



HOW TO DEVELOP THE BEST B2B OMNICHANNEL STRATEGY FOR YOUR MARKET

EMBRACING A UNIFIED CUSTOMER APPROACH



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A photograph of a person's hand holding a credit card over a laptop keyboard. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent red filter. The hand is positioned as if about to use the card on the laptop. The laptop keyboard is visible in the lower-left corner.

INTRODUCTION

Shopping in the B2B world is feeling increasingly like shopping on B2C websites. B2B companies are on social media, they are active in digital marketing, and many of them are already offering personalised web stores.

This is because consumers are blurring the B2C and B2B divide by expecting the same shopping experience in both their business and personal lives. The internet is an intrinsic part of the lives of the new generation of buyers. They're used to being able to access all of their information online whenever and wherever they want.

An omnichannel strategy combines multiple channels (physical locations, web stores, social media, etc.) to offer a fluid customer experience no matter how clients choose to get in touch. In this white paper, we're delving into what an omnichannel strategy entails for a B2B business, why it's so vital, and how your business can develop its own omnichannel strategy.

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WHAT IS OMNICHANNEL?

Omnichannel is a way of thinking that begins with your client and adapts to their behaviour. It's not new and it's not just a buzzword. Omnichannel has roots dating back to the beginning of the millennium.

One of the earliest examples of omnichannel strategy started with the American retailers Best Buy and Walmart. Best Buy knew that Walmart was a stronger retailer, and that they would have to find another way to attract customers. Knowing they couldn't compete with Walmart on pricing, Best Buy reassessed its business. The demand for e-commerce was beginning to take off around that time, and Best Buy jumped on the wagon.

Instead of focusing on pricing, Best Buy focused on the customer experience by giving clients something else they wanted: convenience. By adapting and converging sales channels to better meet customer demands, Best Buy created one of the first successful large-scale omnichannel strategies.





CLICKS AND BRICKS

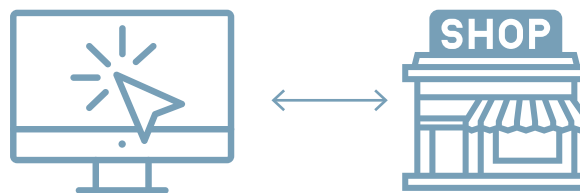
It used to be enough to just have a physical location or just a web store. After all, clients didn't expect any more than that.

But a global economy made for increasingly fiercer competition. With the rapid development of e-commerce and the ability to serve increasingly wider audiences, businesses continued to relentlessly develop and adjust their strategies. Some businesses thought, "What if we offered both a physical location and a web store?" They tried it and clients liked it. They liked it and they wanted more — more attention, more detail, better selection, better information. Businesses continued to adapt.

Today's consumers expect intelligence, assistance, easy communication and no hassle. Merchandise returns, easy order adjustments, credits, coupon and loyalty discounts, faultless delivery and customer recommendations are the norm in today's competitive market.

On top of that, it has to be fast, too. Clients have countless devices at their disposal and can compare prices, quality, and specifications with one click.

Luckily, an omnichannel strategy gives you the tools to offer it all.

