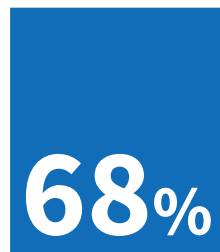


# How to Use Your E-Commerce Site to Empower Your Sales Team

# The Demand for Self Service Commerce

The increasing popularity of self service commerce with B2B buyers is undeniable. Research from Sirius Decisions shows that 67% of the buyer's journey is now done digitally.<sup>1</sup> That goes from the first stages of research to purchasing, order tracking and beyond. Buyers expect to be able to research products and manage orders independently online, only calling a sales representative when a price needs to be negotiated or a complex question needs to be answered. This frees buyers to handle purchasing on their own schedule and quickly get back to running their own business.

Forrester<sup>2</sup>



of B2B buyers prefer to conduct research online as opposed to with a sales rep



prefer to buy online when they've decided what to buy

Digital self service doesn't just make buyers happy. It opens up the opportunity to increase the reach of B2B merchants. With a well-designed self service site, merchants can offer a high quality experience to accounts or territories that didn't previously have a dedicated sales representative, and they can do it at lower cost since they don't need to increase their Sales headcount. Because of this, self service digital commerce allows B2B merchants to broaden their reach at a scale that traditional paper and phone can't match.

<sup>1</sup> Three Myths of the "67 Percent" Statistic

<sup>2</sup> Make Omnichannel Real in B2B Commerce

This opportunity is exciting, but let's be clear — simplified self service won't be a differentiator for long in the B2B commerce space. It may keep your company relevant in the short run, but what about long-term growth? To accelerate sales in the digital channel, merchants need to think about how to leverage technology to sell more into each account, in addition to increasing the number of accounts they sell to.

To move forward with this strategy, companies will need to navigate the number one stumbling block that most merchants face: resolving channel conflict with their direct sales team.

## The Sales Team Is Key to Digital Commerce Success

In their zeal to enable self service for digital-first customers, many companies make the mistake of leaving their direct sales team out of the digital channel. There are major consequences to this, as many sales reps will begin to see the digital channel as competition that is poised to eat into their livelihood. Some may even actively tell customers not to use the new site.

One factor is that sales reps often have a digital solution for logging orders that is separate from the self service site that customers enjoy. This creates a contextual gap; when customers call in with a question, sales reps don't have the context they need to respond confidently. In the end, they're often relegated to order takers and unable to deliver on the chance to grow accounts through the digital channel.

To fully drive this organizational change, companies need to empower their sales reps with the same digital tools their customers enjoy, turning them into digital-first sellers that are empowered with contextual customer views, deep product knowledge and real-time account insights. By doing this well, B2B merchants unlock new opportunities to sell deeper into each account and create a truly differentiated experience for their buyers.

# Connecting the Digital and Traditional Channels

Even with the move to self service, B2B buyers still see the direct sales team as a key part of their purchasing experience. Unlike in B2C, B2B buyers have complex needs that only a sales rep can address, especially when companies offer huge catalogs of products. Sales reps, with their years of experience seeing how customers use their products, are in the best position to advise on the right combination of products to buy for any pain point. This hits directly at what companies call the Solution Sale or the Challenger Sale. B2B sales reps can transcend their role of order taker through the close relationship they have with their accounts.



**Plainly put: the CX movement is not meeting the specific needs of the B2B economy. B2C CX management tools fall short in addressing the clear complexities of the multi-contact experiences in a B2B world. New guidelines need to be written to address this market, and move beyond the restraints of a simple buzzword.<sup>3</sup>**

What does this actually look like in practice? Picture this:

A lead sales rep, Sheila, gets a call from her customer at American Energy. As soon as she answers the phone, she pulls up the commerce site and logs in, choosing American Energy from her list of accounts. Immediately, she sees the site exactly as the customer does, from his recent purchases to his contract pricing, even down to his personalized recommendations based on browsing and purchasing activity.

