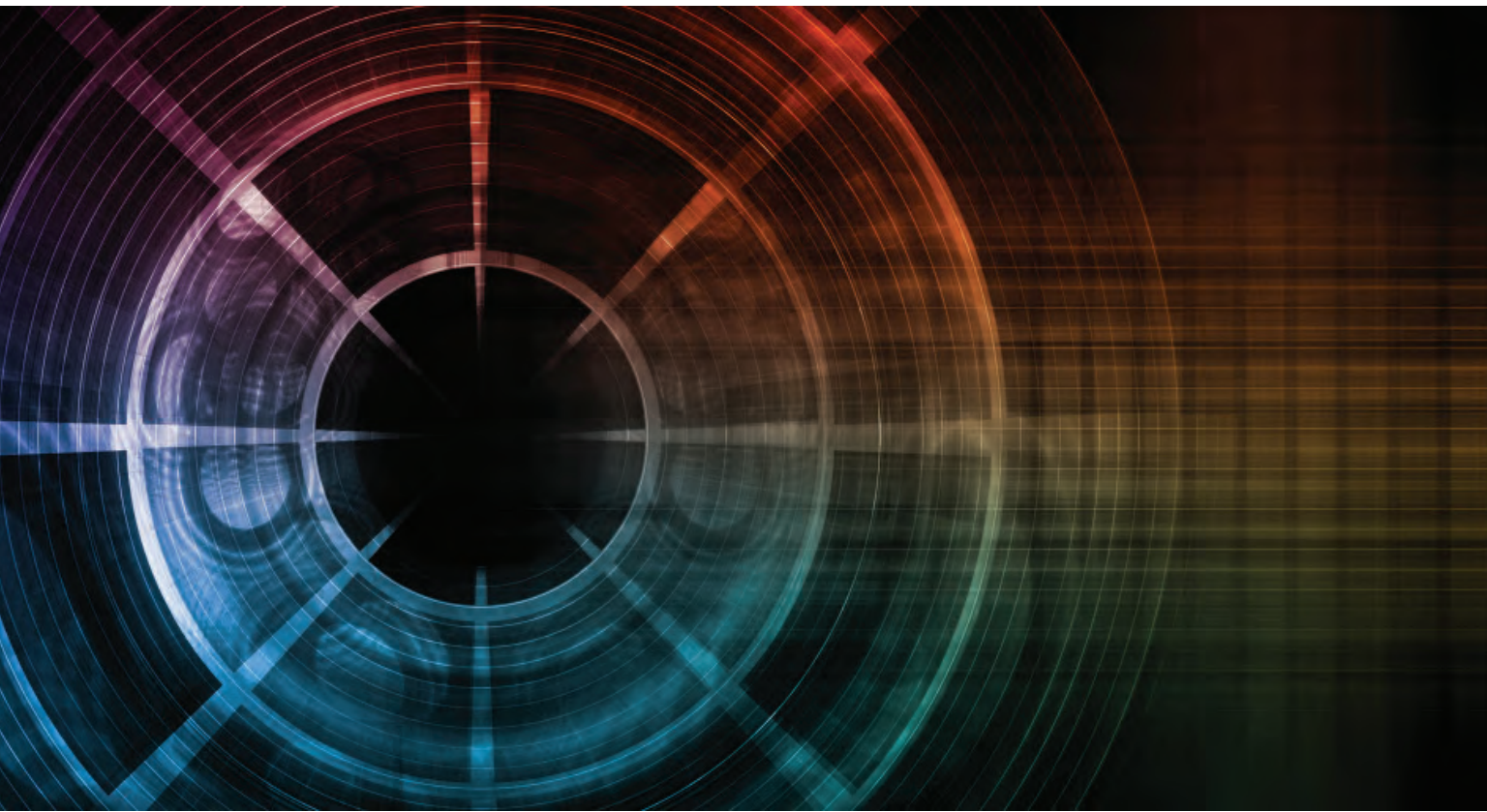


CHOOSING THE RIGHT ECOMMERCE PLATFORM

From new versions of 'monoliths' to 'headless' ecommerce platforms, B2B practitioners explore their options

B2BNEXT
2019

PREVIEW: Conference speakers discuss the B2B ecommerce landscape



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OVERVIEW

DRIVING TOWARD A NEW ECOMMERCE PLATFORM

Steeped in experience from both the business and technology side of things, Jeff McRitchie, co-founder and vice president of ecommerce and marketing at MyBinding.com, explored multiple options when searching for the right ecommerce platform for his growing business of selling office products.

He faced a tough decision for a company driving strong growth through ecommerce: Whether to upgrade the Magento version 1 ecommerce platform his company's website had launched in 2014 to Magento Commerce version 2, or opt for a platform from a different vendor.

Although MyBinding considered Magento a suitable platform for its business customers, it realized it would not be an easy migration. "It wasn't really just an upgrade—it would be like redoing our website from scratch," McRitchie says. "There were tools to migrate data from the existing platform, but all of the software programming—all five years of our programming would have to be redone."

MyBinding explored several types of platforms



'It wasn't really just an upgrade—it would be like redoing our website from scratch.'

Jeff McRitchie, co-founder and vice president of ecommerce and marketing, MyBinding.com

from multiple vendors—including Shopify and BigCommerce for less costly options, Oracle NetSuite for its built-in integration with its back-end enterprise resource planning system, and Oro Inc. for its strong integration with the Oro CRM technology. In each case, McRitchie and his team considered which platform brought the best mix of functionality for customers, the most ease of deployment and speed of time to market, offered the best return on investment, and was the most suitable overall to satisfy the growth goals he and his senior executive colleagues had set.

More options than ever before

McRitchie and his team decided to migrate to Magento 2 Enterprise edition, which backed much of the B2B functionality MyBinding needed, even though they realized it wouldn't be easy. MyBinding's familiarity with Magento offered several advantages: it knew the basics of how to map Magento's data structure to MyBinding's Acumatica ERP software and its Acumatica and Salesforce.com CRM systems, and it figured that Magento, now part of Adobe Inc., a leader in digital content systems, offered a strong roadmap of planned investments in the Magento technology platform to complement Magento's broad-based network of web development partners, McRitchie says. It took about six months to launch the Magento 2 site, he adds.

MyBinding's process of considering its options points to the state of the ecommerce technology market. Today there are more options for ecommerce platforms than ever before, with far more flexibility in how websites can be developed and customized, industry experts

say. Companies planning to deploy a new B2B ecommerce site can now choose among vendors offering a wide variety of price, flexibility for customization, built-in features or software kits for providing B2B-specific commerce, and scalability in transaction volume.

“Rather than replace a giant monolith vendor with another monolith vendor,” many ecommerce practitioners are going with, or at least considering a more flexible approach with open-source or API-driven platforms that let them replace ecommerce functionality bit by bit, says Joe Cicman, senior analyst for digital transformation at Forrester Research Inc.

Going ‘headless’ for B2B ecommerce

For B2B companies, that means they can use APIs and microservices to highly customize their websites with the particular features their customers want, such as offering pricing structures that differ by multiple buying groups within a large corporate customer, or providing sales reps the ability to set special one-off prices that their best customers can access through a log-in portal—features that McRitchie’s team has built on the Magento platform at MyBinding.com.

Industry analysts group ecommerce technology vendors into such categories as B2B-focused with out-of-the-box B2B features, integrated enterprise suites for large companies, global ecommerce operations, and flexible/modular for highly customized websites. Although virtually all vendors say they use APIs—which are sets of software instructions to exchange data between disparate applications—to extend the functionality of their base platforms, some are more flexible than others.