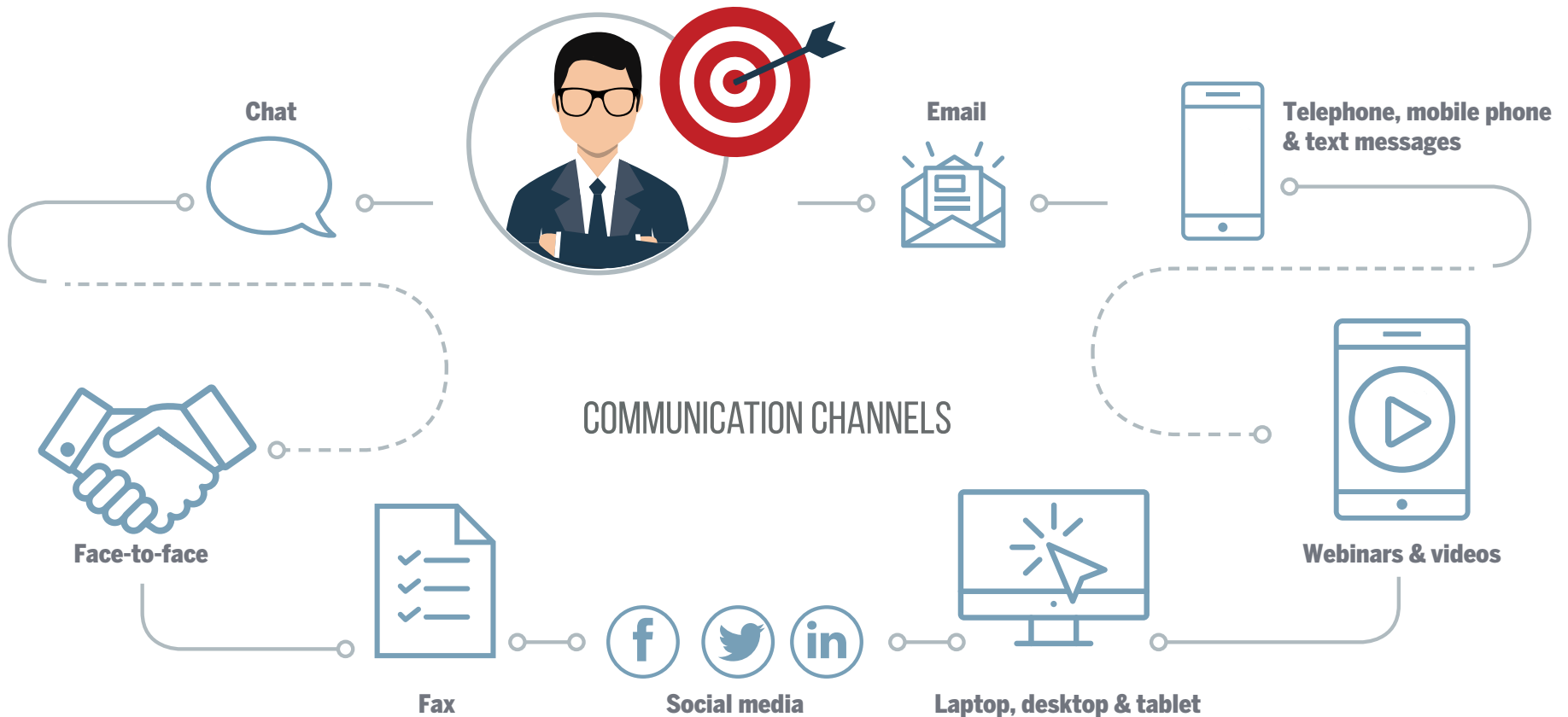


THE CHANNELS

To put it simply, a channel is any method your business uses to interact with a client. We've mentioned brick-and-mortar stores and online stores, but there are countless channels and devices that can be used to communicate with clients.

Any time you engage a client via more than one channel, you're taking a **multi-channel approach**, something most businesses today do.

So what turns a multichannel approach into an omnichannel one? Fusion. **An omnichannel approach ensures a seamless user experience across channels, from start to finish.** A true omnichannel approach means that your clients are getting consistent messaging across channels. The more integrated these channels are with one another, the better.



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WHY OMNICHANNEL IS ESSENTIAL



1. Buyers connect with the brands they trust, not the channels they use.

Did you know that buyers exposed to omnichannel strategies are likely to be **more active, more loyal**, and **higher-spending customers**? In fact, in a survey done by Accenture, 75% of B2B buyers said they would purchase from the same supplier again if they had excellent omnichannel capabilities.¹

A strong omnichannel approach will reinforce your brand and the loyalty of your customer base.



2. The buyer journey is no longer a straight line from A to B.

The use of mobile devices has disrupted the traditional shopping experience. Three quarters of respondents in the Accenture survey indicated that being able to look up product information across channels was important or very important when making work-related purchases online.

Your approach needs to be seamless, whether your client is on location with a sales rep, on a computer at work, or using their mobile phone during their commute.

