

The Ultimate B2B Ecommerce Buyer's Guide

Achieving B2B Commerce Success

Did you know that only 5% of B2B goals are actually met according to Business to Community?¹

So, the question is, what can you do to ensure your initiatives are achieved within budget and project scope?

To start, this guide will help you establish the foundation needed for successful B2B ecommerce.

Preparing for a B2B Commerce Solution

Successful B2B commerce requires more than just adopting the latest online shopping capabilities.

Businesses must first have a deep understanding of their customers, their buying journeys, and audience preferences so they can build an experience their users will love.

But it's not just consumers you'll have to aim to please.

Many businesses operate in an ecosystem with distributors, retailers, partners, and dealers that are involved in the end-to-end customer journey. Their experience is also critical to the success of B2B commerce initiatives.

To effectively serve each of these stakeholders, consider these 4 questions:

1. How and where do customers prefer to shop?
 - Through mobile? Through a website?
2. What do customers need to do on the site?
 - Purchase? Reorder? Manage multiple accounts?
3. What information do partners need to have access to?
4. What systems do distributors and retailers already use and that we need to connect to?

¹ The Top 7 Points of Failure in B2B Commerce

Gathering the Right Parties

Understanding what stakeholders need will help define the scope and goal of your investment. When beginning to plan for a B2B Platform, consider:

- Who are the internal stakeholders that need to be involved? (Often times, this project requires a collaboration of marketing, sales, IT, and customer success sharing their needs, goals, and desires for the ecommerce solution.)

- What piece of the evaluation and selection process will each of these teams own? Who will be accountable that deadlines are met across the entire project?

- What is the ideal timeline to get a solution up and running?

What is the budget? Not just for implementation, but for maintenance and upgrades later down the line?

- How do you measure success and what KPIs do you want to track?

- What are the top priorities for the team to implement in order to stay in scope?

- What are features or improvements that are not the highest priority but should be added in the future?

Establishing Requirements

With these guidelines in mind, businesses can begin to determine where they fall on certain priorities:

1. WHAT FEATURES ARE NEEDED?

In order to meet the goals listed above, consider what functionalities are needed to build the desired experience. A few major ones to keep in mind include:

- Personalized Catalogs and Pricing
- Reordering Capabilities
- Integration with other systems
- Bulk Ordering
- Self-Service Account Management
- Advanced Workflows

Consider your different audiences and stakeholders. Are there specific features that their experiences would require?

2. USE CLOUD OR ON-PREMISE?

Until recently, the only available hosting option was to depend on an in-house IT team to host a server on-premise. However, with cloud solutions, businesses now can have the option of having a third-party provider managing their solution on the cloud.

Benefits of Cloud	Benefits of On-Prem
The challenges of fully managing infrastructure maintenance, security, and upgrades are alleviated.	The business needs to be in full control of the solution: this includes its data, hardware, security, etc.
Cloud provides greater flexibility for businesses to grow and respond to changes.	For highly complex businesses where a lot of OS and hardware-level customization is needed, on-prem may be a better fit.
Implementation is made easier with cloud infrastructure and PaaS services.	In certain cases, a company-wide mandate may require an on-prem solution.

Having a solution managed on a cloud-native platform allows businesses to reduce infrastructure expenses and IT responsibilities, eliminating the need to configure and maintain servers and resulting in a significantly lower total cost of ownership (TCO). Additionally, cloud-native platforms provide access to a complete software development environment and everything needed to get started on day one. With a DevOps Stack, auto-scaling, monitoring, and backups configured out-of-the-box, development teams can be more productive and go-to-market faster.

3. POINT SOLUTION OR PLATFORM?

While point solutions are able to focus exclusively on a specific part of the commerce experience, they don't provide features for the rest of the journey, such as a customer portal or marketing capabilities.

Businesses should be looking to a platform to provide the broader features they need and then supplement with point solutions for specific requirements.

4. PARTNER OR IN-HOUSE TEAM IMPLEMENTATION?

While in-house IT teams can definitely implement and customize commerce platforms for business needs, consider whether it's more cost-efficient and faster to have an implementation partner handle that process, especially for companies with complex tech stacks.