The flexible/modular platforms—known as “headless commerce” because they have no customer-facing presentation system built onto the ecommerce transaction engine—are

A SAMPLING OF THE B2B ECOMMERCE SOFTWARE MARKET

Vendors	Site
Apttus	Apttus.com
BigCommerce	BigCommerce.com
commercetools	commercetools.com
Digital River	DigitalRiver.com
Elastic Path	ElasticPath.com
Epicor Commerce Connect	Epicor.com
Episerver	Episerver.com
Evolution Software	EvolutionX.io
Four51	Four51.com
GenAlpha Technologies	GenAlpha.com
GoECart	Goecart.com
Handshake	Handshake.com
Infor	Infor.com
Insite Software	Insitesoft.com
Intershop	Intershop.com
Kibo	go.Kibocommerce.com
Magento	Magento.com
Nexternal	Nexternal.com
NuOrder	NuOrder.com
Oracle NetSuite	NetSuite.com
OroCommerce	OroInc.com
Pulse Commerce	Pulse-commerce.com
Salesforce Commerce Cloud	Salesforce.com/products
Salsify	Salsify.com
Sana Commerce	Sana-Commerce.com
SAP Commerce Cloud (includes SAP Hybris)	sap.com/products/crm/e-commerce-platforms.html
Shopify	Shopify.com
Sitecore	Sitecore.com
Skava Commerce	Skava.com
Unilog	Unilogcorp.com
WebJaguar	WebJaguar.com
Znode	Znode.com

Source: B2BecNEWS

considered the most flexible because they use APIs to connect the transaction platform with virtually any database or customer-facing presentation system. Rather than using a more traditional ecommerce transaction platform to sell through a single desktop or mobile website, headless advocates say they use the API-driven platforms to reach customers through any number of presentation layers, including internet search ads, mobile apps or personalized customer web portals.

Gartner Inc. in a report earlier this year cited ecommerce technology vendors Skava, Elastic Path and CommerceTools as offering the most options through their API-based architecture for customizing ecommerce sites. But there are others that practitioners find effective as flexible platforms. “Their strength is you can really do some customized implementations, create unique experiences, but any time you’re talking about things that are very modular there can be more development work to make it happen,” says Jason Daigler, senior director and analyst covering digital commerce at Gartner. “It’s not out-of-the-box, but that’s part of the game when using API-based platforms.”

At MyBinding, it wasn’t worth the extra software development work to go with a headless platform to build its B2B functionality. “Magento did most of the stuff in ecommerce we wanted,” McRitchie says, adding: “We still had to build integrations with our ERP and CRM systems—and that’s where it can get really complex for B2B sellers. We have to manage many pieces of the account management puzzle—how do we give sales reps credit for ecommerce sales and record that? For parent/child accounts, we can sell to a corporation, but each of its offices can log into our ecommerce site separately—that all has to be updated accurately in our ERP for billing.”



‘Any time you’re talking about things that are very modular there can be more development work to make it happen.’

Jason Daigler, senior director and analyst covering digital commerce, Gartner Inc.

So while MyBinding faced development work with Magento or a headless platform, it decided to stay with Magento for its built-in feature set and for MyBinding’s familiarity with how it integrates with its ERP and CRM systems.

Going to school with APIs

But experiences with different types of platforms can vary with each ecommerce practitioner’s needs. Apparel company Global Schoolwear/School Uniforms by Tommy Hilfiger, designs, manufactures and sells customized uniforms through an arrangement with hundreds of schools for which it develops personalized online product catalogs accessed through Global Schoolwear’s ecommerce platform. To more easily and quickly set up individual schools on its ecommerce platform, Global Schoolwear replaced its legacy ecommerce platform earlier this year with a Znode “headless” commerce platform from Amla Commerce.

It took Global Schoolwear about five months to set up the Znode platform for a “full, complex launch”—a process that enabled the manufacturer to get the new ecommerce platform active in time for the start of the busy season for ordering school uniforms, says Matt Kohls, chief operating officer of Global Schoolwear. “We had no choice but to have our site up and running before peak season started on June 1,” he says.



To more easily and quickly set up individual schools on its ecommerce platform, Global Schoolwear replaced its legacy ecommerce platform earlier this year with a Znode “headless” commerce platform from Amla Commerce.

Under its old website platform, it took Global Schoolwear about a month working with a third-party development team to get a new school and its custom product line set up on a dedicated ecommerce portal. “We are now doing this in approximately three days without a third-party development team,” Kohls says.

The Znode platform has also freed up Global Schoolwear to build in-house custom product displays in its content management system without having to rely on a third-party development team. In addition, Kohls says he figures the API-based ecommerce platform has saved his company time and money as Global Schoolwear has customized the platform to work with customers and to integrate it via APIs with its warehouse management system and other software applications.

HCL takes the hybrid approach

Other ecommerce practitioners, such as Gerber Technology, opt for ecommerce technology designed especially for manufacturers or distributors (see Gerber story, page 13). And others, notably large organizations with far-flung

markets and substantial ecommerce technology spending budgets, prefer to deploy integrated software suites that integrate a customer-facing ecommerce with back-end ERP software, digital marketing applications and other systems (See story on GE Health Care, page 17.)

That latter platform type is what some would call a monolith, and one of the longest running until recently was IBM Corp.’s WebSphere Commerce platform. Although considered a platform capable of handling the complex websites in high transaction volumes, IBM’s platform was also known for complicated legacy software code that was difficult and expensive to customize and upgrade.

IBM sold its commerce platform and other assets, including digital marketing products, for \$1.8 billion in July 2019, to India-based HCL Technologies. HCL has rebranded its new ecommerce software platform as HCL Commerce, and it has turned the page from IBM’s legacy software code to build a more open and flexible API and microservices-based platform, says Peter Wharton, director

of marketing for HCL Software, the HCL Technologies division that sells and services HCL Commerce.

HCL Software, based in Toronto, is rebuilding HCL Commerce as a platform that can serve highly complex ecommerce sites, including those that may handle both B2B and business-to-consumer transactions, Wharton says.

A new ecommerce portal for Cardinal Health

Cardinal Health, a distributor of medical and pharmaceutical supplies to thousands of hospitals, pharmacies and physician's offices, recently migrated close to 40,000 digital customers to its new Cardinal Health Market ecommerce portal, which runs on the HCL Commerce platform. It replaces a pair of older and separate B2B ecommerce log-in portals operating on outdated legacy systems, says Matt Wingham, Cardinal Health's director of ecommerce, medical products and services.

Although the company doesn't break out B2B ecommerce sales, Cardinal Health runs a sprawling distribution business that generates annual sales of \$137.0 billion annually and operates in 45 countries. A new ecommerce platform was needed in part to keep up with key competitors such as McKesson Corp., Medline Industries Inc. and others, Wingham says.

Customers also wanted easier ways to research and find products, Wingham says. "We had to

make sure we nailed the customer experience," he says.

For two years, Cardinal Health spent considerable time and resources rebuilding its website taxonomy, which supports 300,000 products, the company says. In addition to a new search engine using updated Solr technology, the new platform also uses technology from Adobe Inc. for the customer-facing side, including personalization and analytics; and, for systems integration, a combination of internal technology staff and consulting firms SapientRazorfish and Accenture. Solr is an open-source search platform that is written in Java.

Family-owned and finally online

Quality Mill Supply Co. Inc., a 75-year-old family-owned distributor of products ranging from 99-cent fasteners to metal-cutting lathe machines priced in the tens of thousands of dollars, launched its first ecommerce transaction site two years ago on the CIMM2 platform from Unilog Content Solutions.

Quality Mill Supply, based in the southern Indiana town of Franklin, primarily serves a regional market through its five Indiana branch locations.

