Building a Human Centric B2B Strategy

"The hands-on presentations and discussions set B2B Online apart from other digital vision and strategy events. You walk away with practical insights."

— OTTO PREISS, GROUP SVP, CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, ABB

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INTRODUCTION

The way we shop has changed irreversibly. Brands are bending over backwards to meet consumers through every available channel, whenever and wherever they may be. While the B2B world seemed separate from the B2C world of consumer interactions, the past few years have made it clear that the people who represent businesses expect the same level of convenience across the board.

In Q3 of 2019 WBR Insights surveyed 100 CEOs, CTOs, CDOs, VPs of Marketing and Digital, Global Heads of eCommerce, and those of a similar standing from B2B companies across Europe to find out more about the challenges they face and the innovative solutions being brought to the table.
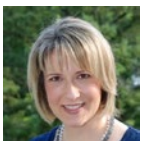
The survey was conducted by appointment over the telephone. The results were compiled and anonymised by WBR Insights and are presented here with analysis and commentary by the B2B Online community.

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CREATING AUTONOMY FOR THE B2B CUSTOMER

David Holender, CEO, VAIMO

Digitalisation and becoming successful in digital commerce presents a number of challenges. As the global market expands, with companies using marketplaces such as Amazon and eBay to gain access to new audiences, customer experience, value-added services and product expertise are becoming more important to stay competitive. But the profile of a typical B2B client is also changing. Fuelled by B2C purchasing experiences, they demand autonomy and flexibility in how they interact with your business. B2B clients want to purchase what, how and when they want, on their own terms. eCommerce serves as a valuable method, however, to offer better customer experiences, drive loyalty and attract new prospects.

RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

Doing B2B eCommerce right — off the bat — is a challenge, be it a first-time launch or a re-platforming exercise. Our recipe for success is as follows: start with understanding your level of digital maturity, define your digital vision and then address the gaps with a 3-5 year roadmap. Mastering the disciplines of eCommerce also requires cross-organisational cooperation — there might be changes to logistics and finance will need to consolidate customer accounts faster. The vision and roadmap help drive clarity and will make change management easier.

LAUNCH FAST

Our experience is that projects below 9-months of implementation have a significantly higher success rate of being on time and on budget. Launching faster with a minimum required scope creates focus and helps to drive sharper scope prioritisation between what is nice-to-have and need-to-have. A faster launch also means a faster return on investment and organisational quick-wins.

IT NEEDS TO DELIVER VALUE

B2B companies usually have fewer customers with higher retention and closer relationships than B2C. This also means that doing things right is more important — having a bad digital customer experience can have a direct impact on the relationship and your opportunity to ever onboard the customer to your digital offerings (even though you might improve it over time).
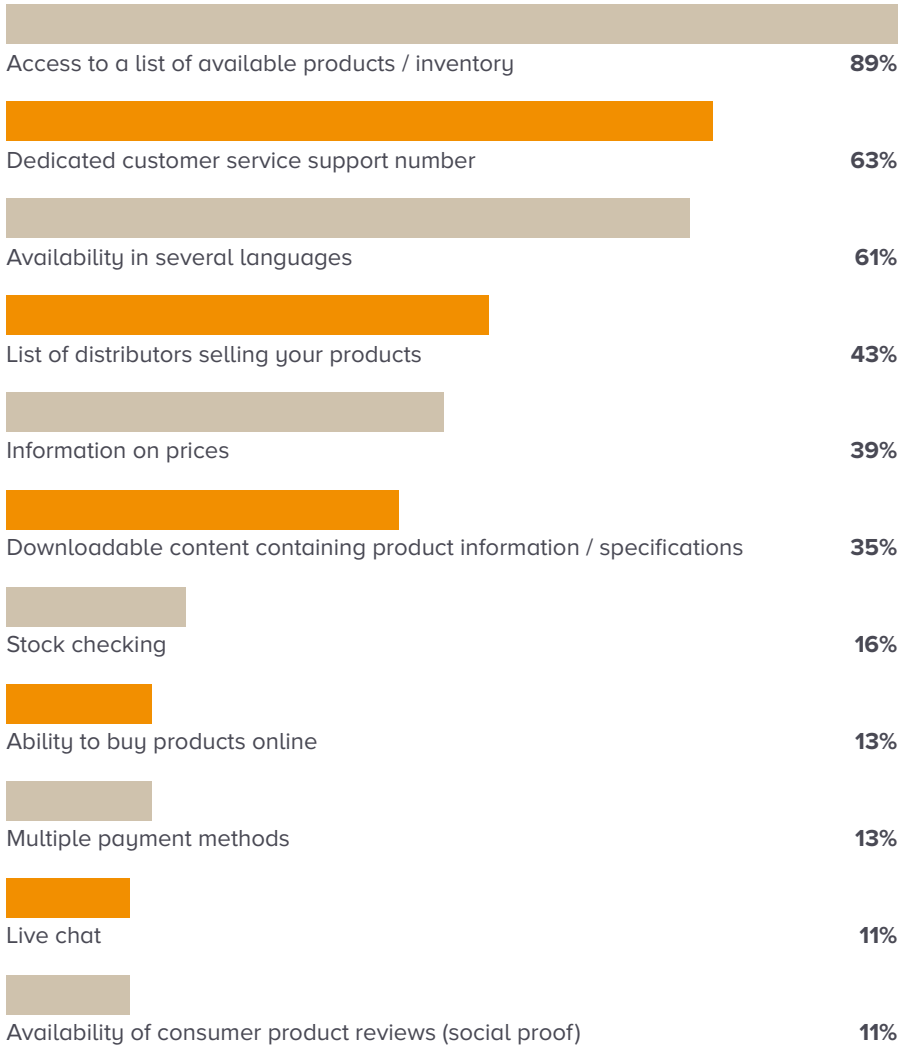
EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS

Customer expectations are rising. Rapid advances in technology have transformed the merchant/customer dynamic and it's now the customer that holds all the cards. Just like in B2C, B2B customers expect quick, frictionless and enjoyable experiences with your business across devices and touchpoints. And overall, they seek autonomy — the autonomy to place orders, change delivery, speak to customer service, return products (and many more) on their own terms. It's the businesses that are able to incorporate new technologies and exceed the needs of their consumers that will be primed for future digital commerce success.

Part One

Catering to the Modern Customer

What features does your website
(eCommerce or otherwise) **have?**

Access to a list of available products / inventory **89%**

Dedicated customer service support number **63%**

Availability in several languages **61%**

List of distributors selling your products **43%**

Information on prices **39%**

Downloadable content containing product information / specifications **35%**

Stock checking **16%**

Ability to buy products online **13%**

Multiple payment methods **13%**

Live chat **11%**

Availability of consumer product reviews (social proof) **11%**

Respondents were asked to select all that apply

eCommerce has allowed B2B organisations to offer consumers the quick and convenient customer journey which they have come to expect. Most fundamentally, this means there needs to be a list of inventory on the site with clear product descriptions. However as the industry advances we are seeing more elements of B2C commerce filter through to create a more customer-centric approach. **63% of respondents have a dedicated customer support service on their website,** and as the trend continues, features such as product reviews and live chats are beginning to bridge the gap between B2B and B2C.

"I think it's time for B2B organisations to stop thinking of websites as an isolated channel, and evolve from being salesperson focused to customer focused. As we do that, we will naturally understand what we need to build in order to effectively connect with our customers."

**Devashish Saxena,
Chief Digital Officer,
PPG**

"If you're selling B2B, you need to make sure your website is giving as much detail as possible on your products. Customers should also be able to see an account overview which gives them access to their invoices, shows their history with you as a vendor, and offers ways for them to customise and manage their account."

**Jean-Louis Keraudren,
Global Corporate Head
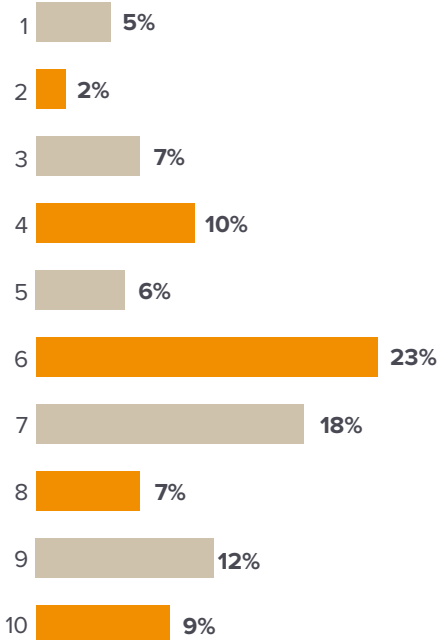of Customer Experience,
Hilti**

"It's interesting to note that although 89% of respondents use their website to show products and services, only 13% sell online. With B2B customer preferences rising in line B2B customer expectations, companies must adopt new methods and technologies to remain competitive. We've seen successful B2B clients implementing such features as ordering by SKU, intuitive on-site search and filtering, complete inventory visibility, personalised price lists and multiple and seamless payment methods. Businesses willing to embrace new eCommerce technologies and features can take greater control of the customer journey and, therefore, offer world-class customer experiences."

**David Holender,
CEO,
VAIMO**

On a scale of 1 to 10
(1 being completely siloed, 10 being fully integrated) **how would you rate your current omnichannel strategy?**

1	5%
2	2%
3	7%
4	10%
5	6%
6	23%
7	18%
8	7%
9	12%
10	9%

Omnichannel goes beyond a siloed multichannel approach and blurs the lines to create a seamless customer journey. The retail industry moving towards an experience first model to create fully integrated experiences and customer expectations are at an all-time high. As a response to this, B2B organisations are picking up on this trend. In fact, **28% of respondents rated the integration of their omnichannel strategy as an 8 out of 10 or higher.**

"At their core, B2B customers are no different from B2C customers. We all want optionality and availability on our own terms. As purchasing experiences become more diverse and personalised, the B2B organisations that can offer omnichannel solutions for their customers will be at more of an advantage. It's not about offline vs. online, it's about giving our customers the choice of how and when they want to engage."

