



ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

You are reading this guide because you either have an e-Commerce site already that isn't working for you, or you are developing an e-Commerce site for the first time. We have seen numerous e-Commerce projects that run into cost overruns, extended timetables, or poor outcomes because they failed to answer the right questions up-front.

We want to help you avoid these problems!

This guide is both informative and interactive. You will...

- Gain insight from our company's years of experience about creative ways to handle your B2B e-Commerce challenges.
- Find examples of specific tools and approaches we've used in the industry.
- Answer the most important questions about your B2B e-Commerce needs so you can make the best choices, from software to development.
- Calculate the Return On Investment of your B2B e-Commerce project so you can get buy-in in your company. Pull out pages 7, 12, 16, 17 and have the first step of your B2B e-Commerce project done!

There are three areas that have a huge impact on your e-Commerce implementation, and we will look at each one individually:

Section #1 - Your Sales Channels

Section #2 - Getting Your Products To Market

Section #3 - Online Content

We have also included a Return On Investment Worksheet so you will have a clear picture of what you need and what it could mean for your company.

Let's get started!



SECTION 1: SALES CHANNELS

In B2B, clearly defining your sales channels is the first step in the e-Commerce planning process. How do you sell your products? Do you use distributors? How about sales reps? Are your end customers able to purchase from you directly?

Let's take a look at each of these sales channels and see how they could work online.

DISTRIBUTION

Do you have a distribution network? If so, your e-Commerce strategy will need to support your distributors in selling your products, both on- and off-line. Consider an online strategy that is a win-win for your distributors.

Tools to Support Online Sales

If the majority of your distributors already have their own websites, provide them with tools in order to list your products more easily and keep them up-to-date with rich product descriptions, images, reviews and more.

Pre-configured Web Stores

You could provide websites for your distributors that don't already have a web store. Pre-load them with your products and enable your distributors to brand them and customize them with their information.

Automating Web Ordering

Use the web to simplify (or even automate) the process of receiving orders from your distributors, and tracking the shipping.

Dealer Locator

Offer a way for visitors to your website to easily find your dealers and be directed to their website or in store.

EXAMPLE :

One manufacturer offers e-Commerce websites to their distributors that are pre-loaded with the manufacturers products. Resellers are charged a fee for the setup of the sites, but are also able to add additional products to the sites and customize them for their needs. The sites are integrated to the manufacturers ERP software so that products drop ship from the manufacturer quickly, simplifying order processing for the distributor and offloading customer service for the manufacturer.

SALES AGENTS / REPS

Many organizations that have a strong salesforce are threatened by the advent of the Internet. The key is to look for a strategy that builds up your salesforce rather than undercutting them.

Incentives

Ensure that your sales reps have an incentive for your customers to place orders online. If your reps are commissioned on orders that are called in, they should also be commissioned on orders that are placed via the web.

Strengthen the Rep / Customer Relationship

Use the web to re-inforce the customers' relationship with their sales rep by showing the rep's picture when the customer logs in. You can also provide tools so reps are able to assist customers with their online orders and even place orders on their customer's behalf.

Sales Support Tools

Create an online presence that reps can use to better serve your customers. Your reps can take a tablet into a meeting and place orders for their customers on the spot. Enable reps to see inventory even if customers cannot.

EXAMPLE :

This manufacturer has a website setup for its retailers and sales reps to login and place orders. Sales reps are able to see and modify the orders of the accounts they manage. The website is mobile responsive so that reps can use the site from their phone and tablet and provide customers with special pricing and place orders quickly. The system is integrated with the manufacturers ERP, enabling the rep to check on order status for customers and also enabling the customer to quickly place orders or check on a shipment.

DIRECT TO CUSTOMER

You are selling directly to your customer. If you are like most B2B organizations, this isn't quite as simple as your standard retail e-Commerce site. Here are some points to consider.

Creating an Account

Gather the information you need to enable a new company to order from you. This process can be highly automated, while still allowing for an approval.

The First Order

If you have existing offline customers that come to your web store ready to order, enable them to quickly create their login and order from you using their pricing. For a customer that is brand new to your company, how easy or difficult should it be for them to place their first order?

Form of Payment

How do you take payment now, and how would you take it for online orders? Are first orders required via credit card? Are customers able to pay via terms? Are there credit limits? Create a system that maintains your payment rules.

Multiple Buyers

The accounts that are ordering from you may have multiple buyers. Manage this online by having additional users within your customer accounts.