But with the April 2017 launch of its ecommerce site at QualityMill.com, the distributor has been opening new doors to a broader market, says Wilford Gosser, manager of ecommerce and marketing. Online sales still account for less than 1% of total sales, but the new site is engaging customers like Quality Mill's prior website never could, Gosser says.

Unilog has a close relationship with Affiliated Distributors Inc., or AD, an association of independent distributors including Quality Mill Supply. Quality Mill gets product data from AD to populate its website with several hundred thousand SKUs, and by deploying CIMM2, it



'We had to make sure we nailed the customer experience.'

Matt Wingham, director of ecommerce, medical products and services, Cardinal Health



An executive conversation with
Michael Han, chief technology officer,
Liferay Inc.



How to help B2B companies meet customer expectations

For many manufacturers and distributors, staying competitive means adopting ecommerce strategies that meet the expectations of their diverse customer bases. To discuss how a digital experience platform may be a key component in that effort, B2BecNews sat down with Michael Han, chief technology officer at Liferay Inc., a digital experience platform provider.

Q: What current ecommerce trends should B2B companies have on their radars?

Han: Because of their shopping experiences as customers in the B2C world, B2B buyers now expect improved experiences and efficiency when making purchases for their business. They want to be able to go onto manufacturers or distributors ecommerce sites, log into their account and see their past purchases. They want to be able to schedule their orders to automatically send when they need them. And it's frustrating when they can't do that.

Q: How are B2B companies responding to this shift in customer expectations?

Han: B2B companies are looking for ways to improve the customer experience and differentiate themselves from competitors. For a lot of manufacturers, the goods that they manufacture are also manufactured by

other companies, and it's hard to differentiate widget A from widget B, so they have to win on something other than price to stay competitive. Many of them are starting to examine their business and their products to provide value-added services beyond the goods themselves.

For example, some manufacturers are starting to implement strategies and technologies to understand how their customers are consuming their goods and then passing that information back to their customer as a value-add. If that manufacturer or distributor has a customer who has been buying from them for years, they can begin to detect purchase patterns. With that data, the manufacturer can begin forecasting for its customer, who may not have these capabilities, and ultimately help them fine-tune their business.

Q: What are the biggest challenges manufacturers and distributors currently face with regard to their digital commerce?

Han: Technical knowledge and understanding what is possible. B2B companies' main focus is getting their own products out in the market, which is not following best practices in ecommerce. So they often end up looking for traditional ecommerce solutions that simply sell their products. But they should really be rethinking their digital presence beyond the initial sale of their products and focus on the post-purchase experience.

How to help B2B companies meet customer expectations *(continued)*

Take a company that sells coffee makers, for example. High-quality coffee makers last a long time, so those customers who operate cafes won't be returning anytime soon to buy another one. But they could become loyal customers if the manufacturer offers them something they can replenish, such as coffee, coffee filters and replacement parts. It's important to be able to take that digital experience and expand on the entire customer relationship and journey.

Q: What attributes go into a robust digital experience platform for B2B companies?

Han: It's an overused term, but the reality is it comes down to flexibility. A platform needs to actually handle all types of customers a B2B company might have, as well as all stages of the customer journey. B2B companies are no longer only selling through their own distributors. Many have adopted a hybrid model, where they also sell to both online and brick-and-mortar retail stores, as well as directly to consumers. They need to be able to service those uniquely different types of customers and their different customer journeys. And they need to be able to do that on a single platform that can offer both the B2B and B2C experiences.

For example, Liferay's digital experience platform allows B2B companies to create a customer portal that has the functionalities of a digital marketing solution with content management and analytics already built in. A B2B company can have a public-facing ecommerce site and plug into it the capabilities it needs, such as a shopping cart, inventory management, product and price information, and tax-compliance capabilities. In

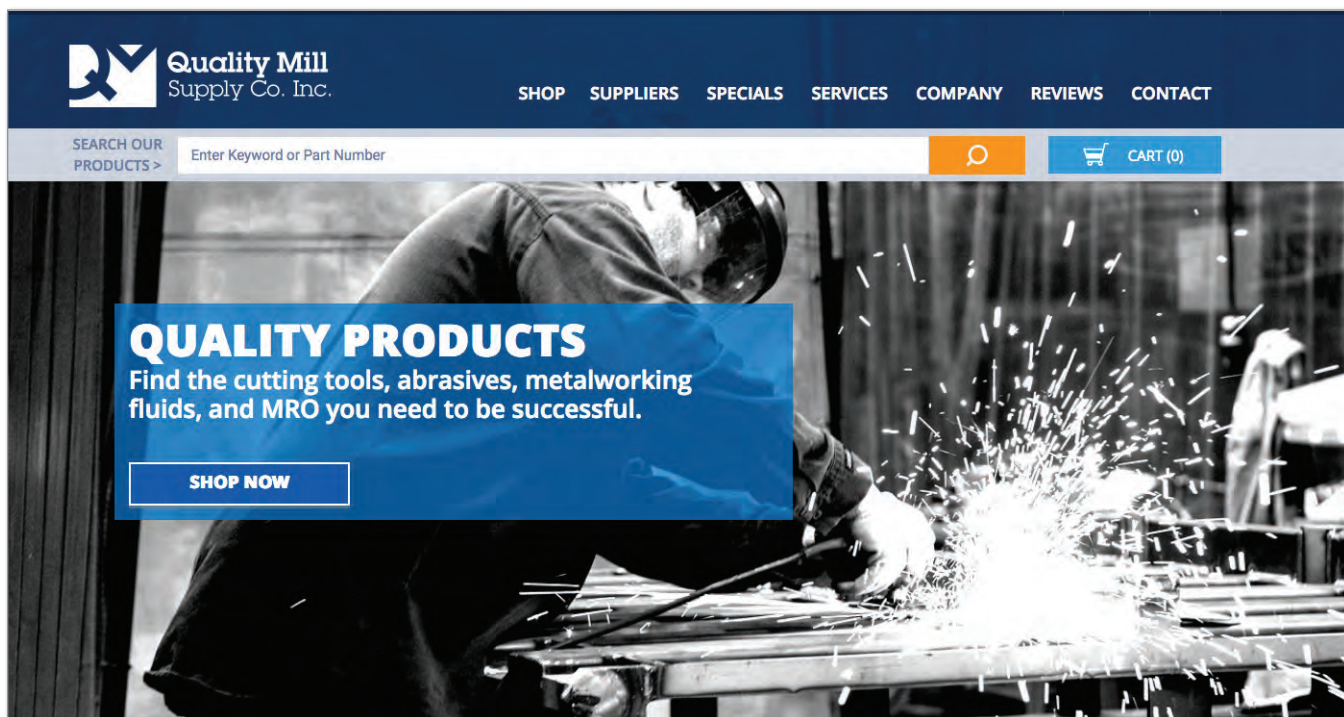
addition to customer portal, Liferay also offers a dealer portal, which has the same capabilities as the customer portal but allows the dealer to self-manage.

Q: Would you give an example of a company that recently had success using a digital experience platform?

Han: Airbus is one good example. The airplane manufacturer wanted to unite its 100,000 users in a single IT services portal to simplify the management and follow-up of incidents. It wanted them to be less dependent on the company's service desk for incident management. After implementing Liferay's digital experience platform, Airbus saw an overall increase in productivity, a 30% decrease in the number of incidents that went to the service desk and a 30% increase in the number of incidents managed through the portal.

Another example is Volkswagen Group France, the French subsidiary of one of the world's largest car manufacturers. It needed to simplify the creation of multiple sites while supporting a large number of users. So the company partnered with Liferay to implement our digital experience platform to better serve both its employees and its network of dealerships and repairers. Since converting to the new platform, Volkswagen has been able to support its five brands on a single portal, ultimately meeting the demands of its 20,000 users. ●





With a built-in product information management system, Quality Mill's new ecommerce platform provides online access to more than 600,000 products available for online order.

uses the same integrated product information management and ecommerce technology that works for other AD members.

