex landscape of product and price transparency, non-linear purchase influencers and digital marketplaces that shape the B2B buying journey today.

In truth, customer behavior is the same across the web; it often is formed from [daily habits and channels](#) where users spend the majority of their time online. In this way, people using

B2B websites have been conditioned by the same browsing habits they use on B2C sites like Amazon, eBay and other retailers. Even if these actions are done outside of work settings, these experiences have changed expectations of what is normal for any online retail experience: Intelligent recommendations, personalization and optimized journeys.

Digital has made consistent, high-quality customer interactions inherent for B2C organizations. And great experiences can be a source of competitive advantage. Our research shows that, far from this being unimportant for B2B customer, these great B2C experiences shape their expectations of B2B commerce. Successful B2B digital organizations are beginning to understand this need and are breaking from old ways of working, borrowing from the customer-centric thinking of B2C brands and bringing it into their own approaches.

## **Creating consistent digital experiences**

Though e-commerce user journeys for B2B can be quite different from those of consumer companies, the characteristics of B2B demand similar, but elevated, experiences to their B2C counterparts.

## **How is the B2B user journey different?**

**A high percentage of B2B users are domain experts.**

Digital B2B buyer journeys involve more repeat users who frequently return to the website to carry out similar or repeat tasks. Users often have a high degree of product knowledge, are familiar with the industry jargon and want to use navigational shortcuts where possible.

**B2B users are more purpose driven.**

B2B buyers typically visit e-commerce sites to complete a transaction rather than to spend time browsing. They want to quickly filter to products of interest and quickly navigate the check-out process.

**Higher transaction complexity.**

Checkout flows are often more complex in B2B transactions. For example, the person executing the purchase may be different than the person selecting the product, there may be multiple approval steps in the journey and payment may be deferred. Typically more information is collected and users required for complex choices around factors like lead-time and delivery date.

**Not all B2B clients are created equal.**

B2B consumers are less homogeneous than B2C consumers and organizations need to tailor bespoke solutions for them. This is often possible due to high prices, margins and average order value of some products or services.

Like B2C websites, B2B businesses need to show a real understanding of their users and an even more ruthless application of good UX techniques. The drivers and emphases might be different, but the techniques honed for mass-market are still valid.

## Building new B2B journeys

Understanding the customer and creating customer-centric experiences go hand-in-hand. But to achieve success, B2B retailers and other organizations must also have the right internal structures in place to succeed in the next steps of digital transformation.

The relationship between B2B organizations, their suppliers and their customers is often complex, with legacy processes built up over many years that remain ingrained within the organization. These longstanding processes make innovation difficult.

As a quick fix, new e-commerce capabilities are often bolted on to the existing business, resulting in siloed processes that are managed by different technologies. This structure can lead to disjointed consumer experiences – such as separating the browse-able product catalogue from shop-able e-commerce. Everything is designed so as not to disrupt ongoing operations.

This leads to a myriad of problems, with disconnects in the online user experience, like weak search and filtering capabilities that are important to B2B users. The average B2B customer uses six different channels over the course of their decision-making journey – when issues disrupt the experience, frustration forces users to disconnect from those online channels and revert to offline.

In response, B2B leaders are taking a new approach, designing interfaces that allow users to move smoothly from offline interactions to online channels. They expose data, remove friction and have taken steps to re-wire their organization to present connected experiences to buyers who don't really care about internal silos.

## The customer-centric B2B organization

Customers using B2B websites have been conditioned by their B2C lives, and are now expecting similar experiences. In order to get to the next stage of digital transformation, B2B organizations need to borrow customer-centric strategies from B2C and bring them into their own user journeys – creating personalized, engaging and accessible experiences for customers that, although on very different buying missions, are no less demanding and often have higher expectations than B2C.



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