

WHITEPAPER

# Solving the biggest B2B omnichannel challenges





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# 17.8%

In 2021 alone, online sales on B2B e-commerce sites increased by 17.8%<sup>1</sup> to \$1.63 trillion globally from the previous year.

Much like B2C customers, B2B customers are increasingly shopping online and interacting with businesses across multiple online platforms. In fact, B2B buyers are interacting with suppliers across 10 channels<sup>2</sup> during their purchase journey.

Smart B2B businesses are aware of these changes. More and more, B2B businesses realize that they must put a greater emphasis on e-commerce and omnichannel – that is, the unification of multiple channels (online and offline) into a holistic and seamless buying experience – to meet their customers' needs.

These investments pay off. Studies show that omnichannel customers spend 10%<sup>3</sup> more than single-channel customers. Furthermore, companies with omnichannel customer engagement strategies retain an average of 89%<sup>4</sup> of their customers, compared to a mere **33%** for companies whose omnichannel customer engagement was the weakest.

Implemented effectively, omnichannel is a boon to B2B businesses. However, the implementation process can be riddled with challenges. To gain the most benefits from an omnichannel presence, B2B businesses must correct for these issues. In this guide, we will review some of the latest challenges that companies face as well as the various omnichannel e-commerce solutions and trends that companies utilize to become more competitive in the market.



B2B buyers are interacting with suppliers across **10 channels** during their purchase journey.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.digitalcommerce360.com/product/b2b-e-commerce-market-report/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.marketingcharts.com/industries/business-to-business-225180>

<sup>3</sup> <https://hbr.org/2017/01/a-study-of-46000-shoppers-shows-that-omnichannel-retailing-works>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.digitalcommerce360.com/2013/12/31/why-omnichannel-strategy-matters/>

# 1. The challenges involved in delivering an excellent **B2B omnichannel e-commerce** experience

Implementing an effective omnichannel strategy requires unifying all of your disparate sales channels to provide a seamless customer experience. Buyers must have a consistent and personalized journey as they migrate from email to marketplace to e-commerce.

## Easier said than done, right?

A seamless omnichannel experience is daunting. B2B companies will need to sync data across channels, engage with customers on multiple devices throughout the sales, use channels synergistically, and provide an uninterrupted customer experience throughout each part of the customer journey

Here are the three biggest obstacles that B2B companies will face during their omnichannel rollout.



## 1.1. Syncing data across ecosystems is a difficult task

Studies show that omnichannel customers spend **10%** more than single-channel customers.

### Studies show that



**36.6%<sup>5</sup> of distributors** have difficulties managing data across various channels such as in-person, e-commerce, and marketplaces.



**31.7%** struggle to manage pricing across these channels accurately.

It becomes quite daunting to deal with multiple channels, each with its own user interface and data labeling requirements. To do so, B2B companies need a comprehensive system that brings all that product information into one platform that allows the brand to sync between channels with ease. This doesn't just include product descriptions, but also pricing, promotions, and quantities.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.digitalcommerce360.com/2021/09/21/distributors-face-challenges-and-set-priorities-for-e-commerce/>

## 1.2. Customers want to interact with brands on **multiple platforms**

The challenge that brands face is how to be **available to every customer on every platform**. Not only that, but customers don't want to have to start from scratch every time they initiate an interaction on a different channel. As an example, if a customer interacts with a B2B brand on social media chat about a defective order, they want that information to be readily available when they finish the interaction via phone.

Accomplishing this requires a whole suite of tools such as **social media engagement tools, social listening, and social monitoring**. Beyond that, this also requires a tool that can integrate all of the data into one platform and make it easy enough to use for the brand to interact with each customer, close each ticket, and provide the same personalized experience across every platform. While acquiring tools and software (such as CRM for customer management) is a critical component to solving this issue, brands also need to embrace a holistic data approach that dismantles data siloes and unifies all customer data across channels.