With a built-in product information management system, the new ecommerce platform now provides online access to more than 600,000 products available for online order. That has helped Quality Mill Supply broadly expand its exposure through internet search and produce a significant uptick in online customer activity over the past year.

Sessions multiplying

The new ecommerce site produces product image content that “makes us appear on standard Google searches,” Gosser says, adding: “Before we launched this site, we had around 500 sessions per month in Google analytics; in July alone this year we had over 12,000 sessions. That alone provides value to us.”

Moreover, “we’ve seen a definite correlation between sales growth and how active people are on our website,” he says.

The CIMM2 platform also integrates with the distributor’s Epicor Prophet 21 ERP software for updating such information as customer order activity and inventory records.

With the new ecommerce site, which prominently lists all of the distributor’s services—including calibrating the accuracy of tools sold to customers, and an online portal that shows where customers have been able to save on purchasing costs—Quality Mill Supply is looking toward evolving as an online B2B seller with a much broader base of customers for all of its products and services, Gosser says.

And like other ecommerce practitioners, it can be sure the ecommerce technology market will also continue evolving with new options for interacting with online B2B customers. ●

MANUFACTURER CASE STUDY / Gerber Technology

CLICKING A 3D IMAGE TO ORDER INDUSTRIAL PARTS

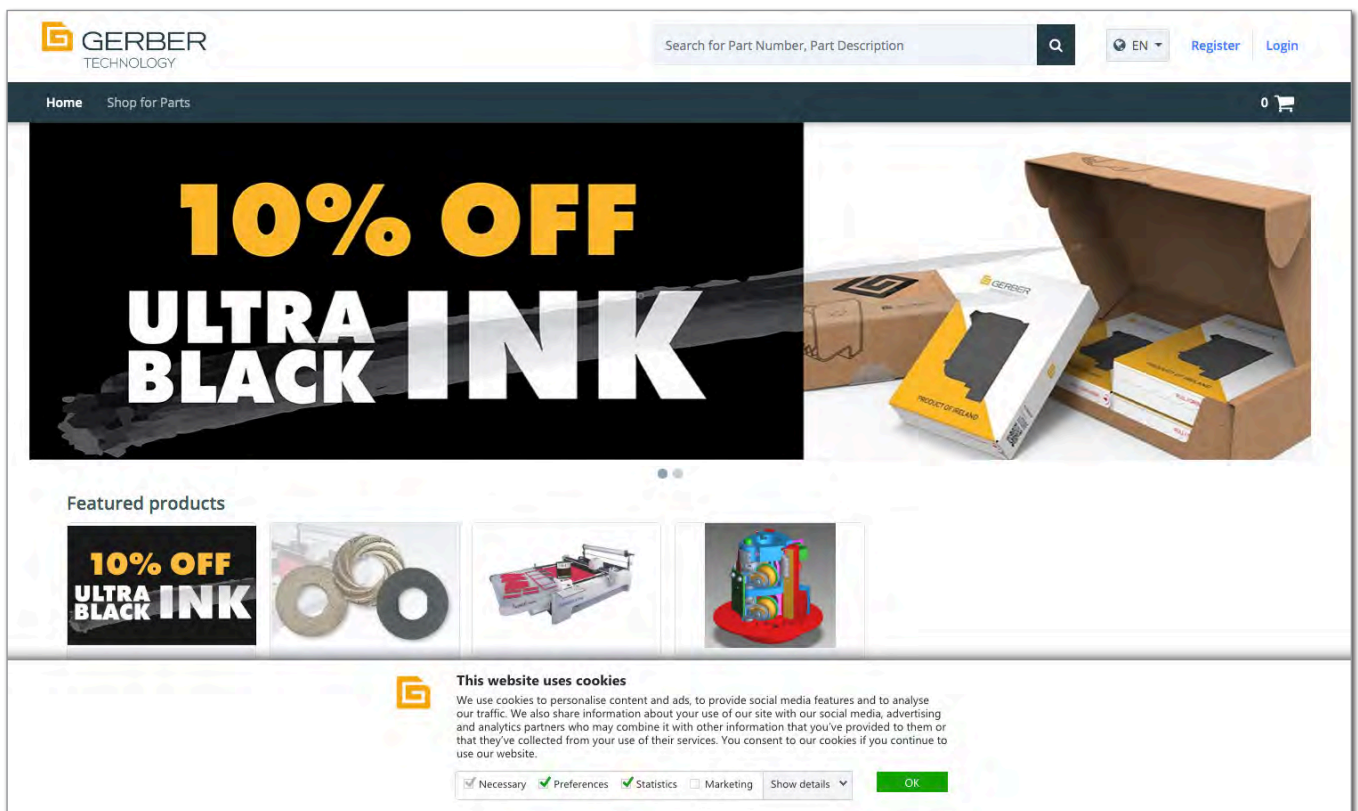
Although ecommerce has steadily transformed B2B sales for more than a decade by making purchasing more convenient, the competitive pressure on suppliers is greater than ever to help buyers with better site search and navigation, personalized product recommendations and visibility into their order status.

That's why Gerber Technology, a designer and manufacturer of integrated hardware equipment and software and systems, such as for cutting and shaping apparel and other flexible materials, has relaunched its Gerber eStore, at estore.gerbertechnology.com, with more ways for a customers to find and purchase products.

Gerber, whose equipment is used by

manufacturers in industries including apparel, automotive and aerospace, provides software and automation solutions designed to improve the manufacturing and design processes. Companies also use its products to manage and connect their supply chains from product development and production to retail and the end-customer.

"Efficient product and part identification is becoming a bigger focus for buyers and we sought a website that would make it easier for buyers to accomplish that," says Brandy Moore, vice president, global service and aftermarket. "Our new eStore ecommerce platform is just one part of Gerber's focus on empowering our customers to achieve operational excellence."



Clicking 3D models

The website, built on PartSpot ecommerce technology from GenAlpha Technologies, includes a new user interface, advanced functionality and features including clickable drawings and 3D models, commonly paired parts, one-click re-ordering, bulk uploads, and tracking of orders and invoices.

The inclusion of clickable drawings and 3D models streamlines part identification, selection and purchasing by enabling a user to identify a part in a drawing, then click to add the featured product to a shopping cart. If a part added to a buyer's shopping cart is frequently paired with another part, the website will automatically suggest the companion part for purchase. In addition, online customers can upload part numbers in bulk to cut back on having to key in product identifiers.

The eStore allows buyers to access parts and supplies for all markets served by Gerber Technology: aerospace, fashion and apparel, furniture, packaging, transportation, sign and graphics, technical textile and wind management. The previous version of the eStore, which launched in 2016, did not provide access to parts and supplies for all market categories. The company has 78,000 customers in 134 countries.

The Gerber eStore is an online sales channel separate from the company's main website at www.gerbertechnology.com, which is an information site and does accept online orders. About 85% of orders placed by distributors come through the eStore, Moore says.



'As we add functionality to the eStore, the focus will be on providing value to our customers.'

Brandy Moore, vice president, global service and aftermarket, Gerber Technology

Going forward, Gerber Technology plans to add training and service contract offerings to the eStore. Currently, Gerber's customers can only purchase those services through a Gerber sales representative. Plans are also in the works to expand the site's parts library.

"As we add functionality to the eStore, the focus will be on providing value and benefits to our customers," Moore says.

Part of Gerber's marketing strategy for the new website includes directing customers to the site to take advantage of exclusive "eSTORE only" promotional offerings.

Tolland, Connecticut-based Gerber develops and manufactures its products at multiple locations in the United States and Canada and has additional manufacturing capabilities in China. Gerber is owned by American Industrial Partners, a New York-based global private equity firm specializing in technology companies, with more than \$3.0 billion assets under management. ●

MANUFACTURER CASE STUDY / GE Healthcare

WHY GE HEALTHCARE IS SHAPING UP ITS B2B ECOMMERCE SITE

GE Healthcare, the \$19 billion healthcare arm of General Electric Co., is pushing further into B2B ecommerce on a digital commerce platform that's in far better shape than its prior one.

Four years ago GE Healthcare, a manufacturer and distributor of equipment used in medical imaging and monitoring, bio-manufacturing, and cell and gene therapy technologies, launched GE Healthcare Service Shop as a log-in portal for hospitals and others to order spare and replacement parts.

Now the company has upgraded its GE Healthcare Service Shop with more product inventory and such website features as advanced site search and faster online parts

reordering. Going forward, GE Healthcare Services Shop also will begin to carry medical equipment parts from other companies. The updates are all part of an ongoing effort to bring more ecommerce technology into healthcare purchasing by hospitals and health systems and to make the buying experience more "Amazon-like," says Tim Erickson, GE Healthcare's general manager of global asset returns and ecommerce.

Ramping up for more online buying

"We're just scaling up," he says. GE Healthcare is adding ecommerce tools and programs now because, as soon as 2022, hospitals in North America will be purchasing as much as 14.5% of all services, parts and devices online, the company says.

The screenshot shows the GE Healthcare Service Shop website. At the top left is the GE logo and the text "GE Healthcare Service Shop". To the right are links for "About Us" and "Contact Us". Below this is a search bar with the placeholder text "Search by Part #, System ID, Serial #, Equipment or Keyword" and a magnifying glass icon. Below the search bar is a navigation bar with "Shop" and "Repair" links, and "Sign In" and "Register" buttons. The main content area features a large blue banner for "Vaporizer repair and maintenance" with the text "Extend asset life and reduce cost of ownership when you rely on GE Healthcare's Repair Operation Center." and a "Request a repair >" button. To the right of the banner is an image of several GE vaporizers. Below the banner are five smaller images: a person using a smartphone, a collection of GE vaporizers, a GE vaporizer with a "NEW" tag, and two GE vaporizers with red caps.

Hospitals in the United States on average spend \$3.8 million annually on supply expenses, says the Business School Alliance for Health Management. Given that 6,210 hospitals are operating in the U.S., total annual spending on healthcare supplies would mean hospitals collectively spend about \$23.60 billion annually. Factoring in GE Healthcare's projection of ecommerce accounting for as much as 14.5% of spending by 2022 would result in about \$3.42 billion in annual online purchasing by hospitals.

At GE Healthcare, the ramp-up for more ecommerce will bring "a more business-to-consumer experience to business-to-business buying," Erickson says.

Saving hospitals time

GE Healthcare isn't breaking out ecommerce sales. But over the past four years, customers ordering parts online instead of over the phone have saved 300,000 minutes, the company says. Over 730,000 products have been sold on GE Healthcare Service Shop, GE says.

GE Healthcare Service Shop, which runs on an SAP Hybris ecommerce platform, currently carries an online inventory valued at \$1.5 billion, representing 489,000 parts numbers, GE says.

Hospitals and other customers can now purchase products from 18 categories ranging from anesthesia and MRI to patient monitoring and X-rays. GE Healthcare Service Shop ships out about 6,000 products daily with a 96% on-time delivery rate, GE says. In some cases, GE Healthcare completes delivery as soon as eight hours after a customer places an order.

The updated site search tool on GE Healthcare Service Shop lets customers search by part number, type of equipment, or keyword. Other new and updated ecommerce tools allow online buyers to view daily deals, check parts

'The updates are all part of an effort to bring more ecommerce technology into healthcare purchasing by hospitals and health systems and to make the buying experience more Amazon-like.'

availability instantly, and track delivery status. The updated ecommerce site was also designed to better integrate with a hospital's supply chain and enterprise resource planning systems, resulting in faster reordering by customers, the company says. That can enable customers to operate with leaner inventory levels as they quickly reorder supplies as they need them, it adds. "We think more of things as being just in time," Erickson says.

Online products from multiple manufacturers

Today GE Health sells mainly its own parts. But by expanding B2B ecommerce and adding on more website upgrades, GE Health aims to diversify and sell more parts online from other healthcare equipment manufacturers. "Customers want an original equipment manufacturer (OEM) who can supply multi-vendor support," Erickson says. "The increased inventory of multi-vendor parts available through Service Shop is another step in helping meet that need."

GE Health carries products from other manufacturers including Philips, Siemens and Toshiba on GE Healthcare Services Shop, with more products from other medical device makers to come, GE says. "The increased inventory of multi-vendor parts available on Service Shop helps providers focus on patient care by ordering OEM and multi-vendor parts where and when they are needed," says Rob Reilly, GE Health's vice president and general manager, Canada and U.S. Service. ●

DISTRIBUTOR CASE STUDY / Transcat

HOW A DISTRIBUTOR BUILT A BETTER ONLINE UX FOR CUSTOMERS

With ecommerce technology having carved out a beachhead in business-to-business commerce, many suppliers are realizing that simply launching a website is not enough to satisfy buyers' expectations for an attractive and helpful digital purchasing experience.

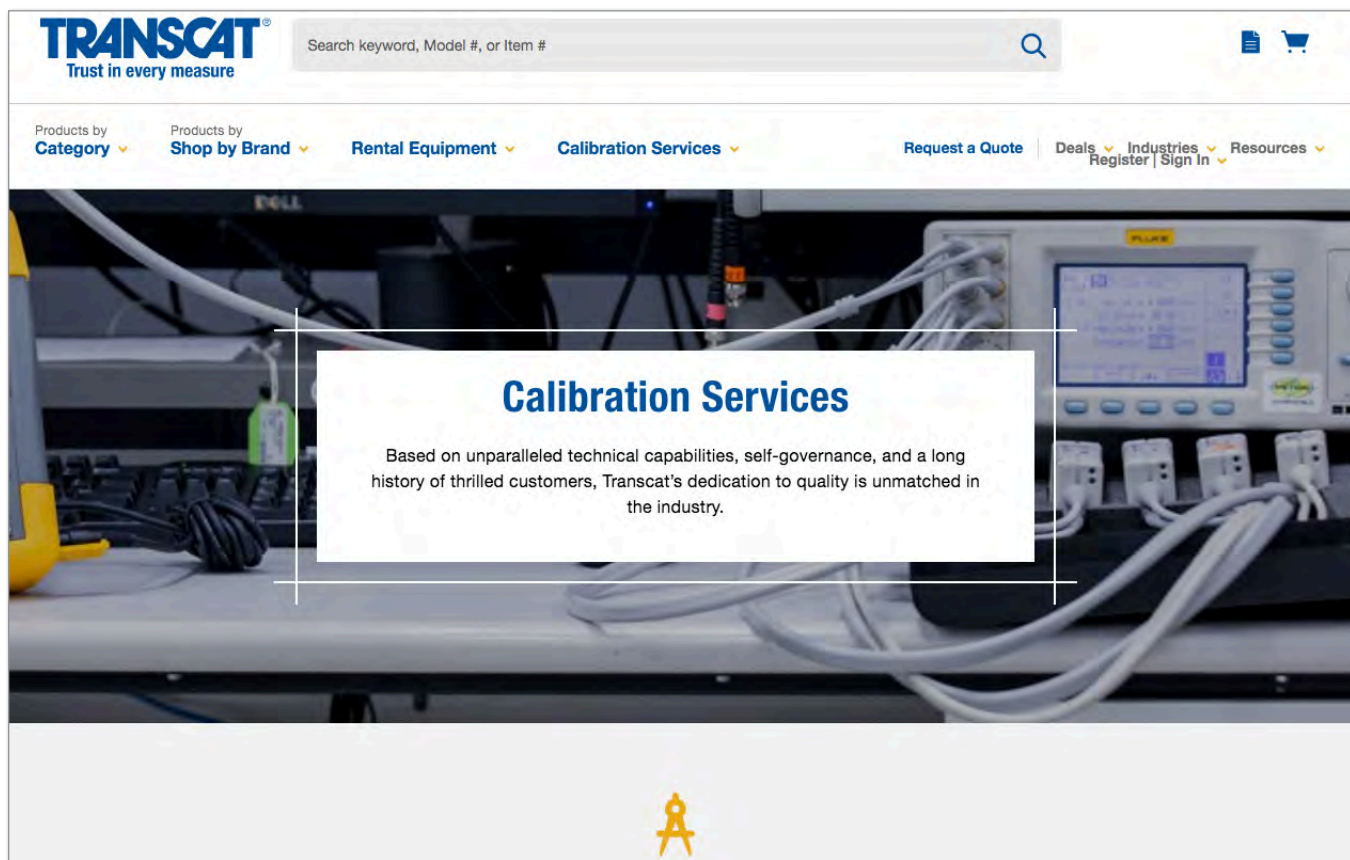
B2B buyers expect suppliers' websites to be compatible with mobile devices, provide access to order history, offer custom pricing and even suggest products and services based on their purchasing history.

Operating an aging website, Transcat Inc., a supplier of measurement and testing

equipment, concluded that if it was to grow sales through its digital channel, its website needed to do be more appealing to customers and easier for them to use for finding and purchasing products.

“When we looked at competitors' sites, we realized our site was not up to par when it came to the user experience,” says Jason Thielges, manager of digital marketing manager.

At the time, the company's website showed static product and pricing information and lacked scalability.



Since launching the new site, conversion rates have increased 17.9%, average order value has increased 11.2%, mobile traffic has increased 40%, and new account registrations have grown two-fold, Transcat says.

A UX for each line of business

Once Transcat decided to scrap its homegrown website, it selected the Magento 2 ecommerce technology platform on which to build its new website. The first step in building the new site, Thielges says, was to create a user experience relevant to each of the company's four business lines: new product distribution, pre-owned equipment distribution, equipment rental, and calibration services.

Next, Transcat built a middleware solution that would allow integration of Salesforce's CRM solution and its own ERP application. The software, which uses 80% of Magento's native built-in functionality, was jointly developed by Transcat's information technology team and Magento engineers. By keeping customization within the middleware to a minimum, Transcat ensured a smoother path for implementing future upgrades to the website, Thielges says.

The connectivity between Transcat's website, CRM and ERP systems allows the company to display a richer level of information than it could previously, such as inventory availability and custom pricing, Transcat says.

The new middleware application also allows Transcat to sync online and offline order data

to create a single order history for its customers and provide sales and customer service representatives a single view of the customer.

Pushing up conversions with personalization

Other enhancements to the user experience include personalization, the introduction of tiered pricing and requests for price quotes. The new site also allows Transcat to package product information in new ways to increase sales. For example, a buyer looking for new network testing instruments may see also comparable pre-owned equipment or an option to rent the device. Transcat can also show buyers equipment rental options at checkout.

Transcat determines the type of cross-selling options it offers based on a buyer's purchasing history. "If a buyer purchases a lot of equipment from us, but does not actively use our calibration services, we can promote those services at the time of purchase," Thielges says. "This has created new ways for us to interact with customers through the web site."

Since launching the new site, conversion rates have increased 17.9%, average order value has increased 11.2%, mobile traffic has increased 40%, and new account registrations have grown two-fold, Transcat says.

Looking ahead, improvements on tap include the addition of self-service features, category and SKU expansion and building out the website's analytics capabilities.

"We knew that successfully positioning ourselves for future growth through our digital channel would be a user experience play," Thielges says. "Now that the new site is in place, we are looking at more ways to leverage its capabilities to keep enhancing the user experience." ●

DISTRIBUTOR CASE STUDY / Univar Solutions

FINDING A 'KILLER' FEATURE TO DRAW CUSTOMERS ONLINE

Univar Solutions, a multibillion-dollar distributor of chemical products, has produced sharp growth in self-service ecommerce sales since relaunching its B2B ecommerce site more than two years ago, said Steve Martinez, senior director of digital commerce.

A big reason is because buyers wanted 24/7 access to products in a user-friendly portal. Building that kind of ecommerce site, at MyUnivar.com, was the reason Univar migrated its ecommerce site in 2017 from an old legacy platform that was difficult for customers to use. The alternative was a new platform integrated with the company's customer relationship management system that was better attuned to customers' needs.

Now, "online customers buy more products, more frequently," Martinez said in a presentation on Univar's growth in ecommerce during the B2B track at the IRCE @ RetailX conference in late June.

A 'killer' app builds awareness

But while it's important to have a useful and easy-to-use ecommerce site—for example, where customers can instantly access critical product documents like safety data sheets and certificates of analysis, view order status and purchase history, use a 2-click process to request quotes and place orders, and click among content in multiple languages—Univar has found that it's also crucial to provide a "killer" online feature that helps the company to stand out and further build its base of repeat customers.

The screenshot displays the Univar Solutions website interface. At the top, a navigation bar includes links for Investors, Careers, About Us, Safety & Sustainability, Sign In, and Regions. Below this is a secondary navigation bar with the Univar Solutions logo and tabs for PRODUCT TYPES (highlighted), SUPPLIERS, MARKETS, SERVICES, and a CONTACT US button. The main content area features a breadcrumb trail 'Home / Product Types' and a large heading 'Product types'. To the right of the heading is a photograph of two scientists in lab coats. Below the heading is a large image of laboratory glassware containing colored liquids. To the right of this image is a section titled 'Chemicals and ingredients by type' with a sub-header. The text describes Univar Solutions as a one-stop shop for quality chemicals and mentions a grid for exploring products by type or chemistry. A 'CONTACT US' button is located at the bottom of this section.



'Customers prefer to transact when and where they want, 24/7. An increase in online self-service orders has resulted in more productive customer service and sales reps.'

Steve Martinez, senior director of digital commerce, Univar Solutions

"Awareness is key," Martinez said. One standout killer feature Univar has deployed is its MyWallet application, where registered customers can store their credit card account information and other data to expedite online purchases and communications with customer service reps. "It helps drive faster adoption of the website," Martinez said.

Martinez said Univar took about eight weeks to launch its new ecommerce site, which runs on the Commerce Cloud platform from Salesforce.com Inc. and integrates with the Salesforce CRM system. The tight integration between ecommerce and CRM helps Univar to better understand and address customers' needs based on their account activity, whether they place orders online on a site personalized to their interests or through sales reps.

Selling customer experience

"Customers prefer to transact when and where they want, 24/7," he said. An increase in online self-service orders has resulted in more productive customer service and sales reps, he added.

Univar also designed its ecommerce site to show customers more recommended products and to let them sign up for reminders to reorder routinely purchased products.

Its website also displays extensive information about its suppliers, allowing site visitors to click descriptions of each supplier's offerings and request additional information. "We manage complexity for suppliers and customers," Martinez said.