EXAMPLE :

One distributor has a team of sales reps that get credit for orders, but they also allow customers to place orders directly from their website. An account creation process can be initiated via their website and will automatically notify a customer service representative (CSR) to review and approve the account and assign it to a rep. The customer is required to place their first order via a credit card but future orders can be placed on terms. Customer accounts can have multiple users that can login and view each other's orders.

SALES CHANNELS WORKSHEET:

Do you sell through distributors? ☐ Yes ☐ No

- How many of your distributors have e-Commerce sites today?
- Should your distributors have the ability to sell your products online?
- What is the process for taking and processing orders now?

Do you sell through sales reps? ☐ Yes ☐ No

- Do you have a method of enabling your reps to place orders online? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- Do your sales reps get a commission on orders placed? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- How do your Sales Reps currently interact with customers and place orders?

Will you allow customers to purchase directly from your website? ☐ Yes ☐ No

- What information is required to create a new customer account?
- Do you have an approval process for new accounts? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Describe it: _____

- Do your customers have multiple people who place orders?
- What are your payment rules for the first order and subsequent orders?



SECTION #2: GETTING PRODUCTS TO MARKET

There are three main types of products that are sold in the B2B space.

Consider how these product categories correspond to your business.

STOCKED PRODUCTS

Are your products carried in inventory? If so, you can offer the ability to add products to their shopping cart and checkout online. By selling stocked products online, you not only increase your sales by providing helpful tools to your customers, you also save money through the automation of your fulfillment of an order.

Customized to the user

Your store can be restricted to certain types of users (i.e. dealer portal, sales rep portal, customer portal) or it can be available to the public. You can also offer multiple scenarios – where you sell to the public at a retail price, and sell to established accounts or dealers at special pricing.

Linked to inventory (public or private)

When selling stocked products on your website, you have the ability to link your online store to your ERP software to display inventory, if desired. You can use this to show certain users how much you have in stock, or simply to alert users if items are out of stock or on backorder.

Searchable by product attributes

Allow customers to find products they want instead of searching through your website, speeding up their buying process. Even if a customer does not know the name of the product, other characteristics of the product can be searched and help the process move faster. This can be done through a search function or a visual “reductive navigation” on the side of the page.

EXAMPLE : INTEGRATED STOREFRONT

One distributor of industrial supplies has 40,000 SKUs and over 700 sales reps. Every customer can have a unique price on every product. They used filtered/reductive navigation to enable customers to quickly find the right product so they can order products between sales rep visits and order online.

CUSTOMIZED PRODUCTS

If ordering your products involve choices that customize the created product, you can use the web to help guide users through the ordering process. The beauty of customized products is that it will be hard for other online retailers to sell these products. By building tools to enable customized products to be ordered from your site, you will stand out from the crowd, as well as offer helpful tools to your customers

Wizard Ordering Tool

Offer an online wizard to lead customers through the buying process and give them options to choose from. Each choice they make may cause the future options to change.

Request for Quote

In some instances you may not be able to, or want to, immediately show the cost of the customized product to a customer. In this case, the buyer can submit a request for a quote for the customized product via your website.

EXAMPLE :

One company lets customers narrow down the type of tool they want through a customization process with drop-down choices and diagrams showing the specifications. Buyers can choose from available options according to exact measurements, or they can be customized if a certain measurement does not match up with what the buyer needs.

REPLACEMENT PARTS

Manufacturers and distributors often sell replacement parts. Replacement parts typically offer a healthy profit margin and can offer unique opportunities for using the web to make it easier for customers to order. Reduce the workload on your customer service department and allow customers to order replacement parts outside of standard business hours. These are just a couple of reasons to provide online tools for ordering replacement parts.

Digitized Exploded Parts Diagram

While customers may not know the part number they need, they often are able to visually identify the part on a parts diagram. Provide customers with an interactive parts diagram that they can click on and add the part they need to their cart.

My Parts

Enable customers to personalize their experience on your website so that it only shows them parts for the machines they have purchased.

Related Products

Allow customers to quickly view and order replacement parts by listing them as related products to the original equipment.

EXAMPLE :

One manufacturer developed a portal that allows sales reps to view a parts diagram and click on the appropriate replacement. Once the rep clicks on a specific part on the PDF diagram, they are then led to that product's page where they can add it into a cart or find related parts. This helps sales reps to quickly identify the correct replacement part visually, regardless of if they or the customer knows the part number.

