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Succeeding in B2B and B2C Ecommerce: Your Guide to Managing Retail and Wholesale

In today's ecommerce landscape, businesses often serve both consumers and other businesses, each with distinct needs and buying behaviors. Whether you're selling to consumers (B2C) or to wholesalers (B2B), managing both operations can be complex.

However, with careful planning and the right tools, launching and maintaining both types of stores doesn't have to be overwhelming. This guide explores key factors to consider when launching B2B and B2C stores, and shares lessons from Tim Maule of Diono, who successfully launched and scaled their B2B and B2C business on BigCommerce.

Select a platform that can support both sales models

One of the first decisions when launching B2B and B2C stores is choosing an ecommerce platform that supports both types of sales. Ideally, the platform should allow you to manage both operations efficiently from a single instance, streamlining everything from product management to inventory management and customer service.

When evaluating platforms, consider:

- **Multi-storefront capabilities**: The ability to create and manage multiple storefronts with unique customer experiences.

- **B2B-specific features**: Tools like custom pricing, bulk ordering, quoting, and account hierarchies are essential for managing wholesale customers.

- **Customizability**: Flexibility to tailor the user experience for B2C and B2B buyers while maintaining operational efficiency.

How Diono executes this strategy.

In 2020, Diono partnered with BigCommerce to launch multiple websites across the USA, Canada, and Mexico. BigCommerce was selected for its flexibility and capabilities — not just at the time of the partnership agreement, but also based on its forward-looking development roadmap.

The BigCommerce B2B functionality was critical for Diono, enabling the creation of multiple customer groups across North America. These groups can place orders through the site either as a traditional ecommerce platform or by using an "order pad" function. While the B2B and B2C sites share many common features, both have been tailored to meet the unique needs of their respective users.

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Create distinct experiences for B2C and B2B buyers

If you're catering to both consumers and businesses, having separate storefronts can help create the right experience for each audience. B2C customers are typically driven by factors like convenience, emotional connection with the brand, and speed of delivery. They expect a visually engaging site with intuitive navigation and a seamless checkout process.

On the other hand, B2B buyers prioritize efficiency, needing quick access to bulk ordering options, custom pricing, and detailed product information. They often require a more structured purchasing process, focused on accuracy and reliability over aesthetics.

Multi-storefront functionality allows you to operate distinct B2B and B2C sites, each with tailored content and navigation designed to meet these differing expectations, while still managing them from one centralized system.

Why multi-storefront is valuable:

- **Efficient management**: Centralizing operations across multiple storefronts saves time and reduces complexity.

- **Consistent branding**: You can maintain a unified brand while creating unique customer experiences for each segment.

- **Cost savings**: Running both B2B and B2C operations from the same platform reduces the need for multiple systems and integrations.

This approach makes it easier to offer business buyers the tools they need — like fast reordering and negotiated pricing — while providing individual consumers with a seamless shopping experience.

How Diono executes this strategy.

Diono decided to launch separate B2C and B2B ecommerce stores in the USA and Canada because the heavily customized consumer-facing theme was more complex than necessary for the simpler needs of the B2B platform, which required a more streamlined ordering process. Separating the platforms allowed for the use of bespoke themes tailored to each channel, optimizing the user experience.

By leveraging common integrations with SAP Business One, Salsify, Zendesk, and other critical applications, Diono achieved significant cost savings in customer service, order processing, finance, and sales. This increased efficiency has enabled team members to focus on more productive activities that drive revenue.

Deliver efficiency for B2B buyers with the right tools

B2B buyers are driven by efficiency, reliability, and long-term relationships. Their purchasing processes are more complex, often involving multiple stakeholders, larger orders, and negotiated terms. To meet these demands, it's crucial to offer tools that support and streamline the B2B buying journey.

- **Custom pricing and catalogs**: B2B buyers often operate under negotiated contracts and require access to tailored catalogs and pricing specific to their agreements.

- **Bulk ordering and quick reordering**: B2B customers frequently make large purchases, so a platform that simplifies bulk ordering and allows for quick reordering is essential.

- **Advanced account management**: B2B buyers need multi-user accounts with different roles and permissions, supporting features like separate billing and shipping addresses.

- **Quote management**: B2B buyers may request quotes before placing orders, so providing a simple quote-to-order process is key for larger transactions.

- **Payment flexibility and credit terms**: Offering flexible payment options such as purchase orders, credit terms, or invoicing is critical for B2B buyers.

- **Order tracking and history**: B2B buyers need access to order tracking, past purchase histories, and downloadable invoices to manage their purchasing effectively.

Ensuring that your platform supports these capabilities will help create a more seamless experience for business customers.

How Diono executes this strategy.

Diono has successfully launched the B2B platform in the USA and Canada, which is now the primary tool used by retailers to place orders across the Diono range. The ability to launch new products exclusively on presale to retail partners, supported by extensive assets such as sales presenters and rendered product images, has enabled Diono to secure advance orders from retailers. The sales team has found it particularly helpful to place orders on behalf of retailers, either during or immediately after calls.