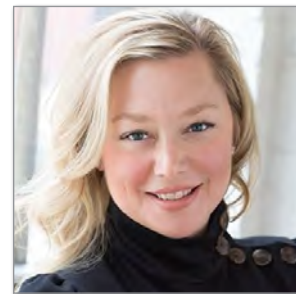
Although Univar sells a range of chemicals products from some 8,000 suppliers used in industrial and consumer products, Martinez sums up the business in how it's able to serve customers. "We sell one product: customer experience," he said. ●

Session

Building a Successful B2B Ecosystem

Taye Mohler

Sr. Director, Global Functions & Customer-Facing Application Portfolios, Cargill



Addressing the big opportunity of B2B ecommerce

B2B customers want the high level of personalized service traditionally delivered in one-to-one exchanges with distributor and manufacturer suppliers. Now, they also have the option of getting that online, from B2B companies that have worked hard on ecommerce sites which optimize the buyer experience. Taye Mohler, senior director of global functions and customer-facing application portfolios at Cargill Inc., a supplier to industries including agriculture and pharmaceuticals, explains why that's no small task as well as what's at stake in getting it right.

Q: What is driving manufacturers like Cargill to expand online?

Mohler: We want to make doing business easy for customers. Online capabilities allow Cargill to provide opportunities to meet customers in their space by offering ecommerce services on functions that typically have been conducted face-to-face. This makes it easier for customers to do business with Cargill all around the world.

Q: What are the biggest challenges?

Mohler: The biggest challenges in creating a digital application are the internal collaborations that are required to make the experience a success for customers. This

includes aligning leadership and teams on the concept, benefits and design of a digital platform. It requires breaking down internal barriers and silos within organizations that will allow people to come aboard the journey with excitement, ambition and drive to make the product a success. It requires a significant shift in thinking about how we work and do business differently; you must have partners who are forward-thinking and committed.

Q: What are the chief gains you're realizing?

Mohler: Efficiency in how we deliver products, services and customer satisfaction. We are able to reach new markets that were previously out-of-reach, which allows for organic growth and additional opportunities.

Q: What in your opinion is the biggest thing B2B companies still need to realize about ecommerce?

Mohler: Customers still want a high level of quality and personalized service. They are willing to explore the digital opportunity and the effectiveness that it can bring to their business and lives. Many remain open to the face-to-face business connections of the past but find a convenience and ease in using ecommerce solutions for the future.

Taye Mohler: **Building a Successful B2B Ecosystem**

Q: What is your most valuable piece of advice for B2B companies looking to add online sales or increase them?

Mohler: You must have bold leadership that is willing to provide relentless commitment to the drive of change which comes with many challenges. You have to be open to be dedicated to the process of creating an ecommerce tool, trust the commitment and be perseverant in evolving the project.

Q: Can you recall from your own experience an example of how following this piece of advice can affect B2B ecommerce?

Mohler: This is a journey of change management. It means that leadership and teams must adapt, stretch, learn and trust in the process. It is challenging to change alone in an ever-wavering business environment; you will see cracks and fractures along the way. Remain bold in your belief in the project and know that you alone cannot force the change—trust your partners in the journey. **B2BNEXT**

Session

Going Global with Ecommerce

Rence Winetrout

Global VP, Digital & Data Science, Molson Coors



Why getting into ecommerce is a “smart risk” for B2B

For established B2B companies with deep roots in traditional offline sales, the benefits of ecommerce for their product lines might not immediately be clear. Take the beer industry, where B2B ecommerce is relatively new. “Investing resources in a new, unproven initiative was challenging,” says Rence Winetrout, global vice president, digital and data science at Molson Coors Brewing Company.

Yet results such as improved operational efficiency, reduced cost to serve customers and top-line growth are proving it to be a risk worth taking, he says.

Prior to joining Molson Coors, Winetrout held leadership roles in digital transformation at

Apple and Adidas in addition to consulting on B2B for Fortune 1000 organizations around the globe. In an interview with B2BecNews, Winetrout talked about the two biggest challenges in getting B2B ecommerce off the ground and how to approach them.

Q. What is driving manufacturers like Molson Coors to expand online?

Winetrout: We view the online channel as a key way for us to improve the overall experience for how customers do business with us. At the same time, having an online connection with our customers creates new opportunities to deliver value added services and solutions designed to help our customers run their own businesses better.

Rence Winetrout: Going Global with Ecommerce

Q: What are the biggest challenges?

Winetrout: Our two biggest challenges have been getting started and getting the broader organization to adopt B2B as a new way of doing business. Initially, getting started required stakeholders to take what we refer to as a “smart risk.” While our leaders were well aware of the benefits other industries were experiencing from B2B, given that B2B is relatively new in the beer industry, we were not certain B2B would drive a material benefit for us. Investing resources in a new, unproven initiative was challenging.

Additionally, as we continue to expand our B2B functionality, the other big challenge has been needing to revisit both systems and people processes that haven’t been touched in years. Given the size and maturity of our global organization, many of the processes we’re integrating into B2B have deep roots, technically and psychologically speaking. Organizational adoption and change management continue to reveal opportunities for improvement.

Q: What are the chief gains you’re realizing?

Winetrout: The gains we’re realizing include improved operational efficiencies and reduced costs-to-serve customers, as well as higher NPS scores and incremental sales revenue.

Q: What is the biggest thing B2B companies still need to realize about ecommerce?

Winetrout: Understand that B2B can and should be seen as a strategy to drive top-line growth and not just operational efficiencies. If you’re able to elevate how your customers do business with you, there is a real opportunity to drive market share gains. I would add the companies need to think about B2B as much more than a transactional channel, and more as a modern customer relationship channel.

Q: What is your most valuable piece of advice for B2B companies looking to add online sales or increase them?

Winetrout: It is crucial to position B2B as an integrated, commercial program within your organization and not a standalone technical solution. If you build it, they will not come. Understand that the value you get from your B2B program will depend on your ability to drive your business KPIs. Therefore, make sure you invest up-front in the right front-office resources to continuously drive business value.

Q: Can you recall from your own experience an example of how following this piece of advice—or even, initially not following it—can affect B2B ecommerce?

Winetrout: As a former B2B consultant, I worked with many organizations who were looking to accelerate growth in their B2B channel. For most of these organizations, what they commonly lacked was a clearly defined set of growth KPIs and commercially oriented talent that were focused on driving top-line.

The danger is in failing to invest in front-office resources, such as B2B marketing specialists, user experience specialists, and customer loyalty specialists; without these investments, companies can fall into a self-fulfilling prophecy where they don’t see incremental sales and therefore don’t see the value in making these critical investments. My advice is to revisit your B2B business case, model out incremental sales targets based on the leaders in your space, and make sure to include a strong commercial team in your resource planning. **B2B NEXT**

Session

Best Practices for Sharing Content Across Channels and Touchpoints

Alison Zepp

VP, Marketing & Strategy, Jessup Manufacturing Co.



Building on customer relationships in B2B selling

Customers' earned trust of you and your business is "pure gold," says Alison Zepp, vice president of marketing and strategy at Jessup Manufacturing Co. The cost? Providing a great customer experience every time.

Prior to joining Jessup in January 2014, she was vice president of marketing at Follett School Solutions; she has also held leadership roles in marketing and product development at Grohe, Juno Lighting Group, Grainger and Citicorp/Citibank's payment services provider, WorldLink.

In a peer-to-peer roundtable at B2B Next, "Best Practices for Sharing Content Across Channels and Touchpoints," she'll talk about why product content is key to winning and keeping customers, and the best ways to deliver it to B2B buyers—wherever they look for it.

B2BecNews caught up with Zepp recently to talk about how B2B companies are growing by selling online.

Q: What is driving B2B companies like Jessup Manufacturing to expand online?

Zepp: Customers expect it. B2B buyers of commercial and industrial products like ours want to research us on their own before they decide to buy. They also like the ease of doing business online.

Q: What are the biggest challenges?

