HOW TO BE B2B E-COMMERCE READY IN (AND BEYOND) 2020:

PREPARING FOR SMART, PREDICTIVE AND ANTICIPATORY COMMERCE

sana
The shortcut to e-commerce

INTRODUCTION

We've seen e-commerce trends evolve drastically over the years, with digitization and technology-enabled business transformation remaining the overarching goals that drive these trends. But over time, they've slowly leaned toward more innovative and sophisticated approaches. This makes sense, as the market-place has evolved, online customers have become more demanding (and more digitally-dependent), and technological advances have made more cutting-edge improvements to digital strategies possible.

This has made digital transformation a constantly-moving target for organizations who are attempting to embrace e-commerce, and an ever-more-distant, long-shot goal for businesses who aren't already making e-commerce priority.

This white paper will offer insight into how e-commerce trends have evolved over time, what challenges organizations will face in 2020, and what changes they'll need to prepare for beyond 2020.

THE EVOLUTION OF E-COMMERCE TRENDS: A TIMELINE

2017

THE YEAR OF UX

In 2017, most businesses (at the very least) were aware of the growing impact of e-commerce, but offline channels still reigned. Still, many organizations:

- Had already launched a web store.
- Started to think about improving the quality of the user experience (UX).
- Put a more intentional focus on mobile commerce.
- Began to consider the impact of better online personalization.

2018

THE YEAR OF DIGITAL-FIRST COMMERCE

In 2018, we moved toward digital-first commerce.

- Online channels became priority over offline counterparts.
- Millennial buyers drove a sizable shift toward digitization in B2B.
- A maturing of e-commerce experiences began, with a particular focus on conversion rate optimization (CRO).

2019

THE YEAR OF CONNECTED OMNICHANNEL (AND AUTOMATION)

In 2019, with digitally-driven customer preferences catalyzing further evolution, we ushered in the era of hyper-convenient omnichannel commerce. While multichannel experiences had already been a topic of discussion for 6+ years, 2019 finally saw the beginning of:

- Interconnected, seamless omnichannel experiences that were further improved by new technologies and automation (as opposed to the disjointed desktop and mobile cross-channel experiences common in 2012).
- Connected digital experiences enhanced with a human-like touch, leveraging voice search and technology like virtual assistants.
- Long-challenging processes like order management largely becoming more automated.
- A move toward B2B marketplace adoption and more flexible headless commerce solutions.[1]

2020

THE YEAR OF SMART, PREDICTIVE AND ANTICIPATORY COMMERCE STRATEGIES

In 2020, we will see businesses better leveraging technology to enable smarter processes and accelerate their progress toward customer centricity and digital transformation.

Artificial intelligence (AI) data and predictive analytics will:

- Enable seamless, cross-channel experiences (like progressive web apps).
- Take personalization to a new level: one that meets anticipated needs rather than just existing demands.

WHAT TO BE READY FOR: 5 E-COMMERCE TRENDS FOR 2020

1. The Continued Growth of B2B Voice Commerce
2. Smarter Analytics for Predictive Commerce Experiences
3. More Personalized Online Marketplaces
4. The Foundational Stage of Progressive Web Apps (PWAs)
5. The AR/VR Takeover in B2B

1. The Growth of B2B Voice Commerce

After moving past initial issues with the accuracy of voice technology and the slow adoption in B2B, we will see substantial growth in voice-enabled commerce in 2020.

The complexity of the B2B buying cycle will remain a challenge, but the high volume of repeat orders in B2B will pose a clear opportunity for voice commerce to further stream-line order and fulfilment processes.

> **TIP:** Using an e-commerce platform that integrates with your ERP system can provide B2B sellers with the customer data needed to support voice assistance. [2]

2. Smarter Analytics for Predictive Commerce Experiences

By combining browsing behavior, order history, demographics and other available data, organizations can already provide their buyers customized online shopping experiences. But with predictive analytics, users can also be served customized product catalogs (and even entirely personalized websites and checkout processes) — tailored to both current and anticipated individual needs.

> **TIP:** To provide such a customized experience, businesses will need to connect their web stores to relevant data points, such as their ERP systems — in addition to leveraging artificial intelligence and historical customer data.

3. More Personalized Online Marketplaces

DATA: Our 2019 research tells us that, today, only 6% of B2B buyers aren't using online marketplaces to buy goods and services, and nearly 70% are satisfied with the experience they receive... [3]

...Still, because marketplace transaction fees eventually start to eat away at profit margins (and - because marketplaces keep your valuable customer data for themselves), B2B businesses should expect to see a rise in more niche marketplaces — not unlike those we're seeing in the healthcare space — that provide more tailored experiences and more simple user journeys.

4. The Foundational Stage of Progressive Web Apps (PWAs)

Progressive Web Apps (PWAs) are not quite ready to become a 2020 trend, but we will start to see developers make an initial push toward a PWA-driven world. In the short term, we'll see them building out the foundation for PWAs' future by re-writing their code into single page applications (SPAs). These will allow e-commerce websites to interact with a user by dynamically rewriting the current page code (rather than loading entire new pages from a server), which will improve performance and enable more seamless online experiences. But it will still miss the offline capabilities that true PWAs offer, at least until widespread adoption takes hold.

INSIGHT: "With PWAs, we will eliminate the obstacles in the buyer journey for customers who browse and purchase across channels, and begin to treat cross-channel purchasing like one cohesive flow, rather than distinct behaviors that we need to connect and unify."

Arno Ham, Chief Product Officer at Sana Commerce

5. The AR/VR B2B Takeover

For businesses selling directly to consumers, augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) already make up a growing trend — but it's currently primarily focused on delivering the immersive customer experiences B2C consumers have come to expect. In B2B, this type of experience is less relevant.

B2B buyers are more practical, and more concerned with efficient features and functionality online. AR and VR in B2B in 2020 will present the opportunity to help buyers, for example, virtually try out and identify the correct products for purchase quickly and easily. This can (and will) come in especially handy when it comes to purchasing spare parts and or highly configurable products.

DATA: Forecasts for 2023 predict that the AR/VR market will then be worth more than $160 billion. [4]

2021 - 2025

WHAT TO BEGIN PREPARING FOR: DISRUPTORS FOR 2021-2025

While making predictions about trends that may arise in the next two to five years is just conjecture, the indication we've gotten so far tells us that certain focus areas (like personalization, customer experience, and innovation via emerging technologies) will continue to sit at the forefront of organizations' minds. We'll simply get more advanced with how we approach them, and the ways in which we can evolve and improve strategies.

As these organizations also have more reliable access to predictive data, we'll focus on proactive strategies that meet customer needs before buyers start to demand that they be met, and — finally — begin to put an end to the cycle where businesses remain just a step behind what their customers truly want.

Footnotes:
1. https://www.sana-commerce.com/what-is-headless-commerce
2. https://www.sana-commerce.com/e-commerce-terms/what-is-voice-commerce
3. https://info.sana-commerce.com/int_wp_b2b-buying-process-2019-report.html
4. https://www.digitalcommerce360.com/2019/01/27/2019-b2b-e-commerce-trends-putting-convenience-before-innovation

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