In today's digital society, it's increasingly common for multiple channels to be involved in a single purchase, and that's exactly the kind of customer experience that an omnichannel approach supports and encourages.



3. Buyers demand a smart and personalised approach.

Businesses with a strong omnichannel approach retain an average of 89% of their clients. Compare that with a 33% average retention rate and it's clear that clients know what they want and they'll go to the companies that offer it.

Brands need to be savvy in using customer data and engagement systems, and address preferences intelligently.

Research shows that companies can establish trust if they can provide an omnichannel shopping experience and engage their customers holistically. With that trust comes customer loyalty, a powerful tool in the B2B world which drives business results.

Sources: 1. https://www.accenture.com/iv-en/-/media/Accenture/Conversion-Assets/DotCom/Documents/Global/PDF/Dualpub_1/Accenture-Building-Omni-Channel-Commerce-Platform-Future.pdf.

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THE CHALLENGES



The New Digital Divide

B2B customer expectations and shopping behaviour are changing rapidly as B2C practices permeate the B2B world. As a result, the way we do B2B e-commerce has fundamentally shifted.

The risk of losing customers, cash flow and control over key elements of the value chain is a new reality to retailers and distributors alike. This mentality of cost-centricity needs to switch to a customer-centric one, and omnichannel is the key.

Adopting a new way of doing e-commerce, however, also means investing in the technology required to support and fulfill all those customer expectations. **Without the technology, a digital divide is created between the clients' expectations and the actual experience that is delivered.**

The challenge is finding a way to better align the omnichannel capabilities of B2B retailers with the high expectations of today's savvy buyers.



Transparency

Omnichannel requires organisations to adopt a new way of thinking and a new approach to sharing information. This can present a challenge for B2B companies that operate in silos and are not used to being transparent.

B2B companies are sometimes reserved about using multiple channels because of possible information conflicts. A company will lose its trustworthiness, for instance, if its PR or marketing reaches further than its delivery capabilities.

Transparency and authenticity are powerful tools that can help businesses address the challenges of silos and conservative behaviour so they can make space for an omnichannel mentality.



Logistics

The Accenture survey referenced earlier also reveals the following about B2B businesses:

- 44% of B2B businesses believe that biggest barrier is implementing back-office integration across all channels.
- 42% indicate difficulty in sharing customer data analytics between channels, countries or locations.
- 40% believe they are limited by distribution partners, franchises or wholesale customers.
- 36% report a conflict between different channel organisations.
- 33% are hindered by a lack of business incentives,
- 32% by limited staff skills, and 31% by employee or management resistance.

Clearly businesses have their reservations about the actual logistics of an omnichannel strategy, and that's not surprising. New technologies can be daunting, and when they require such a big investment, it can pay off to be skeptical.

Luckily, the technology that made omnichannel possible is the same technology that can help businesses solve their approach to omnichannel.

It's all about developing the right strategy with the right technology for your business.

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CREATING AN OMNICHANNEL STRATEGY

Where to Begin

Achieving a sustainable balance between the online and offline worlds is the key to boosting customer satisfaction and sales performance. All channels should collaborate seamlessly, while complementing and strengthening each other's performance. What's a B2B company to do?

Agile Thinking in Your Processes

Use client data to try to understand your client's behaviour and preferences. You can be steps ahead in the buying process by knowing which trends are relevant to that client, which products to recommend for their shopping basket, and making sure that the price is optimised for a specific customer.

In addition to ensuring that you're not lagging behind, it also shows your clients that you understand their buying wishes and can keep up with their demands throughout their journey.

Take a Client-Centric Approach

We've said before that growing client demands are changing the way B2B businesses need to operate, and that means you can also use agile thinking to redesign your distributor network and order fulfillment operations. Dynamic client data can provide insights into your customer journey and location. It allows you to adapt your operations to be more flexible in automated product optimisation, up-to-date inventory and accurate product information. It makes it easy to put the client at the center of everything your business does.



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GET THE TECH AND YOUR TECHNOLOGY PARTNERS RIGHT

Technology is what makes your omnichannel strategy possible. Make sure that you are well equipped to tackle the barriers that you may run into when integrating all your processes — and if you can't, find a technology partner who can help.

