B2B Marketing™



BEST PRACTICE GUIDE

Ecommerce

PUBLISHED DECEMBER 2014 | B2BMARKETING.NET



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About B2B Marketing

B2B Marketing is the comprehensive information resource for B2B marketers. Its mission is to provide practitioners with the information they need to perform better and achieve more, whatever sector of the B2B space they are operating in.

Launched in 2004 as *B2B Marketing* magazine, it has since evolved into a multi-faceted resource, delivering a broad range of content in a variety of different forms and formats.

Its key products are:

Magazine: The essential monthly guide to B2B marketing, with a key focus on best practice guidance, plus monthly features looking at current trends, regular research and profiles.

Awards: The showpiece event for brands and practitioners, attracting over 800 people. Former winners include a host of top-tier B2B brands, including Amex, Barclays, Cisco, Dell, Fujitsu, IBM, KPMG, Nokia, O2, Oracle, Orange, SAP, Thomson Reuters, Vauxhall UK and many more.

Research and reports: A library housing the best in B2B practice, in-depth practical guidance and research into specific channels or industry issues.

Training: Comprehensive, integrated and flexible training programmes enabling client-side and agency marketers to boost their skillsets and confidence, improve their effectiveness and increase impact on their brand.

Events: Quarterly headline events providing essential learning and networking opportunities, including the B2B Summit, the Annual B2B Conference and the B2B Leaders Forum.

Membership: Become a member and receive all research and reports for free. You will also receive exclusive invites to members-only networking events, get discounts on training seminars, workshops and conferences and receive a subscription to the monthly magazine. There are different levels of membership available.

For more information on any of these products or services go to b2bmarketing.net or call +44 (0) 20 7014 4920.

Introduction

1

DAVID HOWELL

According to research from Forrester, B2B ecommerce has grown to twice the size of the B2C ecommerce sector. Value added resellers (VARs) and distributors may have traditionally dominated the B2B sector but today, B2B ecommerce continues to grow and expand, as B2B enterprises realise the power direct sales can achieve.

With an ever-expanding retail-base that is fast moving to mobile devices, B2B ecommerce has had to evolve. Enterprises in the B2B sector have been slowly developing their own ecommerce channels, as they see more direct sales as their future. This development has been slow, as the risks of jeopardising what could be long-standing relationships with existing sales channels and partners are real.

Ecommerce in the B2B sector has developed to complement the traditional sales channels B2B enterprises have long used. It is now not an either or decision when B2B ecommerce is concerned, but how an enterprise can develop this channel holistically and with full integration with its existing sales partners. B2B marketers must develop a new multi-channel approach that embraces ecommerce.

And the available tools and resources have also now developed to the point were B2B ecommerce is possible for more enterprises. The arrival of Amazon Supply, for instance, delivered a platform that all B2B enterprises could leverage with their own online presence. B2B ecommerce is now rapidly accelerating, as enterprises realise they can apply many of the tools and techniques that the B2C ecommerce sector has perfected to their own specialised sales channels.

David Bowen, product manager at EPiServer, told Internet Retailing: "The business case (for B2B ecommerce) is fundamental: an effective B2B ecommerce strategy will allow companies to sell more at a lower cost and transform sales efficiency. Delaying the launch of a successful, fully integrated B2B ecommerce platform may leave you trailing aggressive competitors who are looking to cut cost of sales while increasing customer convenience, loyalty and margins."

There is little doubt that B2B and B2C ecommerce is converging. Many businesses in the B2B sector have watched how the omnichannel has developed and what this has meant for suppliers and retailers alike. Agile B2B enterprises need to look closely at how the omnichannel approach can be applied to their businesses.

Ecommerce in the B2B sector then is increasingly taking on the guise of ecommerce in the B2C channel. This isn't surprising, all buyers within the B2B environment are also B2C buyers as well, and have gained masses of experience and – more importantly – expectations of what ecommerce means. There will always be key differences between ecommerce in the B2B and B2C sectors, but the trend is for more convergence, as B2B ecommerce responds to its customer demands to offer more B2C-like services online and increasing via mobile devices.

1.1 Understanding B2B ecommerce

Many B2B companies have been practising a wait and see attitude towards ecommerce. With complex sales and distribution models, developing more direct ecommerce sales channels has been difficult. Unlike the B2C sector where one size can fit all when services and products are sold, the B2B arena is quite different but can benefit from ecommerce approached with a clearly defined commercial goal.

However, what is becoming clear to all B2B enterprises, is that their relationship with end customers and partners within their supply chains is changing. A more one-to-one approach typified by the massive rise of social media is the future for all commercial businesses no matter which sector they are trading within. For B2B marketers, more detailed insight into their client-bases is vital if their ecommerce activity is to be successful.

“Account information is a goldmine that can be leveraged with big data analysis to deliver intimate customer insights”

PwC conclude in their report 'Uncovering B2B social media value, innovation and engagement': 'Companies like American Express, Dell and Thomson Reuters have all demonstrated that social media can become central planks of B2B customer engagement strategies, driving real benefits for both customers and the organisation. These organisations have learned from the B2C models and successfully extended the application of social media into the B2B domain.'

And change can be highly lucrative. Autodesk, for instance, saw a 35 per cent increase in its software renewal licences after moving from its traditional reseller channels to a direct online ecommerce service. B2B companies of course must assess their whole sales channel to identify where direct ecommerce sales could be developed – but develop they must, as whole B2B channel shifts to deliver better customer value.

As Digital River succinctly states: 'Companies today are thinking in terms of the entire lifecycle of a customer. In order to better amortise the cost of acquisition, B2B companies are seeking to deepen their relationships with customers so as to improve renewal cycles, upgrade purchases, maintenance contracting, replacements and spares provisioning and even decommissioning and disposal work.'

1.2 New age ecommerce

According to the lastest ecommerce report from Intershop, three in five (60 per cent) retail respondents believe B2B commerce is shifting from offline to online and self-service, 55 per cent feel B2B commerce should adopt B2C best-practices to optimise purchasing experiences and 48 per cent replied that the internal organisation has to adapt to meet new online goals.

Many companies in the B2B sector have developed an online presence to one degree or another. What is needed now for ecommerce to deliver on its promise is more coordinated investment to develop this digital channel. The rise of the smartphone and tablet are forcing all vendors to re-evaluate how they do business simply because their customer touch points have changed. Many B2B companies struggle with transactional ecommerce websites, but this has to change.

Forrester Research notes: 'Science fiction writer William Gibson once said: 'The future has already arrived; it's just not evenly distributed yet.' Such is the case with B2B ecommerce. Whereas some B2B enterprises have been selling online for years, most B2B enterprises are either new to online selling or still deciding how to proceed.'

The delivery of B2B ecommerce on mobile devices is a clear trend, as is more personalisation. Again this is being driven by the increases in personalisation across the B2C sector. What is interesting here is B2B companies have a distinct advantage: B2B enterprises typically have accounts with their clients, something the B2C sector can't match. Account information is a goldmine that can be leveraged with big data analysis to deliver intimate customer insights that can be used to further develop each ecommerce platform.

Salmon concluded in their report: 'B2B ecommerce (local and international) and business optimisation are key trends resonating across all B2B organisations in the UK. It is as though organisations are waking up to the fact that the race is on, to make an impact in and fully exploit the digital sphere, with high rewards if managed correctly.'

Ecommerce will increasingly become a fact of life for all B2B enterprises. Indeed, leveraging ecommerce can deliver tangible positive commercial results: according to Forrester Research nearly 90 per cent of businesses surveyed said adding ecommerce increased annual revenue by 55 per cent, with research from Acquity Group revealing that 57 per cent of business buyers have already made purchases online. The trend is clear: B2B companies must embrace ecommerce across their B2B marketing activities now to ensure their enterprises remain relevant and profitable.

Customer experience

2

JAMES SKEELS
DIRECTOR
ATLANTICO DIGITAL



Since the inception of the internet all those years ago we've become used to most businesses having an online presence. Now with the avenue of more 'blended' purchasing patterns, changing buying habits and a marketing presence that is both on and offline, how can businesses stand out from the crowd? How can they convert more users into actual customers and how can they best leverage the latest tools while understanding how people like to purchase products and services?

2.1 Learning from the B2C arena

I've often turned to the B2C arena when seeking advice for clients on best practice and inspiration. An industry that really embraced the web is the online travel market and almost all airlines rely on their digital presence to engage and garner sales from. Since I have been visiting the British Airways website since the late 90s, they have probably had over 10 new websites built, which shows how important it is for them to stay fresh, add new functionality and engage with different buying patterns.

At first glance their homepage offers a standard booking tool, but the menu at the top and a scrolling background also display (and encourage) the viewing of their holiday packages, which include various components on top of the flights and show visitors what other products can be easily viewed and booked. There is also a tab for company/business travel clearly signposted on the homepage – a key area BA relies on for high yield sales. Upon making a flight search, and when I select flights, the site offers various extras – the main being the chance to upgrade to the next available travel class for a quoted amount. I'd be lying if I hadn't been tempted at this as I have done it several times on business trips – so this up-sale idea clearly works. Easyjet even highlight how many people are currently viewing the fare you are looking at to create a feeling of 'demand' and many others will display 'only xx seats left at this price' to encourage your prompt booking.

When I visit the site of Flybe or even Ryanair and start the quotation process I am given a basic quote, but by the time I come to pay, it's likely I will have had to purchase luggage options, an allocated seat and perhaps more. This has become commonplace with airlines, but you will need to think carefully about whether it is appropriate for your business.

On the aforementioned purchasing style, the user is reminded constantly of the suggestion to buy an additional service, upgrade or pay more for their product, but an outstandingly good piece of best practice we can follow is that the user journey is flawless, easy to understand and, more importantly, encourages you to keep going and make the sale.

So why do most businesses not emulate this? The first step, however, in trying to mirror the good things learnt from the airline websites is identifying whether your business is: a) a transactional type (perhaps selling tangible products etc.), or b) a service where your sales approach will be more consultancy-based and probably over a longer period.

Once that is clarified we can assume the airline B2C style is not going to work as traditionally as the latter method so the approach needs consideration. This is because your business will need to work on visibility in the marketplace and motivating prospects over time in encouraging them to want to buy from you. Secondly, any up-sale suggestions or upgrade adverts could be seen as crass or too early in the sales cycle, which could turn off potential customers and alienate your brand. The first idea for a type 'b' business would be to create a microsite or intranet for warmed-up prospects (ones that have or are already engaged in your brand) – these may be prospects you have been having conversations with, people you already know or previous customers of your service – and/or an intranet for either the same thing or existing customers of your business. The idea is this demographic of user already knows your business, is motivated to buy and now just needs the encouragement to make the sale, and decide 'how much' and 'what of' they buy.

“The user journey must be flawless, easy to understand and encourage sales”

To do this you can start emulating some of the methods used with the airlines such as call-to-actions suggesting the popularity of products, links to extra services and copy encouraging them to make a sale. Again the key point is most of these users have already been 'warmed-up' and are interested in buying from you.

Type 'a' business, as the more transactional type, can also do the above, but with more emphasis on selling to the prospect and then converting them. In comparison, this business type is likely to attract the customer to them in the first place and then sell to them all in one go. An example of this is an email marketing and digital media platform called Vertical Response. Atlantico Digital has used this company for several years for both us as an agency and our clients, and I'm happy to say my initial knowledge of them was zero. But within a few days of registering with them we had bought their entire email and digital media platform. Why? Because their design and marketing process was outstanding. Firstly, they are very well positioned under the search terms we had inputted into Google, and secondly the copy on their website suggests successful customers who have gone on to win new business with their products.

The products on offer are easy-to-use and since we've been using them have been upgraded several times to engage with the latest social media tools, surveys and SEO methods that are all now very important. The site is also visually pleasing, its simple design and user experience is both free flowing and logical to navigate. One service I have used on numerous occasions is the online chat function – where an operator from Vertical Response can help with any problems one may have with the platform and give on-the-spot advice while you design a template or activate a campaign. This is a great piece of the overall service that helps to harmonise customer service as well as increase their conversion.

With a more transactional type business, you'll also need to ensure your payment catchment process is efficient. So you'll need to inform users when they have arrived at the payment process with concise information about what they need to provide and how and when they receive the product or service they have ordered. In 2014, the payment process options for businesses online has never been more dynamic. Paypal, Worldpay, SagePay – there are lots of new interfaces that can process payments, and you should be agreed on what system best helps your business to convert users to customers. One example would be if you are event reliant, then you might need a mobile payment device that can authorise credit cards offsite. You should also be aware if your sector is traditionally invoice paid, then your payment area needs the functionality to process, raise and deal with that.

I'll flip back again now to the type 'b' business where building a longer-term relationship is the focus of a company's marketing. In 2013, GE's website was named the best B2B website around. On the surface it's very bold and interesting to the eye, with a good mix of text and imagery. GE does a good job in making its products – including aircraft engines – seem incredibly interesting to the reader. While the highly technical nature of its products is evident, the user is never put off by an overly complicated array of jargon or 'tech' talk. It's also easily navigable and pleasing to view. Probably my favourite aspect of the site is the fact you would never imagine it represents one of the largest businesses in the world – they are keen to stay focused, uncluttered and customer-centric, something that should be admired when a firm becomes so multinational and large.

2.2 Create great content

I've always been of the belief that when approaching the design of any website, the copy has to be of the highest quality. As they say within the SEO world, content is king. It absolutely should be for any material you put on your web presence if you want to be a successful organisation, stand out from the competition and maximise your conversion.

In other words, you need to make your digital presence irresistible. The copy should be in perfect English, grammatically correct and free flowing. If you are a transactional type business then style is likely to be more leading, suggestive and motivating. You'll want to think carefully about being too 'salesy' though as alienating customers is a potential risk. Secondly, your website or platform should be structured in a way that makes it as easy as possible for someone to buy from you. An enormous amount of custom is lost in ecommerce because phone numbers are not displayed properly; the buying process is not clear or there is some other obstruction. So ensure contact details are

“Your website or platform should be structured in a way that makes it as easy as possible to buy from you”

easily visible (phone and email etc.), signpost the buying process so that if you provide an ecommerce site, each stage of the transaction is clear and obvious. If the user has to fill out a form or complete an application then this should be clear from the start. Similarly, if documents such as ID or user verification are needed, transparency in informing users of this is important.

The look and feel of any web presence is critical if you are going to showcase your brand and style to a potential marketplace. Customers are all loyal to certain brands, so as a B2B business you need to think the same, but from a supplier point of view. What is it your brand stands for? What is it your business is currently famous for? What are you really good at? These questions should help allow an organisation to think about how they want to represent their brand. If this has already been set, then the recognition and identity of your business in its target sectors will need to be stamped with your brand as appropriate – this includes ensuring your web presence; extranets, social media and forums are associated with your branding logo or identity so that when prospects are thinking of buying a service you provide, your brand is front of mind.

Now onto the pictures you use. When taking a look at the GE aviation website, it has done a great job in turning boring looking engines into aesthetically pleasing pieces of imagery that sometimes form the layout of how the section of the page scrolls down. The use of colours is carefully applied to ensure the screen isn't too 'busy' and the user is never overloaded with pictures that might clutter or confuse a prospect. Generally, airline websites are inspirational and vibrant with suggestions of exotic destinations and pictures to go with them. What is trendy or fashionable about your firm's products or services? If you can identify these then use imagery to show them off and promote them to your target-base to position them as in-demand, popular or a necessity.

Lastly, when it comes to content, thought leadership has never been so important. Everyone likes to visit a website, forum or social media platform that is fresh and up-to-date, so offer the same for your prospects. