PREPARING FOR THE
B2B E-COMMERCE TIDAL WAVE:
The Difference Between Surging Profits Or Going Under

QAD

In 2021, B2B e-commerce and EDI sales grew to nearly $11 trillion. Why? Because more and more buyers want to do business online. And in just a few years, 80 percent of B2B sales interactions between suppliers and buyers will occur in digital channels, according to Gartner.

Sounds like a dream come true for wholesalers and distributors. Just sit back and ring up the surging sales, right?

Not necessarily.

The rising tide will not lift all boats. Along with growing online sales come growing buyer expectations. If you don't get your most important sales channel right, the massive wave of new B2B digital buyers may wash you out. Buyers — not only new customers but your current customers as well — will seek better buying experiences elsewhere in your crowded market.

 An e-commerce platform that is "good enough" today, will not be tomorrow. B2B online buyers increasingly demand a frictionless shopping experience, along with visibility into available inventory, delivery dates, and complete product details.

Let's consider the success of one B2B company, Bargain Wholesale was struggling with a basic e-commerce platform in place, but it was old, not mobile optimized and didn't offer the capabilities of more modern solutions and resulted in a low adoption rate from its customers. Recognizing they needed to implement a more robust platform that offered an easy online shopping experience to drive more customers to the site and ultimately boost sales, Bargain Wholesale experienced a 50% year-over-year increase in sales and 200% increase in organic traffic.

B2B companies with digital commerce in place today are feeling the pressure to upgrade their e-commerce capabilities even further, but they're struggling with exactly where to start, what features are truly essential to future-proof their business and how to integrate with their existing technology.

By answering the following questions, wholesale distributors can fully assess their current capabilities and make informed decisions as they transition to a modern e-commerce platform that can ride the coming B2B sales surge.

DEFINE YOUR GOALS

1

Have you clearly defined your business goals and built a strategy around meeting them in the next one, five and 10 years?

Before upgrading your current platform to meet modern e-commerce expectations, it's critical to have a clear understanding of how you want your business to move forward.

What are your goals for the next 12 months? How will those goals help you grow to where you want to be in five years and 10 years? Work with departments throughout your organization to understand their expectations and listen to your customers. Your buyers are the lifeblood of your business, so it's important your business goals take into account their expectations.

Focusing on the direction of your business and what your customers expect from you will help you decide how to plan for the next one, five and 10 years.

EXCEED YOUR CUSTOMERS' EXPECTATIONS

2

How can your current platform be improved to meet or exceed the ever-growing expectations and demands of today's B2B buyers?

Today's customers have changed. For years, B2B buyers have consistently expected more from the companies they buy from. But when COVID-19 hit, those expectations became demands. If you don't offer the online shopping capabilities B2B buyers expect today, they will quickly move on to your competitor.

B2B buyers today aren't as loyal as they were in years past. At any point in their journey, a point of friction can send them running to the next seller that offers that product. You need to make sure your customers are getting a frictionless experience from browse to post-purchase.

Common points of friction — and cart abandonment — include:

- **Poor site performance — an increase from 1 to 3 seconds in site loads time can slash your conversion rate by half**

- **Lack of inventory visibility**

- **Minimal or poor product data**

- **Unclear delivery information, including exact delivery date and shipping costs**

- **Inaccurate search results — if you offer search as well as browser functionality the results need to accurate**

- **Multi-page checkout — making users click through several pages to review their purchase, enter their payment and delivery details can be annoying and/or confusing**

GAIN INSIGHTS
FROM CUSTOMER DATA

3

Can your platform collect customer data and analyze it, so you can glean insights that drive business objectives and support growth?

Personalization has been the buzzword in B2C ecommerce for years. That expectation has now crossed over into the B2B world. But to personalize shopping for your B2B customers, you need to know them and their business well.

Data is critical in better understanding your customers. B2B platforms today need tools that can collect, organize and analyze information about all of your customers — not just their name and address, but also their browsing history, past purchases and returns, and frequently bought items.

GROW AND
EXPAND YOUR BUSINESS

4

Do your platform's current capabilities allow for growth into other markets, industries or countries?

The economy today is becoming more global, as digital connectivity makes it easier. Now, more and more companies are expanding internationally, as well as into other markets and industries.

This level of expansion can be the key to growth, but it's critical your e-commerce site is up to the task. A site that caters to international buyers needs to be able to deliver a consistent service in the language and currency native to that specific country. To expand into other industries and markets, the site needs to be able to handle the unique needs of those industries and markets.

IMPLEMENT AND INTEGRATE EASILY

5

Will the new capabilities you're implementing easily and seamlessly integrate with your existing e-commerce platform?

Regardless of the upgrades or new capabilities you plan to implement as part of your digital transformation strategy, it's important to understand how easily they will work with your existing technology.

If two disparate solutions don't integrate easily, it can be difficult and costly to fix. Work closely with your new solutions providers to understand how well the solutions you've chosen will work together and integrate into your existing tech stack. Will it be seamless and quick, or will you need some additional development support to bring everything together?

ENSURE YOUR
RETURN ON INVESTMENT

6

Is the investment of time, money and resources required to transition to a stronger, more modern e-commerce platform aligned with your budget?

Technology can be expensive. But so can losing the lion's share of your customers to competitors who offer modern e-commerce capabilities to their B2B buyers. The true cost of doing nothing could mean losing business to your competition – as new and current customers seek better online buying experiences elsewhere in your crowded market.

When going through this exercise and exploring new platform providers and technology options, it's not only important to keep your budget in mind, but also to consider your return on investment. Refrain from defaulting to the cheapest option because it fits easily into your budget, or the most expensive one because you think it will guarantee success. The right solution is the one that drives your business goals forward and integrates well into your existing tech stack. An advanced, adaptive solution that can be implemented quickly with out-of-the-box capabilities will speed up time to value.

PARTNER FOR SUCCESS

7

Does your new third-party technology provider(s) offer the full technical and industry support you need to operate efficiently and provide smooth customer experiences?

It can be nearly impossible for many B2B companies to implement, maintain and upgrade their own e-commerce systems once they choose and launch new technology. Find a solutions provider that not only offers the right B2B e-commerce features for your business, but also handles the integration and ongoing support.

MODERN DIGITAL COMMERCE FEATURES CHECKLIST

Some features B2B companies may want to consider implementing now to stay competitive in today's B2B ecommerce landscape include:

- ☑ **Built-in punchout catalog integration**

- ☑ **Business rules builder for workflow automation and tasks management**

- ☑ **Rich API library**

- ☑ **Advanced built-in search (filtering and faceted)**

- ☑ **No-code integration engines**

- ☑ **Advanced product configurator for selling complex products that require customization**

- ☑ **Built-in sales and marketing automation**

- ☑ **Multi-store technology**

- ☑ **Scalability and security compliance**

About QAD Digital Commerce

QAD Digital Commerce is a leading ecommerce platform for small- and medium-sized businesses. We provide a complete range of website set-up, custom programming, support and online marketing services. QAD Digital Commerce is a software-as-a-service (SaaS) platform containing more than 100 features to maximize sales and reduce costs for B2B companies and retailers.

For more details **Click here**