Zepp: Keeping up with the pace of changing commerce technology is certainly one of our challenges. Another is developing the kind of user experience that supports our custom engineered products.

Q: What are the chief gains you're realizing?

Zepp: Every time we invest in Jessup's online content, we see an increase in website traffic, leads and sales. The sales may be won by our channel partners, but we know our customers are visiting our website store to view our product content and make buying decisions.

Q: What's the biggest thing B2B companies still need to realize about ecommerce?

Zepp: Ecommerce changes traditional marketing channel partnerships and drives efficiency among all the players. Manufacturers and distributors need to cooperate closely on essentials like product data feeds and co-op marketing.

Q: What is your most valuable piece of advice for B2B companies looking to add online sales or increase them?

Zepp: If you provide a great online experience, customers will reward you for it. The trick is to find out what your customers value most. We've had customers pay the highest price from our store because they trusted the Jessup brand. That kind of loyalty is pure gold. **B2BNEXT**

Session

Navigating the Complexities of Global B2B Ecommerce

Riccardo Caruso

Director of Digital Commerce & Analytics, Illumina



Putting a complex B2B business online

As with any change, shifting more of your B2B company's business to digital is challenging. What surprises many is that the challenge doesn't let up between starting and reaching your goal—it just changes focus.

"At first, the biggest challenges are technical," says Riccardo Caruso, director of digital commerce and analytics at Illumina, a global manufacturer of genomic and biotechnology products. "As you grow, the challenges increasingly become for business-related."

Caruso has more than 15 years of industry experience including prior positions in global marketing operations at biotech companies including Merck Millipore. In a panel discussion, "Navigating the Complexities of Global B2B Ecommerce," he'll talk about Illumina's experience in overcoming country-specific regulations, differences in search engine marketing and other roadblocks facing B2B ecommerce companies that operate on a global scale.

Caruso shared some of the strategy behind the 2017 web site relaunch that tripled the number of million-dollar-sales days as on its prior site and increased average order value by 25% in its first year.

Q. What is driving B2B companies like Illumina to expand online?

Caruso: In order to sustain growth and increase productivity, you must access scalability. Ecommerce allows you to do that.

Q. What are the biggest challenges?

Caruso: Challenges vary as you grow ecommerce, and each one is important at its point in time. At first, the biggest challenges are technical. You have to design a platform that meets your company needs, in the near and long term, and you need a strong team to execute.

As you grow, challenges increasingly become more business-related: they range from business approval of new features and processes on how the company sells, to funding for resources to meet your growth objectives. The ultimate challenge is at enterprise level: now that you have built your Ferrari and all the parts are tuned up, you need the whole team to be on board, from the CEO and CCO, to leadership spanning sales opportunities to customer service. It is a shift not only in sales, but also of culture, internally; and of the digital relationship with your customers.

Q. What are the chief gains you are realizing?

Caruso: Since our ecommerce implementation, online orders have doubled, and we are on track to threefold online sales by year end. Most importantly, we now have a robust platform that Illumina can count on to continue its rapid growth.

Riccardo Caruso: Navigating Global B2B Ecommerce

Q: What in your opinion is the biggest thing B2B companies need to learn about ecommerce?

Caruso: Companies need to realize that going digital is a major trend: they have to invest in the digital relationship with their customers. Ecommerce is a key force necessary to ensure a competitive advantage. Ecommerce today is an important differentiator determining winners and losers in the marketplace.

Q: From what you've learned yourself – What is your most valuable piece of advice for B2B companies looking to add online sales or increase them?

Caruso: Ecommerce done well allows you to leverage your assets, scale up and grow. Ecommerce done well is paramount to thrive, but it is like going into battle: it has to be strategic yet tactical. It requires a robust platform rich in hand-chiseled features (our functional requirements were in excess of 4,000.) You may have the best technology yet you need a great team to run it. Neglect your ecommerce and it will become a growth constraint. **B2BNEXT**

Session

Building a Consensus in B2B Ecommerce, Vertical by Vertical

Lisa Butters

General Manager, GoDirect Trade, Honeywell Aerospace



Addressing big challenges facing B2B ecommerce

It's no news that, increasingly, business buyers want an ecommerce experience that matches the experience and ease of purchasing on a B2C site. The big story now is how industry pioneers such as Honeywell are making it happen—and the significant change that they're betting will help them win online.

Online sales, and especially web-enabled pricing transparency, is something new to many legacy B2B manufacturers and distributors. For B2B sellers, online pricing transparency can be “scary,” says Lisa Butters, general manager of GoDirect Trade, a start-up marketplace organization within Honeywell Aerospace's four walls, but well worth what Butters says is at

stake: Keeping Honeywell relevant in aerospace.

In a panel discussion, “Building a Consensus in B2B Ecommerce, Vertical by Vertical,” Butters will talk about industry-specific online marketplaces as a way B2B companies can grow their ecommerce business.

Q: What is driving manufacturers like Honeywell to expand online?

Butters: This is a critical moment in B2B ecommerce—eventually, buyers will demand a consumer-like experience in a B2B transaction, but that's just the start. The real innovation is figuring out how to take the complexities that come with a true B2B transaction and couple

Lisa Butters: Building a Consensus in B2B, Vertical by Vertical

those complexities with a true consumer-like experience. Honeywell is not willing to miss out on this opportunity—in order for Honeywell to stay relevant in aerospace, we have to enter the ecommerce game and be innovative in this space in order to earn our place at the table.

Q: What are the biggest challenges?

Butters: It's dealing with the complex transactions that multi-million and billion-dollar enterprises take part in to keep their businesses running. The biggest challenge we've seen is ensuring that we can enable sellers with custom storefronts to have a true end-to-end solution. If GoDirect Trade provides the storefront that is their 'face' to the customer, then the storefront needs to integrate into their back-end operations. To do this, we're looking at API integrations and even partnerships with leading ERP providers to build out the ecosystem.

Q: What are the chief gains you're realizing?

Butters: GoDirect Trade is the only aerospace marketplace where a multi-million or billion-dollar enterprise can launch a digital/ecommerce channel within minutes. Literally minutes! You can post your listings and start taking orders, processing payments via credit cards, or other means such as paying by purchase order. But in our minds, we're bringing digital to this very antiquated industry. There are 20 competitors in this space and not a single one requires price, images or quality documentation when listing product for sale. The level of transparency we're forcing into the industry is a huge gain for the B2B buyer.

Q: What is the biggest thing B2B companies still need to realize about ecommerce?

Butters: That transparency is 100% required in order for ecommerce to work. An amazing customer experience depends on a consistent view of products – price, images, paperwork; that has to be there 100% of the time. If you're

missing any of those things, the customer experience breaks down. Furthermore, without price, you CANNOT have a true ecommerce site – because no one can check out!

Q: What is your most valuable piece of advice for B2B companies looking to add online sales or increase them?

Butters: Three things: For many of these aerospace companies, ecommerce has just never been done. You really need one dedicated person (even an intern) that nurtures, manages and gets your storefront up and running and always updated. Second, you must have quality listings and product. Sellers that want to put excess and slow-moving inventory for sale will get infrequent hits because there is little demand for their parts. It's just like any other site out there – consumers want to see products that they want. Third, transparency in today's world is absolute king. Bonus item: Just try ecommerce! Many have not started on this path and it's so new to them but I promise that if you don't start, you will get left behind.

Q: Can you recall from your own experience an example of how following this piece of advice – or even initially not following it – can affect B2B ecommerce?

Butters: There are times when we've struggled with publishing our own subscription pricing or being transparent about our metrics. But at the end of the day we remind ourselves that transparency is key. If we're not transparent with our user community, we're not setting a good example. But it is scary, believe me! **B2BNEXT**

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~Director of Digital Marketing, Danaher

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