**Monique Elliot
VP Global Head of Customer Experience Marketing,
Electrification Business, ABB**

"Creating an integrated omnichannel approach will definitely provide B2B organisations a competitive advantage today, but this will become the standard over time as most of your competitors start to do the same. Staying connected to your customers will ensure that you continue to evolve and maintain an effective connection."

**Devashish Saxena,
Chief Digital Officer,
PPG**

"A fully integrated omnichannel strategy can help businesses in two ways. Firstly, being able to reach customers online and offline and across touchpoints and devices — seamlessly — will increase customer lifetime value and loyalty. After all, today's buyers demand immediacy and convenience. But also internally, a fully integrated omnichannel presence empowers staff through increased efficiency and knowledge — value that they'll be able to pass onto your customers. If your approach is siloed, however, this increases the chance of inefficiencies, miscommunication and errors, which means a poorer level of service for your customers."

**David Holender,
CEO,
VAIMO**

Are you using Machine Learning to create one-to-one relationships with customers?

Yes	40%
No, but we are looking into it	43%
No, we're not interested	17%
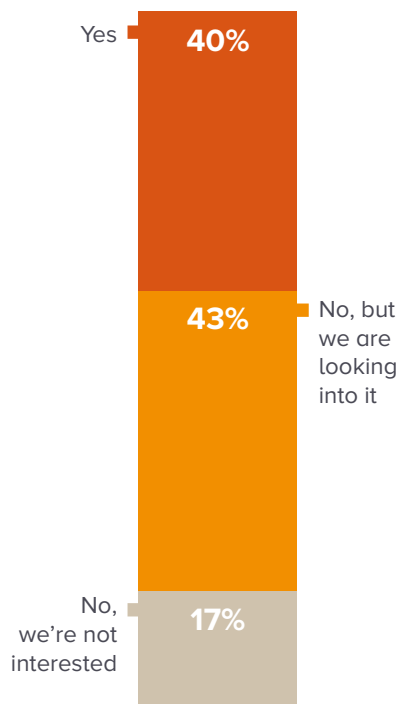
43% of respondents are investigating ML as a means of creating relationships with consumers, while 40% have already implemented this.
Data analysis has advanced to a point where organisations can get very specific with their marketing communications and pool data from across channels to deliver the most relevant messages to customers.

"I expect machine learning to become much more integrated into B2B as marketers begin to listen more closely to their customers. If you are able to capture and understand what your customers are communicating through various channels, you can tailor the responses you are offering."

**Jean-Louis Keraudren,
Global Corporate Head of Customer Experience,
Hilti**

"There are many opportunities to use ML to connect better with your customers, especially in situations where you can anticipate their needs and proactively work to meet them."

**Devashish Saxena,
Chief Digital Officer,
PPG**

"Machine Learning is one of the biggest drivers of digitalisation for businesses. Though it's still early days, the last couple of years have already demonstrated how Machine Learning can be applied pragmatically to gain internal efficiencies and offer better customer experiences. Where Machine Learning becomes particularly interesting is in how it can interpret and handle huge amounts of data to drive personalisation strategies and identify trends."
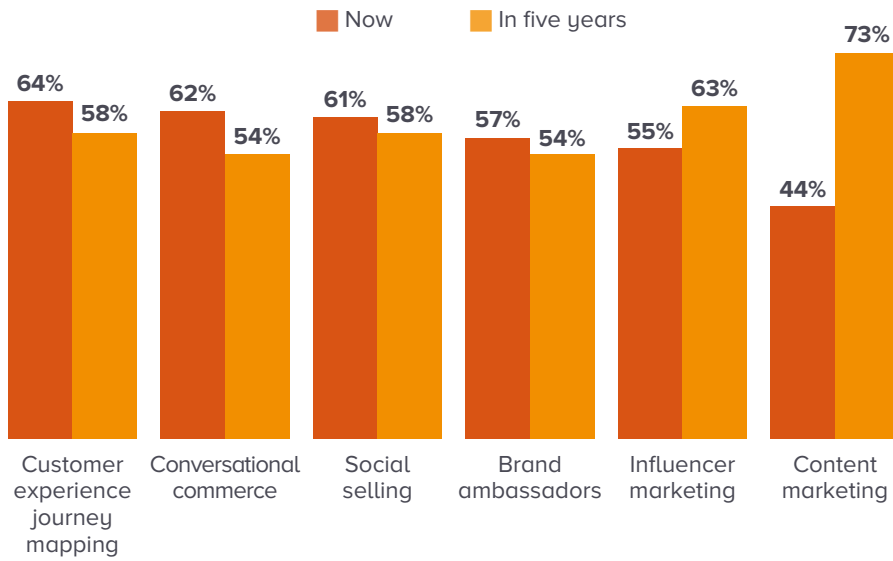
**David Holender,
CEO,
VAIMO**

Which elements of B2C customer experience have had the most impact on the B2B marketing strategy?

■ Now　■ In five years

Element	Now	In five years
Customer experience journey mapping	64%	58%
Conversational commerce	62%	54%
Social selling	61%	58%
Brand ambassadors	57%	54%
Influencer marketing	55%	63%
Content marketing	44%	73%

Respondents were asked to select all that apply

> The trend towards content marketing is another echo from the B2C customer experience. **73% of CDOs surveyed predict that content marketing will one of the most significant elements of B2C to impact the B2B industry in the next few years.** User generated content offers a neutral source for potential customers to review and **alongside frictionless payments, UGC was selected one of the most valuable eCommerce features.**

"You can personalise many aspects of a marketing campaign, but if the content itself is not appropriate then it's all for nothing. High quality user relevant content drives organic SEO and creates user engagement and satisfaction."
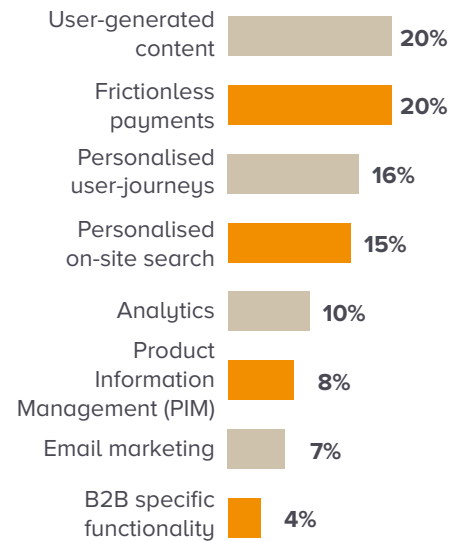
**Jean-Louis Keraudren,
Global Corporate Head
of Customer Experience,
Hilti**

"Major B2C players have been innovating and pushing the envelope in relevant and engaging omnichannel experiences for years. The popularity of services such as Uber, Google and Netflix have also had a huge impact on our perception, as users, of how seamless and easy things should work. Therefore, mastering the disciplines of seamless digital customer experiences is no longer just a business opportunity in B2B but a necessity. Prioritising customer experience in B2B marketing strategies is crucial to remaining competitive and at the forefront of digital disruption."

**David Holender,
CEO,
VAIMO**

Which eCommerce feature/ system do you see as the most valuable in driving the success of your business?

Feature	%
User-generated content	20%
Frictionless payments	20%
Personalised user-journeys	16%
Personalised on-site search	15%
Analytics	10%
Product Information Management (PIM)	8%
Email marketing	7%
B2B specific functionality	4%

"You need to differentiate what frictionless actually means in B2B vs. B2C. Generally speaking, B2C is the driving force behind many trends, and while there are a few adjustments that need to be made to accommodate B2B, the expectation of convenience is continually rising everywhere."

**Jean-Louis Keraudren,
Global Corporate Head
of Customer Experience,
Hilti**

"User generated content like ratings and reviews has become such a dominant part of how we as consumers make so many of our purchase decisions online – it is no surprise it plays over into the B2B arena."

**Devashish Saxena,
Chief Digital Officer,
PPG**

"Where we see the biggest return on investment and the highest percentage of user onboarding is when a website becomes the central point of information and interaction. Offering inspirational and relevant content, product information and strong self-service capabilities form the core of seamless commerce experiences. But businesses also need to look at their customers. It's by analysing user journeys and customer pain points that businesses will learn what functionality is relevant and what should be prioritised for the future."
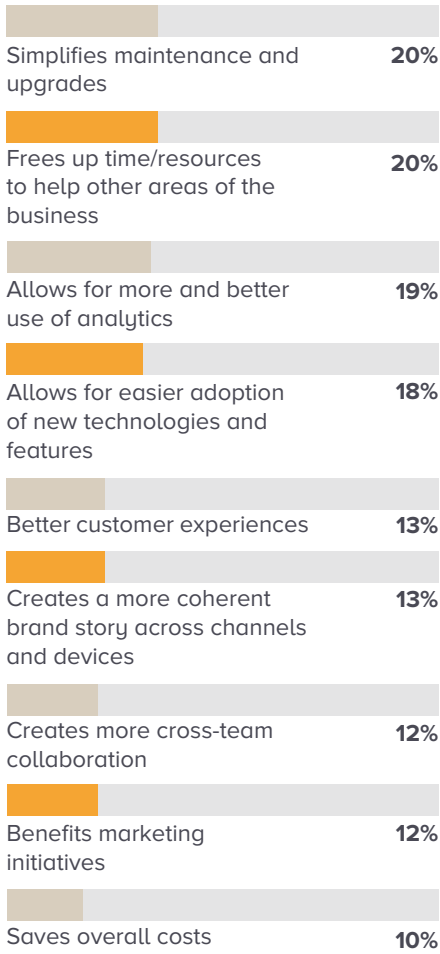
**David Holender,
CEO,
VAIMO**

Part Two

Transforming the eCommerce Platform

What are the primary benefits of having a unified, B2B eCommerce solution?

Benefit	%
Simplifies maintenance and upgrades	**20%**
Frees up time/resources to help other areas of the business	**20%**
Allows for more and better use of analytics	**19%**
Allows for easier adoption of new technologies and features	**18%**
Better customer experiences	**13%**
Creates a more coherent brand story across channels and devices	**13%**
Creates more cross-team collaboration	**12%**
Benefits marketing initiatives	**12%**
Saves overall costs	**10%**

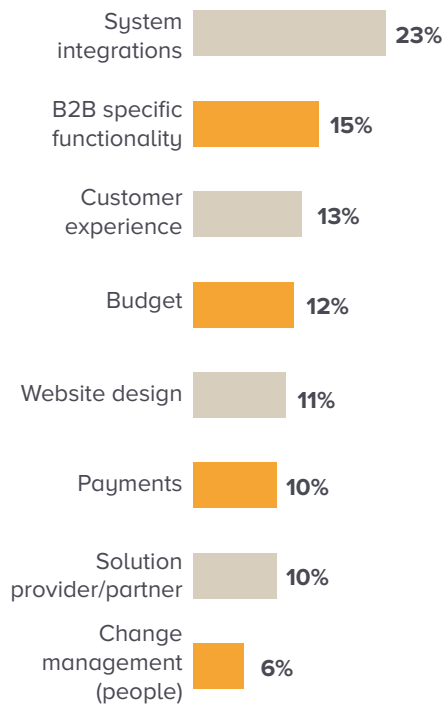Respondents were asked to select all that apply

Respondents reported that the greatest benefits of a unified eCommerce platform were simple maintenance and upgrades, and more free time to focus on other tasks. Having systems with disparate add-ons and multiple solutions has made eCommerce a complicated ordeal for some B2B organisations. In the short term, simplifying things into one platform will take the pressure off when it comes to the complexities of maintenance and upgrades. Long term, as B2B trends towards the common retail experience, having data easily accessible through one platform is going to make a real-time omnichannel experience much more plausible.

" Especially regarding access to product and material information, B2B eCommerce offers a quick return on investment. Depending on the digital maturity of a company, a unified eCommerce solution has the power to improve the quality of master data. This has many positive side-effects — notably better analytics capabilities which not only benefit the eCommerce platform itself but the business as a whole. Data quality is among the top challenges (and subsequent opportunities) we usually identify for companies launching eCommerce for the first time. "

**David Holender,
CEO,
VAIMO**

Regarding the performance of your current B2B eCommerce solution, which area do you face the most difficulty in?

Area	%
System integrations	**23%**
B2B specific functionality	**15%**
Customer experience	**13%**
Budget	**12%**
Website design	**11%**
Payments	**10%**
Solution provider/partner	**10%**
Change management (people)	**6%**

Almost a quarter of respondents selected integration as the primary eCommerce difficulty, making it the most common issue. The sooner respondents can simplify their data the more they will be able to get out of it in the long run. The industry has reached a tipping point, making this a crucial moment for eCommerce strategists. If they lay the foundations properly, they will be in good stead for the future as trends towards an omnichannel experience continue their trajectory.

" Integrations are often complicated due to disconnected or inconsistent internal process. Before launching a large-scale eCommerce solution, the first step is to ensure current commercial processes are clearly mapped and streamlined. This upfront work will help with integration. "

**Monique Elliot
VP Global Head of Customer Experience Marketing,
Electrification Business, ABB**

" I see a severe shortsightedness in enterprise architecture for most organisations. There is little or no foresight on how disparate systems will come together, nor time spent mapping out a desired architecture or how the organisation can get there. Without a proactive approach, many organisations are caught chasing the integration tail! "
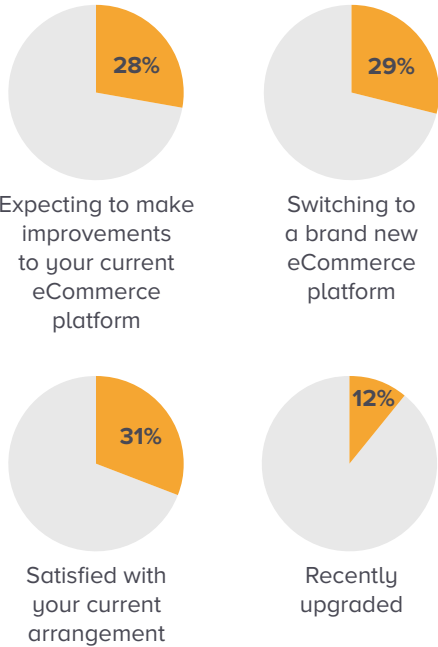
**Devashish Saxena,
Chief Digital Officer,
PPG**

" Older, legacy systems have been architected based on the thesis of one system to rule them all. The increased maturity and need for businesses to consolidate and share data across the business for higher efficiency and better intelligence are changing this paradigm. Today's modern businesses plan towards interconnected best-of-breed systems for increased quality of master data and integration possibilities. Avoiding heavy customisations and adapting to standard out-of-the-box functionalities increases the speed of implementation and also lowers maintenance costs. "

**David Holender,
CEO,
VAIMO**

In terms of changing or upgrading your eCommerce platform to meet future goals. Are you:

28%

Expecting to make improvements to your current eCommerce platform

29%

Switching to a brand new eCommerce platform

31%

Satisfied with your current arrangement

12%

Recently upgraded

Only 30% are satisfied with their current eCommerce situation, while 28% are expecting to make improvements and 29% are switching their platform. The demand for B2B online is growing, but organisations need to be thinking long term when it comes to system overhauls. By investing in their platforms and creating a solid foundation, B2B organisations will give themselves the advantage over competitors in the long run.

"It's crucial that those looking to implement or upgrade their eCommerce platform consider multiple user personas that may wish to interact online. eCommerce experiences are never a one-size fits all. As B2B eCommerce technology becomes more sophisticated, companies have the opportunity to create unique user experiences for their customers."

Monique Elliot
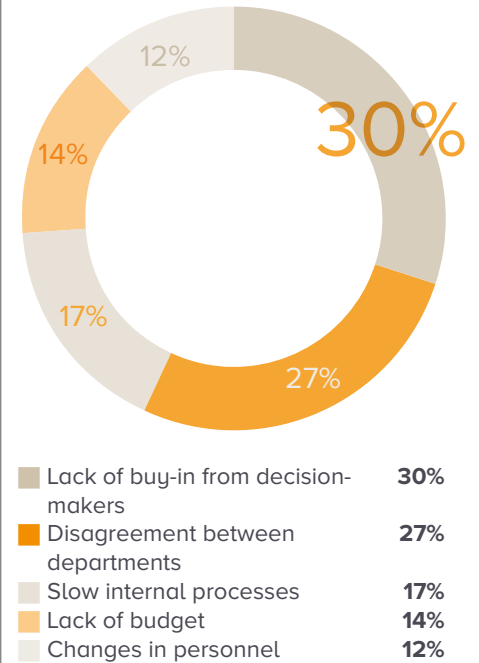**VP Global Head of Customer Experience Marketing, Electrification Business, ABB**

"At the end of the day, your customers don't care what eCommerce platform you have, they care if they can get what they need, to do what they need to do. This should be the top priority."

Devashish Saxena,
Chief Digital Officer, PPG

"Technological innovation is moving at a rapid pace. The introduction of new concepts such as headless commerce, progressive web apps and microservices architecture presents challenges for businesses who are trying to navigate new technologies and understand how they translate into real value. We see that the quick wins from implementing a new best-of-breed eCommerce platform usually come in the form of increased standardisation, more out-of-the-box functionality and lower maintenance costs."

David Holender,
CEO, VAIMO

Are there hurdles which are preventing you from upgrading your eCommerce infrastructure and, if so, what are they?

12%

30%

14%

27%

17%

■	Lack of buy-in from decision-makers	**30%**
■	Disagreement between departments	**27%**
■	Slow internal processes	**17%**
■	Lack of budget	**14%**
■	Changes in personnel	**12%**

The greatest barrier to upgrading the eCommerce infrastructure is lack of buy-in from senior staff. Often the C-suite is more easily convinced by a short term ROI. However, the demand for more convenient channels will only continue to grow. Those who ignore this demand will fall behind, while early adopters gain the competitive edge.

"A lack of digital vision and clarity on how to get there are some of the main reasons why organisations and decision-makers get stuck in their digitalisation journeys. Having clarity on what, why and how the company will drive its digital initiatives — defined by an organisational and technological roadmap — enables a clear picture of how the project should be initiated. With our experience in driving digital enablement through pragmatic and hands-on consulting, we've seen this as the most efficient way for companies to avoid getting stuck and maximising their eCommerce investment."
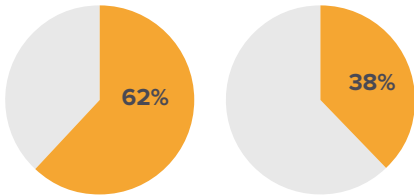
David Holender,
CEO, VAIMO

Part Three

Technology and the Future of B2B

Do you think buzzwords have had a negative impact, or have they helped the industry to identify and promote areas of innovation?

62%

38%

Buzzwords have helped the industry to identify and promote areas of innovation

Buzzwords have had a negative impact

While calling something a buzzword is an easy way to diminish innovative new ideas, respondents to our survey are happy to acknowledge that they have played an important role in highlighting innovative new practices which can help B2B organisations excel. **According to 62% of respondents, buzzwords have helped the industry to identify and advance in areas of innovation, while 38% feel they have had a negative impact.**

The hype around these ideas can be tiresome, but it is not unfounded, and there's a real basis for excitement around technologies such as advanced data analysis tools which can streamline both marketing and manufacturing.

" The use of buzzwords is inevitable, every industry has them. The key is knowing when to use them, and more importantly, to ensure that everyone understands the same definition. When used correctly, buzzwords can help with stakeholder buy-in and promote collaboration. "

Monique Elliot
VP Global Head of Customer Experience Marketing, Electrification Business, ABB

" Buzzwords are great for creating awareness and engagement. However, the downside is that they also create peer pressure, which takes many organisations down the rabbit hole of pursuing ideas without a clear understanding of purpose or intent. This will usually backfire. "

Devashish Saxena,
Chief Digital Officer,
PPG

" Buzzwords help people to look in new directions and get inspired, but they also cause a lot of confusion by creating hype long before manufacturers are ready to implement them, and even before technology is mature enough to be implemented. A whole industry of consulting and knowledge transfer grows out of it. "
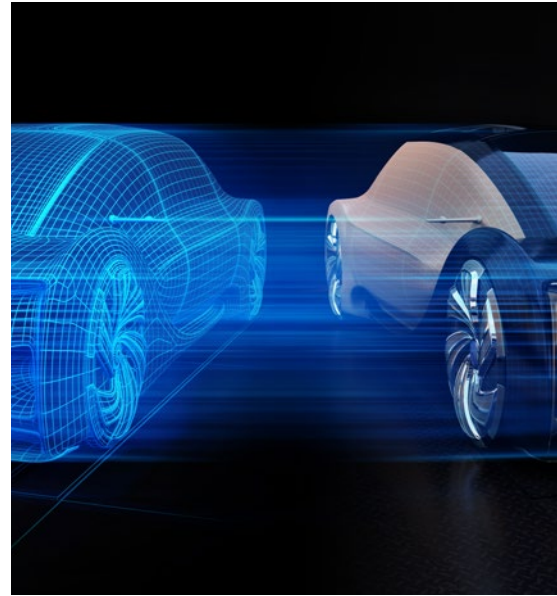
Jean-Louis Keraudren,
Global Corporate Head of Customer Experience, Hilti

" Buzzwords often get a bad rap, and rightly so. Repetition can often deem them meaningless and the word's initial meaning can often get lost. But in the ever-changing eCommerce industry, these words act as a useful way to introduce complex concepts and technologies — especially to non-technical audiences. So for businesses marketing a new product to their clients, it's likely easier to use a well-known buzz word in place of a long technical specification. And if this helps businesses to strengthen their customer relationships, then they have a valuable role. "
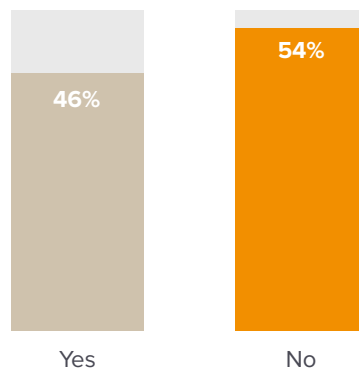
David Holender,
CEO,
VAIMO

Do you think digital twin technology is ready to be adopted by manufacturers and distributors?

46%

54%

Yes

No

The manufacturing process has so many moving parts, and implementing new technologies can take a long time because of this. It follows that the industry is going to wait until the technology has been perfected before they invest. Digital twin technology has the potential to predict problems and bottlenecks and allow manufacturers to get to them before they become a problem, and while this preventative approach has many benefits, the industry still feels the technology is not mature enough. However, it appears we are reaching a tipping point. **46% say digital twin technology is mature enough to be adopted by manufacturers and distributors, while 54% feel it needs more development.**
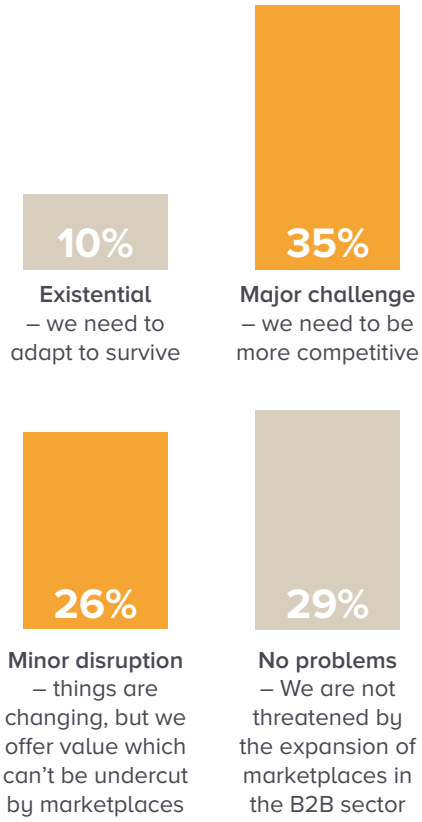
" Digital twin technology is already starting to play a role in certain industries. The data and information collected from the digital twin can be used to make smarter business decisions — and therefore represents a significant competitive edge. And in looking towards the future, digital twins can be used to test various scenarios, thus allowing businesses to make better-informed decisions and forecasts. Whether manufacturers are ready for digital twin technology or not, the evidence suggests that it will form an integral part of B2B in the near future. "

David Holender,
CEO,
VAIMO

How much of a threat do you regard Amazon Business to be to your business model?