## 1.3. Consistent Customer experience across **all channels**

Another crucial trend we've seen is the customer using multiple channels or devices during a purchase cycle. It is common for a customer to find an item on their mobile phone, but then complete the purchase on their desktop. Similarly, an existing customer could migrate channels (for example, from email to e-commerce), and would like their previous invoices and orders from their old channel (email) available for review in their new channel (e-commerce).

In both of these instances, customers want unity of messaging and information. They want their shopping cart on their desktop to have the items they placed in it from their mobile – and they want it to reflect the discounts they found on social media. Providing a consistent customer experience across these devices and channels is a challenge that smart B2B businesses will need to address.

**80%**

of consumers<sup>6</sup> are more likely to make a purchase from a brand that offers a personalized experience,...

**30%**

...and these customers have a **30% higher**<sup>7</sup> lifetime value when they do.

For B2B businesses to take full advantage of this demand, it is key that they choose a solution that can integrate different channels together into one comprehensive omnichannel data platform – one that will keep track of customer interactions, provide personalized shopping experiences that reflect previous interactions, and ensure a unity of messaging across all channels.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/retail/our-insights/personalizing-the-customer-experience-driving-differentiation-in-retail>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/consumer-insights/consumer-journey/omni-channel-shoppers-an-emerging-retail-reality/>

## 2. Omnichannel e-commerce solutions that brands need to **stay ahead of the competition**

Now that we've covered some of the challenges brands face when switching to omnichannel marketing, let's talk about the solutions. Here are some of the best ways companies can make the transition to selling and servicing their customers on multiple channels.

### 2.1. Sell where your buyers are buying

In our [B2B buyer report](#), we reported that e-commerce is now the number one channel for buying in the B2B space –



with **50%** of B2B buyers using e-commerce to buy goods and services frequently.



With **75%** of all new products being bought online, B2B brands certainly cannot afford to shortchange their e-commerce solution.

However, simply because e-commerce is the largest B2B channel does not mean it is the *only* B2B channel worth investing in. As mentioned, buyers are interacting with suppliers [across 10 channels](#) during their purchase journey, so it is important to create a united ecosystem of channels to aid your buyers on their journey.

**45%**

The **2nd and 3rd** most used channels in the B2B space are email and phone, with **45%**...

**36%**

and **36%** of buyers respectively using these channels frequently.



**Businesses cannot afford to neglect these channels;** buyers still want to purchase goods through these media, and are indeed continuing to do so. The challenge for B2B businesses is to ensure that the data from these offline channels doesn't conflict with the data from your online channels. You want to make sure that your phone orders, your email invoices, and your online orders are all synced in a single source of truth – ideally your ERP.



Another online channel that can aid B2B businesses in **reaching new customers** as well as in providing their potential customers with is the online marketplace. In our [B2B buyer report](#), we showed that **24% of buyers** frequently make purchases through **online marketplaces**; it's the 6<sup>th</sup> most popular channel.



These marketplaces allow B2B companies to **expand into new regions or new markets** without incurring the high costs of setting up their distribution programs. However, these marketplaces can charge high fees – some up to **30%**.



Savvy B2B businesses can convert marketplace customers into e-commerce customers through clever messaging. For example, many B2B suppliers who sell via marketplaces may ship a coupon with each marketplace order. The coupon will then provide a discount on a future order – if the next order is done through the in-house, e-commerce site.