5. SECURE OR NOT?

Handling customer data and information must be done with the utmost care. This is why the PCI Security Standards Council established a set of requirements that all merchants and organizations that process, store, and transmit credit card information must adhere to.

The most robust commerce solutions should come with:

- **SSL Certification**
- **HTTPS**
- **Dos/DDOS Protection**
- **Firewall**
- **GDPR**

Start Evaluating Commerce Solutions

To determine which platform can best meet your needs, here are some sample evaluation criteria to get you started on narrowing down the best solution for your business. Additionally, leverage the following worksheet at the end of this section for vendors to fill out:

1. Can the solution integrate with your current tech stack?

A robust commerce solution is able to connect not only with existing ERP, CRM, and other technologies, but also will be able to integrate with any future applications.

So assess what integrations will be critical to business success and evaluate if the platform provides the APIs and connectors to work seamlessly with the necessary systems.

Will the platform work seamlessly alongside your existing applications and how easily can it integrate with new technologies? If it doesn't provide these connectors out-of-the-box, how long will it take to build these integrations?

2. Does the system support your front-end experience strategy?

Does the platform give users the ability to control the front-end without affecting the back-end?

This type of architecture is included in headless commerce solutions. By separating the front and back ends, businesses can use their technology of choice to launch new frontend experiences quickly and more efficiently.

Look for [APIs and tools](#) that allow developers to build compelling experiences on whatever frontend technologies they prefer.

3. How easily can the system deliver the solutions you need?

Sellers need to assess what capabilities are absolutely necessary so that they can deliver the solutions they need, faster. Do you want to:

- Empower customers to purchase through self-service, without needing to reach out to a sales representative?
- Provide customer ordering workflows for buyers?
- Personalize sites, catalogs, and pricing per buyer?
- Enrich product content experience with specs, photos, and videos to provide more guidance to buyers?

- Manage multiple branded ecommerce sites all on one platform?
- Integrate easily with PIM, ERP, IoT, and other technologies.
- Determine what is absolutely necessary within the core platform to ensure agility and what supplemental features can be added by using additional technologies.

4. Does the system allow for agile go-to-market strategies?

As COVID-19 unfolded, businesses that were able to maintain market resilience were the ones that could quickly adapt and change to shifting customer and industry needs.

So when looking for a B2B commerce platform, evaluate if the platform can easily launch new sites and create different catalogs for each of these sites to support different brands and products.

If a future crisis were to arise, forcing sellers to upend their business models, how will the platform help your business evolve?

5. How will the system support changing business models and expansion in the future?

Does the platform allow your business to easily scale? Can it handle an increasing number of customers, products, and sites?

With the increase of direct-to-consumer (D2C) business models after the pandemic, businesses must look to solutions that can help them pivot and adjust according to evolving customer needs quickly.

6. How intuitive is the solution for non-technical users?

Your IT team shouldn't be the only ones who can add new products, update content, or manage customer information. But how easy is it for business or non-technical users to go into the system without needing to ask the IT team for help?

Specifically look for drag-and-drop functionality, intuitive UI and interfaces, and low code development.

For a comprehensive list of evaluation criteria and a sample RFP worksheet, download our [RFP kit here](#).

B2B Commerce Evaluation Form							
	Capabilities	Integrates with Existing Tech	Supports front-end strategy	Delivers multiple solutions	Has agile GTM	Supports future growth	Friendly to non-tech users
Vendor Name							
Vendor 1: _____							
Vendor 2: _____							
Vendor 3: _____							
Vendor 4: _____							

How to Write an Effective RFP

Ready to evaluate different commerce vendors to see which would be the best fit for your business? Download our RFP kit here for a template and guide to get started. [Grab Your Copy >](#)

Additional Resources

[4 Must-Have Ecommerce Capabilities for Modern B2B Selling](#)

[Why Using a B2C Platform for Your B2B Ecommerce is a Bad Idea](#)

[Transform B2B Commerce with a Digital Experience Platform](#)

[How to Use Your Ecommerce Site to Empower Your Sales Team](#)

[7 Best Practices for B2B Ecommerce Success](#)



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