By setting up two types of customer accounts, Diono can offer deliveries to individual stores and also enable drop shipping to consumers. This setup ensures retailers are aware of exact stock positions before accepting consumer orders, whether in-store or via their own websites. Customers also benefit from instant email communication, including delivery tracking numbers for all shipments.

Diono serves a diverse range of customers—some operate on credit terms, others prefer to prepay, and some use a combination of both. The platform accommodates this flexibility. Additionally, many customers frequently reorder the same items, which can be efficiently handled through the quick order function.

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Deliver an engaging B2C experience

B2C customers demand a seamless, engaging experience that is tailored to their needs. Unlike B2B buyers, who may be focused on processes and long-term partnerships, B2C shoppers are typically driven by factors like convenience, personalization, and the immediacy of their needs. When launching an online B2C store, it's essential to focus on several key elements:

- **Site performance**: Fast page load times and a mobile-optimized experience are key to reducing cart abandonment.

- **Personalized marketing**: Offering personalized product recommendations, targeted promotions, and tailored content can enhance the shopping experience.

- **Intuitive navigation**: Clear, easy-to-use navigation helps B2C shoppers quickly find what they're looking for, reducing friction and boosting conversions.

- **Fast checkout and payment options**: A seamless, fast checkout process is crucial to maximizing conversion rates. Reduce friction at checkout by offering multiple payment methods, including credit/debit cards, digital wallets like Apple Pay and Google Pay, and buy now, pay later options, such as Klarna or Afterpay. Allowing customers to use their preferred payment method, while keeping the checkout process quick and simple, can significantly reduce cart abandonment and drive more completed purchases.

Balancing these requirements with the operational complexity of running a B2B store requires a flexible, scalable platform.

How Diono executes this strategy.

Diono has integrated Klaviyo into the B2B platform, mirroring the B2C experience. Email flows are now customized for each customer group, and post-purchase flows have been established to provide B2B customers with enhanced product information based on their purchases.

The selection of a dedicated B2B BigCommerce theme enabled the integration of all necessary B2B functionalities, significantly improving the retailer experience on the site. Since the B2B site operates independently of the B2C site, its navigation has been custom-built to allow B2B customers to quickly find the products or information they need.

Diono regularly runs promotions, and the flexibility of the promotion tools and codes has increased efficiency and effectiveness compared to previous systems.

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Centralize operations for efficiency

While it may seem challenging to run two distinct stores, centralized management of inventory, orders, and customer data can streamline operations. Instead of juggling separate systems, a unified approach can help you achieve greater efficiency, reducing operational overhead and improving the customer experience for both B2B and B2C buyers.

Benefits of centralization:

- **Inventory management**: Maintain a single inventory across both stores, minimizing the risk of stockouts or overstocking.

- **Order fulfillment**: Streamline order processing by managing orders from both stores in one place.

- **Unified reporting**: Access a single view of customer behavior, sales performance, and operational metrics across both B2B and B2C channels.

A single-platform approach can simplify day-to-day tasks and help you focus on growing your business, rather than managing multiple systems.

How Diono executes this strategy.

Centralizing information has been critical to the success of Diono's B2C and B2B BigCommerce sites. Ensuring that fast-selling products do not oversell has significantly improved customer service. With rapid updates to orders, inventory, and tracking information, service levels have also improved. All this data flows seamlessly through a single data feed.

Using the BigCommerce mobile app, the team can quickly analyze and review sales data on an hourly or daily basis, making it easy to pivot strategies as needed. Additionally, with both B2C and B2B operations on the same platform, anyone on the digital team can work across both without needing to learn separate systems.

Plan for future growth

As your business evolves, your ecommerce platform should be able to scale with you. Whether you're expanding into new markets, launching new products, or adding more brands, planning for future growth is critical.

Key considerations for scalability:

- **Platform flexibility**: Can your platform support the addition of new storefronts or product lines without major overhauls?

- **API integrations**: Will you need to integrate with additional systems or services as your business grows, such as ERP systems, payment gateways, or customer service tools?

- **Global expansion**: If you plan to sell internationally, ensure your platform supports multiple currencies, languages, and regional tax requirements.

By choosing a solution that grows with your business, you can avoid the need for disruptive migrations in the future.

How Diono executes this strategy.

Throughout the brand's time on BigCommerce, Diono has been thrilled with the ongoing development of both the B2B and B2C capabilities. The team looks forward to leveraging them more and exploring future integrations, such as enabling customer dropship orders to be instantly processed through the B2B site from their POS systems or websites.

Diono's vision is to continue developing both the B2B and B2C sites, in collaboration with BigCommerce and efelle, their agency partner. This partnership aims to simplify, accelerate, and streamline operations so that the majority of orders from any channel are processed through BigCommerce. This not only enhances the customer experience but also enables Diono team members to work more efficiently.

The final word

Launching B2B and B2C stores together can be a powerful strategy for reaching more customers, but it comes with unique challenges. By selecting the right platform, leveraging multi-storefront capabilities, and focusing on the specific needs of both B2B and B2C customers, you can set your business up for success.

The key is finding a balance between operational efficiency and delivering a tailored experience for each audience. By centralizing operations and planning for growth, businesses can streamline ecommerce management while enhancing the customer experience across both types of stores.