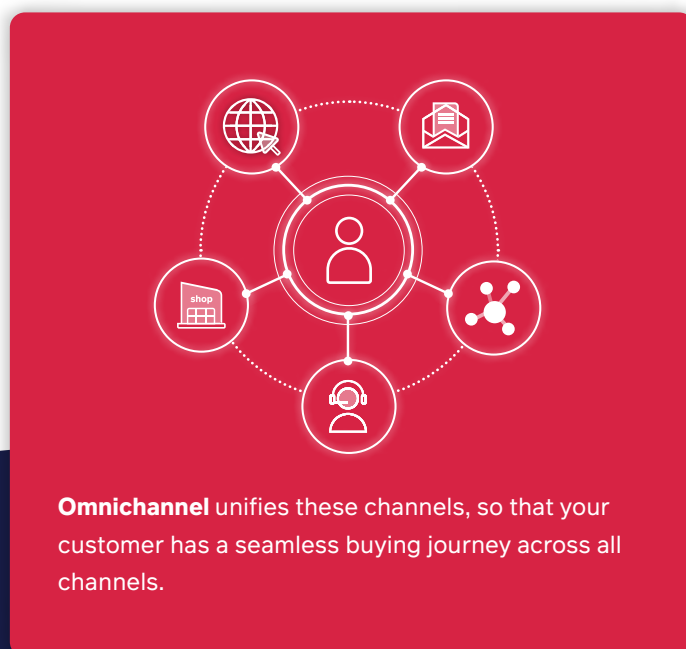
Through this manner, the B2B brand uses the marketplace channel to expand their customer base, but then converts their customers to the more valuable in-house e-commerce channel – where marketplace fees are not present.

Great B2B omnichannel strategies recognize that not all buyers will be on one channel. What's important is to recognize the strengths of each channel, and to aim to provide a seamless customer journey as customers move from one channel to the next.

**The next step is to ensure that the data gathered from all channels – be it e-commerce, phone, or marketplace – syncs back to a single source of truth that you can use to deliver a seamless customer experience.**

## 2.2. Sync online and offline data to a single source of truth – your **ERP**

Let's take a quick second to examine two different, but related concepts: multichannel and omnichannel.



In a multichannel experience, a B2B buyer might place an order via email to your sales rep. However, when they go to re-order via your e-commerce store, there is no record of their previous purchase – the orders and customer data are siloed. The customer has to tediously add all their previous items to the cart. It's not a positive customer experience.

The better B2B buying experience is an omnichannel experience, where the B2B buyer's information – regardless of channel – is synced and accurate.

## Having individual customer data available across all channels allows e-commerce stores to:



**Personalize product** recommendations across platforms



**Create retargeting campaigns** that push hesitant customers towards making a purchase (via advertising, social media ads, and native ads)



**Create smart cart** abandonment campaigns via email marketing, SMS, and push notification



Allow **easy reordering** from an e-commerce platform – even for orders that were placed from different channels

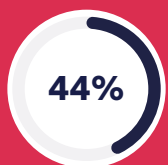
This B2B omnichannel experience can be achieved through integrated e-commerce. Integrated e-commerce solutions integrate directly into a business's ERP – their enterprise resource planning software – making the ERP the single source of truth for all customer information, orders, and invoices.

By centralizing all of your data on one system (your ERP), you remove data siloes; all channels draw from the exact same data. When a B2B buyer places an order over the phone, this order is then keyed into your ERP. When the same buyer goes to re-order through your e-commerce site, their previous order history is now available. Thanks to the ERP integration, customers can easily reorder and view invoices – even though these orders were completed through a different channel.

## 2.3. Personalized e-commerce experiences



**71% of consumers<sup>8</sup>** express some level of frustration when their shopping experience isn't personalized.



On the other hand, **44%** say that they will likely become repeat buyers if they experience a personalized experience with a particular company.

The numbers don't lie: personalization is powerful. There are several different ways you can provide a personalized shopping experience for your B2B buyers.

Through e-commerce platforms, you can segment your customers into unique groups (we call this customer segmentation), and provide specific products, accurate pricing, and tax information for these segments. Additionally, you can deploy product suggestions to show customers certain goods that they may be more likely to buy. Both of

these forms of personalization will help your customers find the products they need and get pricing that is local to them.

Another, more novel method of personalization is through algorithms and marketing insights. Learning-based marketing insights learn from thousands of customer interactions to provide you and your B2B business with key business insights that you can use to create more effective customer segmentation and positioning. Think of these tools as an additional layer of expertise that you can call upon to further hone your customer personalization.