10%

Existential
— we need to adapt to survive

35%

Major challenge
— we need to be more competitive

26%

Minor disruption
— things are changing, but we offer value which can't be undercut by marketplaces

29%

No problems
— We are not threatened by the expansion of marketplaces in the B2B sector

Amazon has had a big part to play in the change in consumer behaviour and expectations. As their influence spread across the globe, this has filtered through to B2B. Millenials and Gen Z employees are moving into the workplace, and even before they reach the C-suite, their research and influence will likely affect buying decisions. This is why online has become such a major channel for B2B.

45% expect Amazon to have a major impact of the B2B industry, while 26% expect the disruption to be minor, and 29% predict they will be unaffected. If B2B organisations are able to meet the expectations of the modern consumer, Amazon will struggle to win the monopoly. B2B retailers can retain the competitive edge by focusing on the knowledge of their client base.
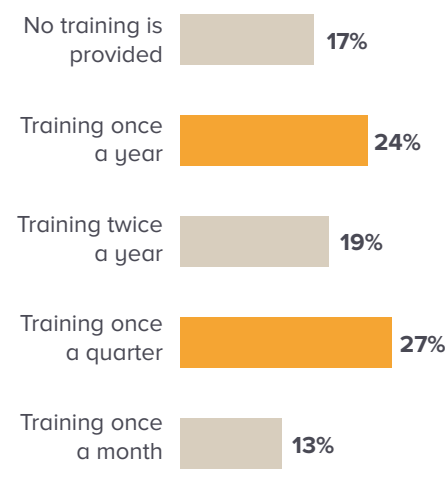
"There are two key consequences of the disruption driven by Amazon and other marketplaces. Firstly, it's transparency. Even those industries traditionally considered 'closed ecosystems' are now being disrupted by manufacturers who, through marketplaces can open their catalogues to the world. Secondly, marketplaces are known for their best-in-class customer experience, which raises the bar for everybody else. Delivering a unified commerce experience is no longer a value add-on for businesses, it's a critical hygiene factor for any B2B business. But despite this, it's still important to remember that Amazon cannot compete on such things as solid product data, product sheets and B2B specific expertise — this is where businesses hold the competitive advantage."

**David Holender,
CEO,
VAIMO**

"Amazon has established high standards for B2B customers. I expect some manufacturers will be forced to choose between investing in meeting the growing customer expectations with their own eCommerce system, or selling through Amazon and losing a big portion of their independence. Amazon could be a threat, but for smaller brands this could also be an opportunity to increase reach and grow their business."

**Jean-Louis Keraudren,
Global Corporate Head of Customer Experience,
Hilti**

How much specialist training are you offering employees so that they can modernise the way they use CRM tools?

No training is provided	**17%**
Training once a year	**24%**
Training twice a year	**19%**
Training once a quarter	**27%**
Training once a month	**13%**

A cultural shift within the organisation needs to take place. As the customer journey become more complexly entangled with technology, the roles within the B2B organisation are going to shift their focus. This is why 40% of B2B organisations we surveyed offer their staff CRM training at least once every quarter.

"Evolving our ways of working is a key part of an organisation's digital transformation journey. How we think, how we behave, how we make decisions — these fundamental attributes have to shift for employees to turn the digital journey from push to pull."

**Devashish Saxena,
Chief Digital Officer,
PPG**

"The benefits of CRM in improving workforce efficiency and client relationships are undeniable. But if your employees don't have the knowledge on how to use it effectively, then the tool becomes static and it doesn't hit its potential. A CRM is only as effective as the people interacting with it on a daily basis. And with innovation occurring at lightning speed, businesses must invest in their employees to maximise the output of their tools and systems."

**David Holender,
CEO,
VAIMO**

About VAIMO

Vaimo is one of the world's most respected experts in digital commerce on the Magento and Adobe Commerce Cloud platform. As a full-service omnichannel agency, they deliver strategy, design, development and managed services to brands, retailers and manufacturers all over the world.

Their broad experience and deep expertise within B2B, B2C, PIM, Order Management and ERP integrations makes them a key partner for driving success in digital commerce. Vaimo's 10+ years track record of technical excellence coupled with proven results in helping their clients succeed with business development, digital strategy and customer experience design is proudly manifested in their status as a Magento Global Elite Partner.

With local offices in 15+ markets across EMEA, APAC and North America and over 450 employees, they provide a global presence that allows them to cultivate close, long-term relationships with their clients.

For more inforantion please visit **www.vaimo.com**

About WBR Insights

We use research-based content to drive conversations, share insights and deliver results. Connect with our audience of high-level decision-makers in Europe and Asia from industries including: Retail & eCommerce, Supply Chain & Procurement, Finance, as well as many more. From whitepapers focused on your priorities, to benchmarking reports, infographics and webinars, we can help you to inform and educate your readers and reach your marketing goals at the same time.

Contact us to find out how your business could benefit from:

❯ Year-round access to our network of decision-makers and industry-leaders
❯ In-depth research on current fast-moving issues and future trends
❯ Lead generation campaigns that fit your priorities
❯ Promoting your organization as an authority in your industry

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