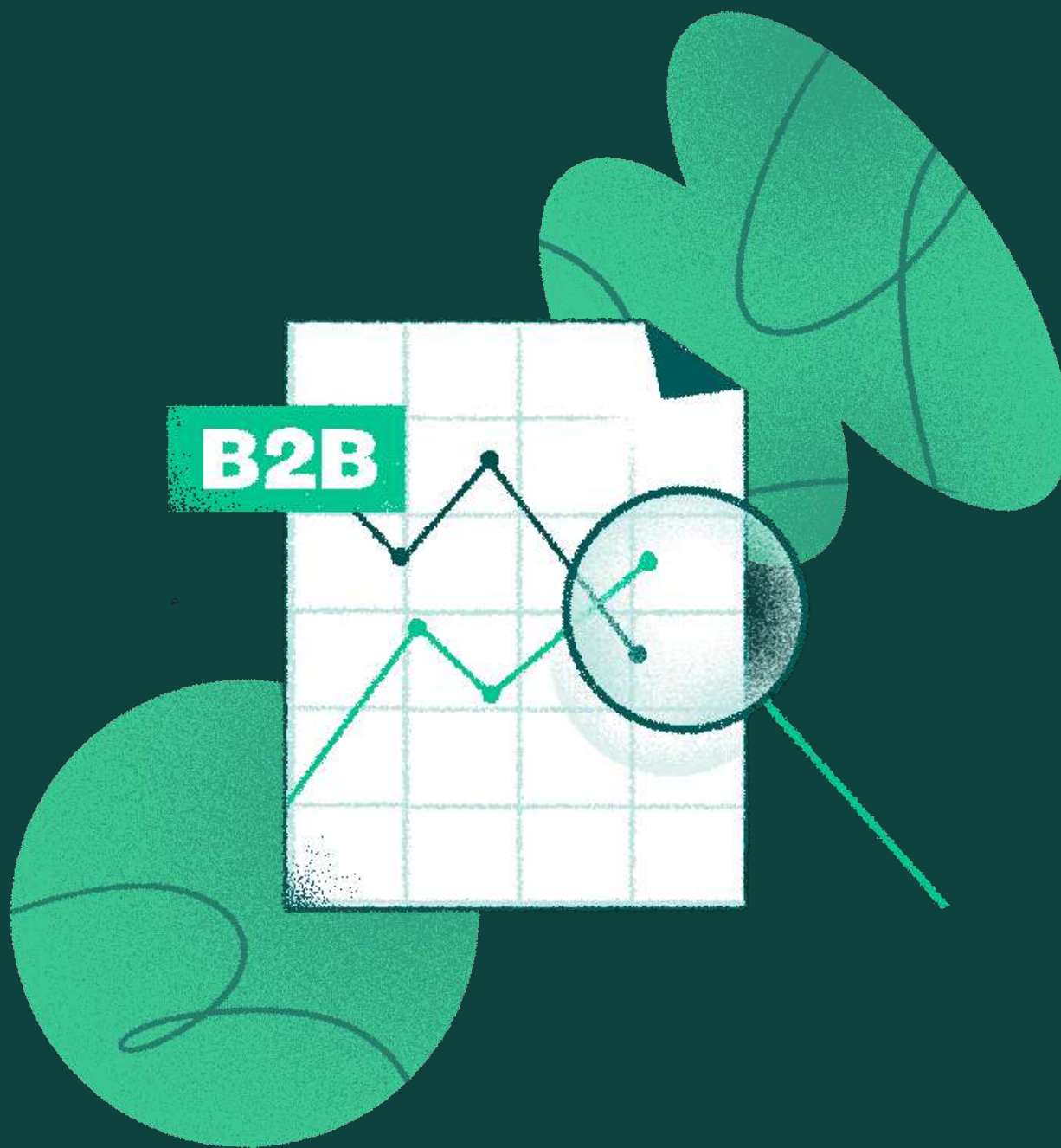


EBOOK

The Ultimate Guide to the B2B Digital Shelf



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What is the B2B Digital Shelf?

What is the Digital Shelf?

The Digital Shelf refers to the ever-evolving online environment in which manufacturers and retailers display their products. A company's presence on the Digital Shelf is formed through the product catalogs they display. These catalogs consist of product descriptions, details, pricing, availability, and other data.

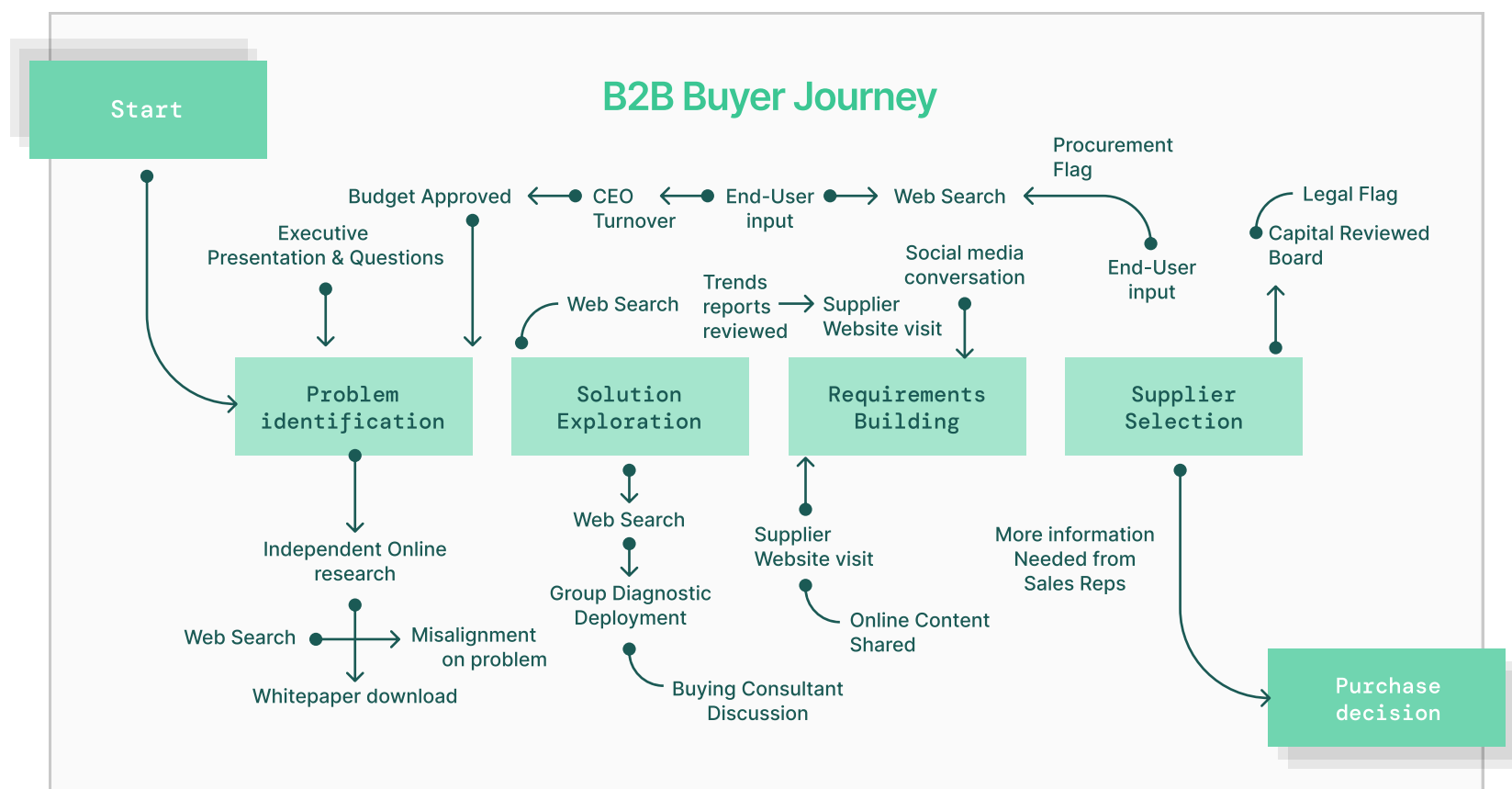
The structure of the Shelf is constantly changing, with more touchpoints for B2B and B2C companies to manage. From ecommerce websites and social media channels to third-party sellers and procurement platforms, there are more competitors online than ever before. For retailers, suppliers, and manufacturers, winning the Digital Shelf has never been harder.

How is the B2B Digital Shelf different from the B2C Digital Shelf?

While there are innate differences between the B2B Digital Shelf and the B2C Digital Shelf, the lines between both landscapes are becoming more blurred with each passing year.

In 2024, buyer expectations are now even closer aligned with those of the consumer. Buyers are seeking a smooth and seamless service and superior product experience from their suppliers. In addition, factors such as logistical complexity, sustainability and risk management are also on the minds of buyers. Suppliers are having to cater to these increased demands amidst a saturated marketplace.

B2C Buyer Journey



Source: Gartner

What's the forecast for the B2B Digital Shelf landscape in 2024

Much like the growth in consumer demands, the gap between buyer expectations and retailer realities is widening. Manufacturers and suppliers are noticing this trend through their B2B channels and eProcurement, and having to cater to the new breed of buyer.

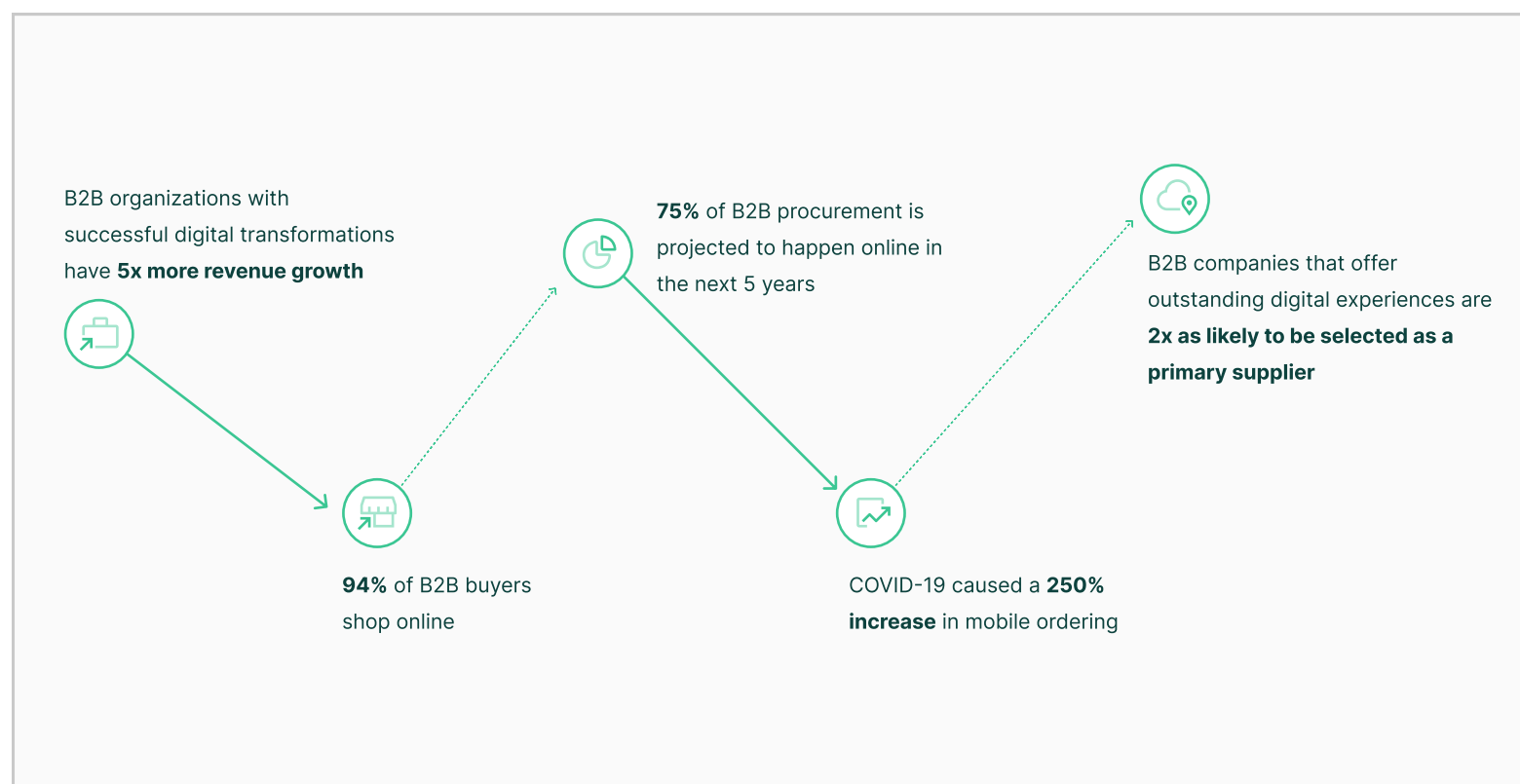
65% of the B2B workforce are now millennials or Gen Z, a demographic who much prefer to shop online (**94% of them shop online**). In fact, **75% of B2B procurement** is projected to happen online in the next five years. These buyers also prefer **self-serve** over direct sales communication, with **44% preferring** to complete a transaction with no sales rep interaction at all.

The structure of the Shelf is constantly changing, with more touchpoints for B2B and B2C companies to manage. From ecommerce websites and social media channels to third-party sellers and procurement platforms, there are more competitors online than ever before. For retailers, suppliers, and manufacturers, winning the Digital Shelf has never been harder.

Impact of Digital Transformation on B2B

Ultimately, buyers want to experience the same level of service from their suppliers that consumers receive when shopping from retailers or D2C brands.

Manufacturers and retailers are realizing they need to embrace this change and the opportunities it provides them to stand out on the Digital Shelf. In order to provide this superior product experience, companies must first identify the obstacles currently in their path.



Source: McKinsey

The Challenges Facing B2B Businesses in 2024

1 Agility

The growth of the Digital Shelf, and the emergence of new channels for businesses to launch and sell products, has created a significant burden for procurement, marketing and operations teams across the supply chain. With more resources required and an increased urgency to digitize processes, businesses are at risk of falling behind by failing to adopt new technologies in both procurement and commerce.

A Manufacturer Agility Assessment Report by The Manufacturer revealed that only **47% of manufacturers** viewed themselves as “extremely agile” or “highly agile” businesses. 67% highlighted production infrastructure as an area needing improvement, while 61% admitted supply chain management was a neglected process.

By ensuring operations remain agile, businesses in the B2B space can adjust to market changes and supply chain disruptions much quicker. Opportunities in the form of new commerce channels and international markets can also be taken advantage of, while product launches are exponentially smoother.

A lack of agility is both a cause for concern in the long run as well as posing a number of day-to-day operational obstacles to overcome. According to the study, 69% of manufacturers experience issues sourcing materials, while 42% find fulfilling orders to be a challenge.

2 Digitization

A reported lack of digitization in the manufacturing sector, and B2B commerce in general, can be damaging and create an inability to perform the following:

- Syndicate products to new channels
- Launch new campaigns
- Change data structure
- Deliver a positive product experience
- Respond quickly to tenders or customer demands
- Deliver the right sales tools to sales teams



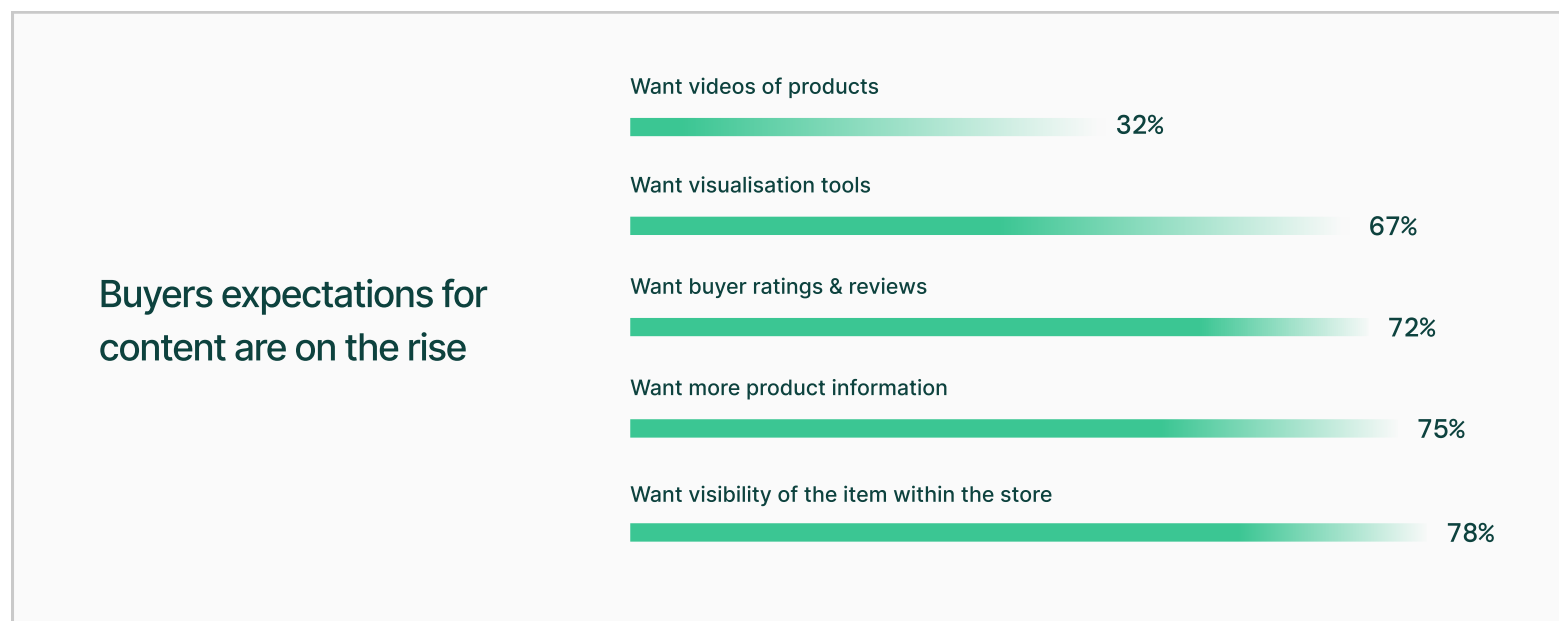
The problem with Excel

It's commonplace in the B2B world for retailers and suppliers to house product data within Excel catalogs. However, with multiple versions circulating within a business, and multiple users editing and updating them, there is a strong likelihood of outdated or incorrect product data being sent to market.

The need to house product catalogs within a centralized system is growing by the day, with procurement departments typically favoring suppliers who offer digitized catalogs. Through digitization buyers can be supplied with accurate, up-to-date information they can rely on.

3 Product information management

One of the main expectations that buyers now have of their suppliers is to receive a complete and accurate product profile before they make a purchase. A [PwC Global Consumer Insights Survey](#) revealed that 75% of buyers expressed a desire to view more product information when placing an order. The below chart details the other provisions that buyers are expecting throughout the buying journey.



Source: PwC Global Consumer Insights – Pulse Survey 2022 / Brightcove survey

Meeting these demands can be a challenge, however. Whether it's across selling channels or procurement platforms, B2B product information tends to be more technical. In addition to the complex details, regulatory information is also needed to meet the requirements of particular industries and countries of sale.

Some of the common product data pitfalls on the B2B Digital Shelf include:

- ✗ Providing incomplete or outdated product data
- ✗ Sources of information contradicting each other across a multi-channel approach
- ✗ Struggling to handle complexities and variations in pricing across different channels
- ✗ An inability to access accurate product data for stakeholders across the supply chain
- ✗ Inaccurate tracking and reporting of product performance
- ✗ Difficulty tracking inventory and managing stock due to data inconsistency
- ✗ Inability to meet customer demand without reliable information management processes

By failing to maintain the quality of product data, catalogs seen by potential buyers can be littered with gaps, errors, and inconsistencies, creating a negative product experience.

These three challenges currently represent the gap between where businesses within the B2B space are, and where they want to be. Only by adopting an agile approach, digitizing data, and streamlining their information processes can businesses mature to win the Digital Shelf.

Digital Maturity Audit | jmango³⁶⁰

If you're not sure where you sit on the digital maturity scale, you need to assess your company right now. Your profit and engagement will expand as you work towards the end goal. Your digital roadmap will be defined by where you currently sit within the progressive stages. To assess this, we look at four elements of your business to define your maturity, from beginner through to mature.

The four areas we look at are: Strategy; Technology, Product Experience and Product Data..

1 Strategy

Hanging on to the past is a huge blockage for any business. Current success is also no guarantee of future gains; reaching digital maturity and undergoing the necessary transformation is the only survival method in a volatile market.

How does your organization score on the following statements? Give points for every statement. Strongly agree (3), agree (2), disagree (1), strongly disagree (0). The more points, the more digitally mature you are within this category.

- 1 We stay informed on current trends and incorporate technology advancement into our business strategy, to ensure we are always improving our offering.
- 2 We meet regularly to ensure our roadmap plans for future trends, such as customer preference and report findings.
- 3 We seek advice from experts in our field who seek to innovate and diversify.
- 4 We regularly assess our current status, and acknowledge our strengths and weaknesses and the opportunities available to us.
- 5 We assess our competitors' activity and this informs our forward planning.

2 Technology

It's vital that digital-first strategy and culture are joined by agile solutions that adapt instantly to market pressures and opportunities. Your tech stack therefore must include solutions that remove any limits to your teams' ability to experiment and innovate.

These are the questions you should be asking your tech leaders. Give points for every question. Strongly agree (3), agree (2), disagree (1), strongly disagree (0). The more points, the more digitally mature you are within this category.

- 1 Have we reduced our reliance on legacy systems or do we have a plan to replace them?
- 2 Can we replace current tech with headless, so we can separate our front and back end for faster experimentation?
- 3 Do we have best-of-breed solutions or an all-in-one platform? Which is best for our business?
- 4 Does our roadmap take account of the future platforms we may wish to adopt?

3 Product experience

The B2B product experience should decrease buyer uncertainty. Unlike B2C, B2B transactions are group decisions and often made for more complex products with more regulatory requirements. If uncertain, the purchase will fail. To decrease uncertainty, make sure you provide the right information at every stage of the buying journey.

These are the activities that will improve the product experience your buyers receive. Give points for every activity. Strongly agree (3), agree (2), disagree (1), strongly disagree (0). The more points, the more digitally mature you are within this category.

- 1 We study and provide the information needed to make a purchase before a customer gets to the transaction stage. We ensure pages follow SEO best practice and run copy through a UX filter to ensure it is as clear as possible.
- 2 We provide customers with logistical information from a single source of truth system, including real-time availability and pricing changes.
- 3 We offer fast, intuitive, and minimal-click experiences for buyers - such as easy checkouts, reordering features, and cXML PunchOut capabilities.
- 4 We provide buyers with product data that meets industry and international compliance regulations.
- 5 We research and/or apply new channels and trends such as: automated order management, B2B online marketplaces, mobile app ordering, automated personalization based on product performance.

4 Product data

Finally, how you store and manage your product data can hugely impact the efficiency of your team and your ability to launch new products and expand to new markets and channels.

Ask these questions. Give points for every question. Strongly agree (3), agree (2), disagree (1), strongly disagree (0). The more points, the more digitally mature you are within this category.

- 1 Do you use one system for storing and syndicating product information?
- 2 Has the latest version of your product data been distributed across your selling channels?
- 3 Are different departments within your organization able to access the same version of your product data?
- 4 Is it a quick and smooth process to syndicate your product data to new channels?

Where do you stand?

Now that you’ve assessed your company for every category, let’s find out how digitally mature you are. It's an indication on which levels you’re performing well, and which levels still need focus.

	Pioneer	Practitioner	Advanced	Digital leader
Strategy	0 – 4	5 – 9	10 – 12	13 – 15
Technology	0 – 2	3 – 7	8 – 10	11 – 12
Product Experience	0 – 4	5 – 9	10 – 12	13 – 15
Product Data	0 – 2	3 – 7	8 – 10	11 – 12

Final thoughts

Digital transformation is an urgent requirement whatever industry or sector you serve. Post-pandemic, digital adoption has skyrocketed, even amongst those who resisted it before.

This is not just a tick-box exercise or even a measure to avoid being left behind. It’s a truly customer-centric evolution that puts buyers and their needs at the forefront of everything you do. The results - in terms of profit, conversion, and loyalty - speak for themselves.

Claim your complimentary digital maturity assessment and your custom plan for growth.
[Plan a strategy call with us today.](#)

The Role of Product Experience

For buyers and consumers alike, product experience is everything. A positive experience informs the buying decision for individuals and organizations alike. This promotes improved customer satisfaction, a lower return rate, and increased revenue from both new and returning buyers.

At the same time, a negative product experience can be equally as detrimental. Damaged brand reputation, more returns to process, and a loss to current and future earnings are just a few of the aftershocks of failing to cater to growing buyer expectations. And it happens a lot more than one might think.



According to the [2022 B2B Buyer Report](#), half of B2B e-commerce sites do not fully meet the expectations of business consumers. The main culprit? Poor online customer experience. 94% of business consumers are frustrated by functional elements when purchasing online. This includes features like ease of checkout and/or repeat orders, visibility of product stock and details, and more.”

What can derail a sale?

- ✗ Incorrect data can damage your reputation, creating more returns to process
- ✗ Gaps in product information represent a missed opportunity to improve product positioning on the Digital Shelf
- ✗ Inconsistent product marketing across commerce channels creates confusion
- ✗ Inconsistent logistics data increases the chance of delays or disruptions for your buyers

Ingredients of a positive product experience



Quality product data

- ✓ Optimized, up-to-date information
- ✓ Relevant to buyer needs
- ✓ Consistent across all channels
- ✓ Localized for the country of sale



Reliability

- ✓ Quality assurance through data
- ✓ Regulatory information to demonstrate compliance
- ✓ Transparent returns policy
- ✓ Warranty details



Seamless buying journey

- ✓ Efficient buying process
- ✓ Provision of pricing, logistics and delivery information
- ✓ No supply chain disruptions



Support/Service

- ✓ Knowledgeable customer service
- ✓ Aftercare information
- ✓ Support/communication throughout and after purchase

How Technology Can Optimize the B2B Product Experience



Today's B2B buyers demand a service informed by the faster and more varied experiences they enjoy in the consumer world; a more cohesive brand experience that also manages to maintain qualitative and consistent content between several retailers and platforms. Thankfully, the technologies that allow you to offer them just that already exist.

For B2B merchants who wish to lead rather than follow, technology is a tool that can be harnessed to align goals across channels and bridge the communication gap between merchants and clients. Businesses can achieve this by focusing on three areas – building an easily updatable online catalog, investing in a solid CMS and further personalizing their offerings.

1 Build a B2B Online Catalog

While catalogs might have been digitized, their functionality has remained largely unchanged. A good catalog is little more than a clear and easily digestible way to discover and order products; ecommerce catalogs are no different.

The main difference between paper and digital catalogs is the potential for distribution and scale, with the former not only more expensive to produce and ship but containing limited capacity for customer engagement. Digital catalogs are also powerful data farms that allow businesses to analyze and act on behaviors and buying habits. Most crucially, digital catalogs are infinitely and easily updatable.

A good B2B online ecommerce catalog gives you greater space to provide information about your products in a more accessible way while also dramatically simplifying the buying process in the following ways:

Inventory management

In the world of B2B, inventory management is key, particularly when buying and selling bulk. By integrating your inventory management API with your digital catalog, you can ensure stock levels are always accurate. Clients will know immediately if a product is available and they will appreciate this transparency. Best of all, most of these processes can be completely automated.

Connecting to your ERP

The enterprise resource planning software that you use to organize the day-to-day running of your business no longer needs to exist in a siloed state. Online catalogs can now be connected to all your various enterprise platforms – from accounting to sales. Connecting the front-end and back-end systems results in an ecosystem that keeps all data in sync holistically on everything from orders to revenue.

Searching and filtering

Online catalogs are infinitely easier to navigate than their physical counterparts. A good ecommerce platform will allow clients to search through thousands of products in seconds with tags and product descriptions used to narrow down searches and filter out unwanted items and make the most of user search intent. It will also allow businesses to categorize their products in a way that feels natural, so buyers don't need to guess where to look when searching for an item.

Responsive web design

With more users now using mobile devices to browse and shop, ecommerce solutions must function consistently across devices and operating systems. Catalogs must be built with mobile as a priority, with dedicated mobile apps now seen as the rule rather than the exception.

2 | Simplify Your Digital Shelf

Whereas B2B buyers once accepted that their experience with touchpoints across the Digital Shelf would be less smooth than their B2C counterparts, expectations have risen in recent years.

But how can the various technologies available to businesses work together to help the product content in their ecommerce platform maintain consistency across platforms? The answer lies in streamlining the process to achieve a smooth omnichannel experience.

Product information management (PIM)

There is bound to be a lot of data across your business relating to each product – from specific product information to shopping, marketing, and more. A PIM will centralize this information into one platform that can be edited in real-time before being published to the relevant sales channel.

This streamlined approach collects and connects all data and information, either using a standalone technology or by being layered on top of the business's existing technology.

Content management system (CMS)

A digital catalog is not built as a permanent solution; it's built to be never completed, but rather to grow and scale as product lines change and markets evolve. A content management system exists to create, manage, and optimize your customers' digital experience. More specifically, a CMS is a software application that allows users to collaborate in the creation, editing, and production of digital content.

Having a quality content management system (CMS) in place that is flexible, reliable, and offers an experience that is easy to use by both content managers and customers, makes it much easier to set up and maintain a digital catalog across multiple channels.

3 | Embrace Headless Ecommerce

Ultimately, technology is a tool that exists to help us achieve more with fewer resources, and B2B businesses looking to simplify their systems have a wealth of options to choose from in this regard. For many businesses, a more flexible, bespoke solution might be a more desirable option.

We would recommend exploring the headless architecture option. For those that wish to constantly improve their ecommerce offerings, a headless architecture offers the ability to inject ecommerce functionality into any customer touchpoint without causing major disruption.

The idea of a headless CMS is a separation of back-end and front-end services so that one can be changed while the other remains functional. This unlocks added flexibility, letting businesses create a single update in the back-end system of the CMS and have it deployed across dozens of front-ends at any one time, rather than having to go from platform to platform.

It's a process that allows businesses to save time and allows for easier platform migration. Most importantly, it allows businesses to continue personalizing and improving their ecommerce offerings with unlimited customization – all of this at a faster rate than more traditional, predefined ecommerce platforms. Headless ecommerce improves your time to value and lets businesses define the exact experiences they want for their buyers and sellers.

4 | The Power of Automation

Whichever system you choose to invest in, the goal is to make what was once a manual process as simple and heavily automated as possible. When used smartly, technology can help your product content management to:

 Remain consistent across all brand channels

 Manage scaling within a centralized system

 Allow for quick and easy product updates

 Save valuable time and resources



Get in touch with the BigCommerce team
to find out more about our B2B commerce
solutions.

Get in touch

Introduction to PXM Tools

Providing buyers with an exceptional product experience can be the difference between success and failure on the B2B Digital Shelf. But, the reality of improving and optimizing product experience management (PXM) is no small feat.

While those with digitized product catalogs are off to a good start, replacing outdated methods and implementing new processes can require a significant investment of time and resources, no matter the business.

There are several tools that companies can use to centralize data and automate their processes. This ultimately saves time and money and provides manufacturers with a more agile platform from which to launch new products or expand to new markets.

What a Product Information Management (PIM) platform offers

Product data enrichment

Provide more accurate and detailed information to buyers to better inform their purchasing decision. In addition, automation helps to streamline internal processes and free teams up for other tasks.

Multi-language product data

Compile, manage, and translate product data in a number of languages. This ensures catalogs are optimized across all international channels, localized product information is being provided to the relevant market and all the requirements of international selling channels are met.

SEO, improved visibility on B2B channels

With enriched data, brand visibility on the B2B Digital Shelf can be improved. Providing complete, optimized product content can boost SEO and increase the likelihood of being viewed in searches.

Reduce MarTech stack

Centralizing data with PIM creates a single database in which to upload and manage product catalogs. By providing the ability to syndicate products to all selling channels, the need to invest in multiple systems or software is eliminated.

“Sales Layer has a great flexibility for creating catalogs for different environments, so each customer can see the product features and analyze if they meet their needs. Now our order processing is more accurate and faster.”

Daniel Marín
IT Manager



“Our aim was improving the shopping experience, which had to be easier and more user-friendly. Given the sales growth experienced after incorporating Sales Layer, we were on the right track.”

María Selma
Ecommerce Manager

YSABEL MORA

What a Digital Asset Management (DAM) platform offers

Ensure brand consistency

DAM offers a centralized location for storing and managing all digital assets. This ensures that all internal teams, stakeholders and vendors are using the correct assets to promote the brand.

Drive more sales with asset provision

As seen in the PWC Consumer Study, **32% of buyers** expressed the desire to view product videos when browsing products, while **67% requested visualization tools**. A complete product profile would include a variety of multimedia assets, such as images, videos, visualization tools, 3D models, graphics, and accompanying documentation.

“We needed a more efficient software, like a PIM with DAM features capable of expanding and enriching product information with digital assets such as descriptions and images for our +70,000 products”

Juan Antonio Porto Alarcón
Director de Marketing en Salvador Escoda



Proven Strategies for Data Preparation



Your Digital Shelf will stand or fall on the quality of the product information you provide for the buyer. Even if you select a great PIM solution, there are some typical problems when failing to use effective methods of product information management. Get the following foundations right and you'll gain the real benefits of using a PIM to populate your Digital Shelf with efficiently-managed product data.

1 Data governance

When it comes to the quality and consistency of a large amount and variety of product information, it is a data governance framework that develops and implements quality standards and policies.

A governance framework is used for evaluating, managing, using, improving, maintaining, monitoring, and securing all data. It defines decision rights and assigns accountability for all product data-related processes, using agreed-upon models defining who can take what actions using what information, how and when, and using what methods.

The PIM system then has inbuilt intelligence to measure the quality of data against company standards, rather than relying on manual processes to check and confirm the accuracy of information.

2 Data quality

Assess, clean, and normalize bad product data. Data quality is what underpins a robust strategy for launching on the Digital Shelf.

It is critically important that your product data meets the following six dimensions to build customer confidence, improve sales and reduce returns: Completeness, Uniqueness, Timeliness, Validity, Accuracy & Consistency.

3 Product data taxonomy

Create strong taxonomies that make your search and browse capabilities more customer-centric and improve the accuracy and efficiency of your product data model.

Even if you invest in a PIM solution, it is still essential to make sure your product data is organized in a coherent and logical way for the customer. A taxonomy does that by organizing product categories into a hierarchy allowing customers to navigate with ease. It also improves efficiency and speed to market, as a taxonomy will allow you to inherit data.

Build a taxonomy to categorize your products without duplication. It's simpler for your customers to find the products they are looking for and means that you can map to your marketplace categories easily. It also allows you to inherit shared data from higher levels of the taxonomy, saving you time and effort in enrichment.

4 Product data enrichment

On the Digital Shelf, you are competing on customer experience, so your omnichannel brand must offer an outstanding experience. Turn your product content into rich, marketing-driven content that attracts customers and improves SEO.

Begin by organizing your range of product information – images, videos, and the range of digital assets which add value to your product pages and empower customers to convert. A PIM is specifically designed to ensure your enrichment process uses clean data on entry and continues to do throughout the product life cycle.

In terms of scaling your offer, a PIM is also rapid and highly flexible in incorporating data to be enriched for new product launches. Given the storage and processing power of a PIM, brands and manufacturers need to leverage them by deploying rich information. It can also be multilingual.

A PIM allows you to view the completeness and quality of product data, allowing you to target enrichment at priority products or attributes in line with customer feedback or sales priorities. Focusing on your core products first is a good way to see immediate benefits from PIM.

5 Tips for Manufacturers on the Digital Shelf

- 1 **Focus on your core products, and key attributes for your channels** – this allows you to target enrichment in the areas which will bring the most rewards.
- 2 **Set clear data quality standards** – considering channel and compliance requirements. This will mean you are able to measure data quality and focus on key areas to improve.
- 3 **Build a taxonomy to categorize your products without duplication.** It's simpler for your customers to find the products they are looking for and means that you can map to your marketplace categories easily. It also allows you to inherit shared data from higher levels of the taxonomy, saving you time and effort in enrichment.
- 4 **Take advantage of automated workflows within a PIM** – to simplify enrichment and automatically de-duplicate data whilst maintaining quality standards.
- 5 **Choose a PIM** with in-built syndication capabilities and connectors to accelerate your speed to market.



Learn more about the services **Start with Data** provide by getting in touch today

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Start your journey today

Transform your data into product intelligence with Sales Layer



Quickest PIM to implement.
Onboard in under 6 weeks



Centralize and manage
millions of product SKUs



Go-to-Market 4x faster
with PIM

Get in touch

Start your free trial



Sales Layer helps keeping product information synchronized with our ERP and ensures up-to-date listings for clients and channels, even in standardized formats."

Teresa Sanz
Software Analyst

FERMAX



We have a rating of 4.6/5 stars on G2.

