



Aptean Distribution ERP

Capitalize on the **Shifting B2B Buyer Journey**





If you've been in the business-to-business (B2B) commerce world for a while, you're likely noticing a monumental shift in the way the industry operates.

Global B2B ecommerce sales are predicted to exceed \$6.6 trillion this year, surpassing business-to-consumer (B2C) sales valued at \$3.2 trillion. The U.S. alone is expected to generate over \$1.9 trillion in ecommerce sales this year, prompting companies to race to take advantage of this lucrative selling tool.

This shift in the B2B commerce industry is a direct result of a shift in the B2B buyer journey driven by two major trends:

1. A generational shift as millennials step into decision-making roles
2. The consumerization of the B2B buying journey

These trends, coupled with nonstop technological innovation and the digital transformation of the B2B industry, will undoubtedly have a significant effect on how ecommerce is conducted in the future.

It's impossible to put this shifting buyer journey into context without taking into account the economic ramifications of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. Though these shifts and trends in ecommerce were taking place before the coronavirus first emerged, the pandemic has accelerated the need for companies to prioritize a strong digital presence. The spending habits, behaviors and expectations of B2B decision-makers now reflect the social distancing restrictions, fulfillment delays and longer delivery times that are a result of the pandemic's impact on the global supply chain.

According to [McKinsey & Company](#), B2B decision-makers' preference for digital is now approximately two times more than traditional sales interactions. And self-serve, digital ordering methods – like mobile app ordering, which is up 250% – are prioritized over other traditional methods.

Based on this research, these changes in preference are here to stay.

32% of survey respondents are “very likely” to sustain these shifts in pandemic-related sales model changes a year or more after the coronavirus pandemic, and another 47% are “somewhat likely” to do so.

In this resource, we explore the shifts in the B2B journey, highlight the trends that will shape B2B ecommerce and how to capitalize on this shift to drive growth.

Creating a B2C experience for B2B buyers

Millennials are firmly establishing themselves as part of the B2B decision-making process.

Today, [73% of B2B purchasing decisions are made by millennials](#) and 34% assume the role of decision maker. With numbers like these, it's critical that companies take millennial buying habits into account in order to be successful.

It's clear that this generation views the B2B purchase journey through the lens of a B2C consumer.

Millennials expect sellers of products and services to have the ability to tailor digital engagement to their individual needs and preferences. They expect a consistent buying experience from a variety of channels, devices and technologies and look for self-service tools and immediate, real-time communication with the seller when needed.

Above all, millennials expect exceptional customer service.

81% of buyers indicate that the buying experience is as important to them as the products and services they are looking to purchase.

The key to creating this B2C experience for B2B buyers is personalization.

For decades, B2B companies have aspired to achieve the level of personalization now common in B2C marketplaces like Amazon, Etsy or Alibaba.com. To personalize the buying process for today's sophisticated B2B buyer, it's critical that companies:

- ▶ **Offer personally relevant content** that is valuable and accessible, and helps guide audiences through the buying journey, rather than merely trying to convince them to buy
- ▶ **Provide an intuitive shopping experience** that includes repeat purchasing functionality, personalized recommendations and discounts, and tailored pricing
- ▶ **Connect the buyer to the brand** by turning customers into brand advocates with tools like loyalty programs, transaction-based discounts and mutual partnership programs

This personalized ecommerce buyer journey is even more critical during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic as the opportunity for massive tradeshows, in-person meetings and outings intended to establish relationships with prospective clients become non-existent. Many events have either been cancelled or moved to a virtual platform, which is proving to be less personal.

Future-looking companies should implement ways to help consumers make thoughtful decisions they feel confident about by providing them with tools like personalized enablement content to guide them through these inherently uncertain times.



Prioritizing fast fulfillment

It's no secret that the B2C world is in the throes of the “Amazon Effect”—a term used to describe Amazon’s success in providing fast, efficient delivery options at a fair price for consumers.

But what may come as a surprise is that many millennial buyers are expecting the same standard in fulfillment and delivery options from B2B sellers.

B2B order fulfillment works much differently than B2C fulfillment. While B2C orders are typically higher in volume and smaller in quantity, the opposite is true of orders in the B2B space, making shipping and delivery coordination much trickier to guarantee.

Complex regulations – like cross-border rules, weight restrictions and hazardous material guidelines – as well as the cost of shipping larger, more expensive orders quickly all play into the difficulties of ensuring speedy B2B order fulfillment.

Nevertheless, 56% of millennial buyers expect same-day delivery. Many companies are utilizing automation and artificial intelligence to try to answer the millennial buyer’s need for fast fulfillment. Automated guided vehicles, for example, help companies with large warehouses increase efficiency by transferring inventory picking from workers to robotic technology. With this technology, warehouses can operate around the clock, further increasing fulfillment efficiency and cutting costs.

Other companies implement integrated warehouse management systems (WMS) to ensure information flows seamlessly from sales channels to order fulfillment, and then to packing and shipping. Accurate data helps keep warehouse processes moving quickly by eliminating human error, expediting fulfillment and speeding up delivery times.

Providing a seamless omni-channel experience

Creating an omni-channel experience for buyers means creating an integrated and cohesive multi-channel approach to marketing, selling and post-purchase services.

This approach requires building a strong physical and digital brand that looks and feels the same to customers whether they've visited a company's website, social media platforms or even brick and mortar storefronts. Creating a true omni-channel experience requires companies to align their messaging, goals, objectives and design across each channel and device to deliver a better customer experience.

According to a recent Harvard Business Review survey, 73% of respondents used multiple channels during their shopping journey. These omni-channel customers spend an average of 4% more on every shopping occasion in the store and 10% more online than single-channel customers. With every additional channel they used, shoppers spent more money in the store.

Companies should work towards creating an effortless transition across channels to entice these customers.

The B2B buyer journey is not a straight line from point A to point B, and successful B2B sellers need to take this into account when aligning their ecommerce efforts with the buyer journey. Unlike B2C consumers, B2B buyers are more sophisticated and spend more time researching the product and the seller.

Creating personalized touchpoints at every step of the multi-channel journey shows customers that your company is reliable and can offer long-time support and high-quality products.

Capitalizing on Shifting Trends

Since one-third of B2B buyers want to buy 90% or all of their purchases online, relying on traditional methods of selling is no longer an option.

While some of the world's biggest retail chains have already announced plans to expand ecommerce sales, the coronavirus pandemic has expedited this process for companies in every industry regardless of their size.

Businesses have been forced to shift their sales channels from stores to ecommerce as consumers continue to avoid visits to retail stores due to lockdowns. As a result, the ecommerce channel is projected to grow at the highest CAGR over the next year.

But not all ecommerce platforms are created the same.

Modern B2B selling requires modern solutions. B2B companies that rely on outdated legacy systems to run their backend and disparate add-ons to aid in their customer-facing efforts will undoubtedly struggle to capitalize on this shifting buyer journey.

An industry-specific solution like an enterprise resource planning (ERP) system with integrated ecommerce tools gives B2B companies complete visibility into customer data they need. Plus it offers control over the buyer lifecycle to create a personalized, omni-channel buying experience that can scale and adapt as buyers' needs change and shift.

Aptean eCommerce—a turnkey solution that allows customers to quickly and easily launch an online storefront for B2B and B2C transactions—helps customers streamline payment processes.

It makes the online order fulfillment process easier by featuring two-way integration with Aptean's suite of ERP solutions. Customers can simply import product catalogs and buyer-specific pricing and discounts directly from their current systems, helping to provide the engaging, personalized shopping experience millennial B2B buyers are looking for.

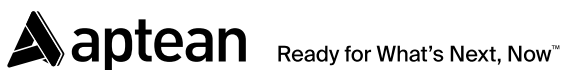
Creating a personalized experience for your B2B customers is the key to capitalizing on the shifting B2B buyer journey.

And we're here to help. By expediting fulfillment and creating a seamless omni-channel experience, forward-looking companies have the ability to drive growth and ensure success in this new B2B commerce world.



Are You Ready to Learn More?

Contact us at info@aptean.com or visit www.aptean.com.



About Aptean

Aptean is one of the world's leading providers of industry-specific software. Our enterprise resource planning and supply chain solutions are uniquely designed to meet the needs of specialized manufacturers and distributors, while our compliance solutions serve specific markets such as finance and life sciences. With both cloud and on-premise deployment options, Aptean's products, services and unmatched expertise help businesses of all sizes, across many industries, to scale and succeed.

For more information, visit www.aptean.com.