Your product details, inventory and order data and your customer information should be easily accessible to all stakeholders. Intelligent decisions should be supported by the real-time availability of operations such as inventory management, delivery tracking and pricing optimisation.

This is tricky, and if you don't have the resources available within your organisation, there are plenty of technology partners who can help you achieve these goals.

ERP Integration

Here's a simple (and essential) tip that will make developing, rolling out and maintaining an effective omnichannel strategy much easier: **start with your ERP.**

Your ERP is the central hub of your organisation; it's where all of your business data and logic is stored. As such, it makes sense to leverage the investment you're already made — not just the monetary investment, but the time you and your team has invested in accumulating the data and information in your ERP.



The Key to Omnichannel

If you're ready to add an online sales channel to your offering, then integrating the platform with your ERP is vital. This allows you to synchronise the data in your ERP directly with your online platform, and vice versa.

What does that look like in practice? Client details, current inventory availability, order histories, related product suggestions — all of the vital information your sales team uses in your ERP — is available in your web store. Likewise, when details are entered in your online platform, such as order placements or shipping details, that information appears automatically in your ERP.

Ensuring that the same data is available across all your channels is the cornerstone of a good omnichannel strategy, and integration makes that possible. We won't get into the details of integration here, but if you'd like to learn more about the details of integrated e-commerce, we have a number of white papers on this exact topic.



**CLIENT DETAILS, CURRENT
INVENTORY AVAILABILITY, ORDER
HISTORIES, RELATED PRODUCT
SUGGESTIONS — ALL OF THE VITAL
INFORMATION YOUR SALES TEAM
USES IN YOUR ERP — IS AVAILABLE
IN YOUR WEB STORE.**

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INEVITABLE OMNICHANNEL

Omnichannel is all about creating a more personalised and engaging shopping experience. That's why it's essential that companies developing an omnichannel strategy have:

- The necessary technology to connect a customer's journey seamlessly across all channels.
- Agile processes for data analysis and iterative approach.
- Key partners that can make it all work smoothly.

Having an orchestra of customer engagement, information management, location intelligence, real-time operations and empowered employees and clients can turn a buying moment into a personalised omnichannel shopping experience to write home about.

As e-commerce shifts to accommodate and stay ahead of consumer demand, omnichannel buying is no longer an approaching trend to read about in tech news. What was once a B2C opportunity is now knocking at the door of your B2B company's office.



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KEY TAKEAWAYS



Understand what your clients really want, now and in the long run.



Implement a solid digital strategy that connects seamlessly across all channels.



Empower and support your people throughout all lead-to-revenue processes.



Carefully select a valuable network of partners who will support you across all omnichannel commerce operations.

Consumers nowadays know they have the luxury of setting the bar high. They don't need to tolerate imperfect functionality and service or disappointment in products.

While they are willing to pay for upsold goods and services, they are intelligent buyers and know that businesses are making money. If trust is violated, loyalty dissipates fast.

In the B2C world, customers love to compare and care little if they can get what they need somewhere else. But in the B2B world, customer loyalty goes a long way. Build trust, enhance the buying experience and connect. Make omnichannel a new reality for your customers so that they will choose to channel their business to you.

The Omnichannel Opportunity is here. Take it.



ABOUT SANA

Sana helps businesses all over the world reach their full potential. We offer the shortcut to e-commerce. How? Through 100% seamless integration with SAP and Microsoft Dynamics. Our e-commerce solution leverages existing business logic and data in powerful and user-friendly web stores. This lets our clients focus on improving customer experience, streamlining sales processes, and increasing sales volume and frequency.

Sana Commerce is a certified partner of Microsoft Dynamics and SAP. Our innovative approach and strong partner network make Sana the driving force behind over 1,200 web stores worldwide. Because of our experience and expertise, we can go all the way, offering not only a product but also supporting services such as online marketing, Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) advice, hosting, design and online payment providers.

**Make your business future-proof and join the e-commerce movement.
For more information, visit www.sana-commerce.com**

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