When it comes to customer interaction, insights can be a powerful tool at your disposal. **Chatbots that help your customers with their questions and concerns are a common instance of AI** that is deployed across B2B and B2C businesses. However, it is critical to ensure that these messaging tools remain consistent across all channels; no customer likes having to go through a chatbot's prompts, only to have to re-explain their issue once a customer service rep gets on the line. By syncing this messaging data to one single source of truth (your CRM, housed under your ERP), you can ensure that your B2B buyers have a seamless customer journey – no matter who they are talking to, no matter what channel they're on.

<sup>8</sup> <http://grow.segment.com/Segment-2017-Personalization-Report.pdf>



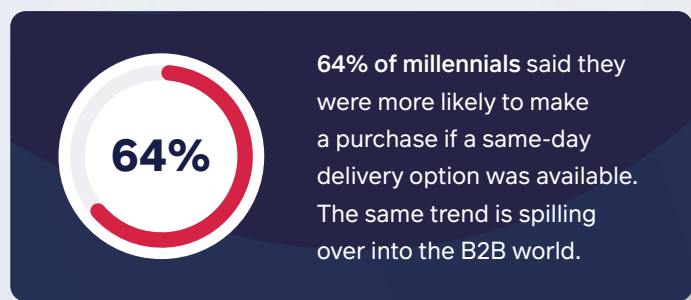
## 2.4. Provide transparency into the **order process**

Fulfillment and delivery expectations are through the roof in a post-Amazon world. Millennials are driving this demand for shorter fulfillment times and simpler processes.

**56% of millennials<sup>9</sup>** expect same-day delivery, compared to **32% of elder generations**.



 **Same-day delivery**



B2B companies can streamline their fulfillment processes by using order management software to centralize all their data and process orders in one place. Brands are increasingly moving away from using the traditional hub-and-spoke shipping model and switching to using 3PLs or third-party fulfillment companies to improve fulfillment times, decrease costs and lock in availability for the peak season.

While these steps are useful for reducing order times, there are other steps that B2B companies can take to create a stronger omnichannel experience that provides transparency into the order process.

By choosing an integrated e-commerce solution that directly syncs with your ERP, you can give customers more insight and control over their orders. Customers can easily track any order – even ones purchased through offline channels – through the e-commerce customer portal.

Additionally, customers are able to change their shipping address on the e-commerce site and have it reflected on the ERP – and vice-versa. This can allow for orders to be re-routed before shipment, saving customers and businesses time and resources.

<sup>9</sup> <https://multichannelmerchant.com/must-reads/millennials-set-shipping-delivery-bar-high-merchants/>

### 3. Omnichannel is the future

As we mentioned earlier, 50% of B2B buyers use e-commerce frequently to buy goods and services. E-commerce is booming. However, it's not the only channel that buyers use; they are drawn to a variety of online and offline channels such as in-person shopping, email, and marketplaces. Indeed, B2B buyers use around 10 channels before they make a purchase.

Smart B2B businesses have recognized this, and they have adapted accordingly by offering multiple channels. However, the multichannel experience, where data is siloed and shunted off between channels, is not adequate. To provide a seamless customer experience that will build lasting customer relationships, a true omnichannel experience is necessary.

For B2B businesses, this omnichannel experience comes from centralizing and unifying all customer and order data – regardless of the channel. Integrated e-commerce uses your ERP as your single source of truth – eliminating data siloes to allow for an accurate and seamless customer experience.

#### Integrated e-commerce allows B2B companies to:



Store all data from multiple platforms in one database



Create a consistent brand experience across platforms



Respond to customers on multiple channels in one place



Streamline order processing and fulfillment operations

B2B buyer preferences are evolving. The thoughtful omnichannel experience provides personalization, convenience, and consistency across the buyer journey. By adopting integrated e-commerce, B2B businesses can provide this seamless customer experience across channels that is the hallmark of an omnichannel experience.

Discover the **power of integrated e-commerce** with Sana Commerce

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