No matter what issue or question the customer has, Sheila can handle it through the site. She can add a last minute product to an order, edit prices that seem incorrect, push through approvals, track shipping status and more. The site allows her

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<sup>3</sup> Account Experience: How to Monetize Accounts, Grow Revenue and Deliver Exceptional Experiences in the B2B Economy; CustomerGauge

to impersonate her customer and take additional action as an admin to ensure that he has the best experience possible. And of course, any order changes that happen will be viewable by the customer the next time he logs into his account.

In B2B, great customer service means making sure that the transition from digital channel to the sales rep and back again is seamless, and that both channels are of the highest quality.

## Digital Leaders Take It One Step Further

Digital leaders take this strategy one step further by empowering their sales reps to be consultants that proactively offer ways for customers to save or better utilize their resources. By taking customer purchasing data and applying intelligence tools, B2B merchants can create a host of ways to help sales reps cross-sell, up-sell and save accounts that are at risk of churning.

How much more account growth could your sales team accomplish if they had these tools at their fingertips?

**Account Health:** Enable smart notifications that alert reps to unexpected changes in purchasing per account. An intelligent commerce platform can tune this to focus on high-value accounts, dips that signal an account is at risk of churn or even a rise in purchasing frequency that indicates an opportunity to increase regular orders.

**Order Forecasting:** By leveraging order history, inventory knowledge and machine learning, sales reps can be shown predictions about when reorders need to happen and help customers optimize their purchasing and inventory management. This can be a complex task for smaller companies that don't have specialized buying roles, giving sales reps a huge opportunity to be seen as a valuable partner.

**Discounting:** Sometimes the only way to appease an unhappy customer is to offer a one-time discount on a certain item or order. Allowing reps to do this per order avoids the complication of asking the store admin to generate a custom coupon code and following up with the customer later to apply it.

**Sales Library:** Help sales reps stay prepared with libraries of information that are only visible to them. As they navigate customer questions about product details, pricing options and related services, ensure they have updated, accurate information that's easy to search through and already connected to relevant products for easy discovery.

**Recommended Content:** By looking at a customer's recent recommendations, sales reps can proactively send related blogs, product guides or other content to encourage a purchase. They can also use this information to begin a bigger conversation about updating the contract to cover more products or services, especially when there's an opportunity to add more products to a catalog that a customer can't access yet.

All of this is achievable on a unified platform that supports both your B2B buyers and direct sales team. In particular, B2B digital commerce platforms that are able to bring in robust support for different roles will be able to surface the right sales tools and training without accidentally exposing it to the customer view. It starts with having the right context, and grows with deploying the right tools.

## The Hybrid Approach

Not all B2B commerce industries are ready for self service. For instance, the food manufacturing industry often has restaurants, catering companies or hotel chains as their end customers, and their buyers still have other tasks to take care of in the kitchen or on the restaurant floor. They may prefer the ease of telling a sales rep what needs to be restocked as they visually scan their food supplies, rather than sitting down at a computer to make orders.

In this case, a commerce platform that unifies the sales and customer view provides a path toward adoption of the self service site. Sales reps still benefit from the content and account tools on the site, but as they log orders, they make it immediately viewable to the customer through their own account. This means that each customer always has accurate information on their order history, incoming shipments and purchasing trends, ready for them when they do have time to check the site. The digital channel becomes a record of their purchases, and they can begin to optimize their spending based on their personalized recommendations, such as the best time to reorder based on food expiration dates.

# Conclusion

Enabling self service for B2B buyers isn't the only benefit of digital commerce. By bringing the sales team into the digital channel, B2B merchants can target the most complex parts of the purchasing experience and turn them into opportunities to retain and grow each account.

The competition in B2B commerce is growing, and the increasing expectations for great digital experiences means that even long-time industry leaders will need to evolve in order to stay ahead. Empowering the sales channel to provide insightful, consultative selling across all their accounts will resolve the channel conflict that many companies struggle with, accelerating growth for years to come.

## Moving Forward

Learn more about how Liferay Commerce transforms the way you sell online to B2B customers. [Read the Full Features List](#)

See how Liferay Commerce can empower your sales representatives by scheduling a personalized demo. [Request a Demo](#)



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