GETTING PRODUCTS TO MARKET WORKSHEET:

What are the major product lines within your business?

What products offer the highest profit margin?

Do you sell replacement parts? ☐ Yes ☐ No

- Do you have parts diagrams? Are they available from your website?
- Do you have a database of what equipment is related to which replacement parts?

Are some of your products customizable or configured? If so, what questions or process does your sales team use currently to order those products?

- Once questions are answered, would a process be able to determine a specific price that could enable a user to checkout or would it build into a request for quote?

Do you store products in inventory or drop-ship them from another warehouse?

- What product attributes exist (i.e. size, color, length, diameter, etc.) that could be used to help customers find products more easily on your website? Where is this data stored today?
- Would it be helpful to use inventory information to allow customers know if products are out of stock? Are there certain users you would want to display inventory information to?



SECTION #3: ONLINE CONTENT

The content you put on your website is important. Being able to manage and update that content correctly is another key aspect to consider when planning for your e-Commerce site. Do you have one spec sheet that applies to many products? How will you update it across many locations on your website? Do you have multiple company websites? How will you keep your content up-to-date across all of them? Will your content be offered in multiple languages? If so, how will this be managed?

There is both product content and marketing content to consider, as well as how this information relates to each other. We recommend integrating your content and commerce in a single platform that enables users to easily move from content into the store and vice-versa.

Here are some common types of content that you will want to consider for your site.

PRODUCT CONTENT

Typical product content includes product descriptions, videos, spec sheets and potentially a product catalog for anyone who wants to take a closer look at each product. The more detail you can provide to your visitors the more confident they will feel in their purchase decision.

Online Product Catalog

[69% of B2B companies expect to stop printing catalogs](#) entirely in the next three to five years. Many companies are choosing to put their product catalogs online. By putting your product catalog online you can enable customers to always view the latest information from your product database. Consider allowing your customers to create PDF catalogs specifically for the products they are most interested in, or for certain categories of products.

Videos

Visitors prefer watching videos over reading, and are [64-85% more likely to buy](#) after watching a product video. Use video to teach your buyers more about your products, and to feel more confident about buying it from you.

Product Reviews

[61% of customers read reviews before making a purchase decision](#), and adding reviews can significantly increase your sales conversions. While some companies are afraid of poor ratings, a few [bad reviews have actually been shown to improve conversion rates](#), because it helps to increase visitors' confidence in the authenticity of the reviews.

MSDS / Spec Sheets

Depending on your industry, technical spec sheets can be an important part of helping your customer validate their purchase decision. If this is true for you, make the relevant spec sheet available to your buyer on the product page.

EXAMPLE : SUCCESSFUL ONLINE PRODUCT CATALOG

One distributor lets customers view the specifications or safety information about a product directly from the product page via a link to the Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) PDF. Even though there is one MSDS sheet that related to multiple products, this distributor only needs to upload it to their system once and then map it to the correct products. This allows customers to quickly find out more details about a product while not navigating too far away from the product page. It also allows the distributor to simplify the maintenance of their website content.

MARKETING CONTENT

For marketing, you will have general website content, blog posts, and email content. You may have white papers or how-to guides that provide helpful information to your customers. You can also gather prospective customers' contact information in return for the content. Marketing content is selling your company and products in a compelling way that will engage prospective buyers.

Blogs

Blogs are a great way to add a personal voice and helpful content to your website, and enable visitors to learn more about your company. When companies setup a blog on a different software platform than their e-Commerce site, they often generate traffic to their blog that doesn't make it back to their products. Consider how you can integrate your marketing content with your product pages, so that visitors are lead from one to the other seamlessly and your blogs drive your visitors towards conversion.

Email

Triggered emails (such as abandoned cart messages), email newsletters, and email drip campaigns can all be strategies useful in following up and increasing your customer lifetime value.

White Papers / Opt-in Content

Depending on your business and the process your customers use in selecting a vendor, you may want to consider offering helpful content that users will be willing to enter their contact information to receive. This is a great way to generate leads from website visitors

EXAMPLE :

One manufacturer has a site that includes videos to help customers with troubleshooting issues with their products, blogs highlighting customers who are using their products, as well as links to their social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and Instagram). The blogs are developed to have a common navigation structure with the rest of the site to ensure that customers are able to easily move from blog and marketing content into product content.

ONLINE CONTENT WORKSHEET

Which of these types of product content do you plan on offering through your site? (check all that apply)

- ☐ Multiple product images
- ☐ Product videos
- ☐ Customer reviews
- ☐ MSDS / spec sheets
- ☐ PDF product catalogs

Which of these types of marketing content do you plan on offering through your site? (check all that apply)

- ☐ Blog
- ☐ Email
- ☐ White papers / opt-in content
- ☐ Company video

Do you have marketing automation software today or do you plan to acquire it? If so, what solution?

Do you have a PIM solution today or do you plan to acquire it? If so, what solution?

TOOLS THAT CAN HELP

In addition to web content management software and e-Commerce solutions, other software can help you to maximize the effectiveness of your solution and decrease the time investment required by your team. You may already have some of these solutions today or you may have considered how they may play a role in your online solution.

Marketing Automation

Marketing automation software such as Pardot, Hubspot, Marketo and Eloqua can enable you to manage your content, automate your messaging, track your visitors' behavior and score potential leads based on their behavior.

Product Information Management (PIM) Software

PIM solutions such as Perfion and inRiver enable companies to manage their product descriptions, images, and video in a single location and to streamline the creation of product catalogs, sales sheets, e-Commerce content – all from a single source.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT WORKSHEET

We know that developing an e-Commerce system is a big investment. Understanding the return on that investment is complicated because of the many areas impacted by this transition. But it is also critical in order to get the buy-in you need and establish measurable outcomes. Here is some important information for you to gather as a foundation for your return on investment analysis.

A. Monthly Revenue (Offline and online)

B. Total # of Orders Per Month (Offline and online)

C. % of Orders Placed Online

D. Gross Profit Margin (%)

E. Unique Website Visitors per Month
(from Google Analytics)

F. # of Online Orders

BxC=

G. Conversion Rate (%)

F / E=

H. Average Order Size

A/B=

SKIP THE MATH?

If you would prefer to save some time, feel free to give us a call at 414-425-4069 x150 and we would be happy to calculate them for you.

Your Estimated Return on Investment

	BEFORE			AFTER		
# of Visitors	<input type="text" value="E"/>	x	10%	=	<input type="text"/>	*
		x			x	
Conversion Rate	<input type="text" value="G"/>	x	25%	=	<input type="text"/>	
		x			x	
Average Order Size	<input type="text" value="H"/>	x	5%	=	<input type="text"/>	
		=			=	
Online Revenue	<input type="text"/>				<input type="text"/>	
		x			x	
Gross Profit Margin	<input type="text" value="D"/>				<input type="text" value="D"/>	
		=			=	
Gross Profit	<input type="text"/>	=J			<input type="text"/>	=N

Incremental Gross Profit per Math

N-J=

* What if you aren't doing any e-Commerce today? Enter your After Conversion Rate at 1.5%.

ROI – JUST THE BEGINNING

In the B2B space, there are a number of places for you to see your return on investment. The estimated ROI on page 17 is based on several assumptions and is made to be a starting point for your ROI analysis. There are several other ways you can see a return on investment that will be specific to your business.

Additional Site Traffic: How many additional site visitors will you receive with a website that provides customers access to what they want? We have assumed this to increase by 10%. This is dependent on a number of factors including your industry and your current and planned marketing efforts.

Conversion rate improvement: How many additional orders will come in from a site that is better optimized for your site visitors? We have assumed this to improve by 25%. Again, this will depend on how much mobile traffic makes up your current site, and how good your current user experience is, among other things.

Increased average order size: How much will the average order size be increased by showing customers related products during their shopping experience? We have assumed this to be 5%.

There are several other ways that you can see additional returns from your e-Commerce site. Here are a few:

- Decreased customer service labor costs
- Decreased shipping errors
- Sales rep productivity improvements
- Increased dealer loyalty

If you are interested in help creating a more thorough return on investment analysis, we are happy to help.

Feel free to contact us at [414-425-4069](tel:414-425-4069) x150.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Hopefully you've gained some clarity around the opportunity that exists for your company online. Many times we find that the process is both exciting and also a little overwhelming. It provides answers, but may also raise some more questions.

If you'd like to some additional help putting together an online plan specifically designed for your company, please schedule a [free consultation](#) or give us a call at the number below. We'd be happy to talk with you.



Lori McDonald

President & CEO

414-425-4069 x110

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lori".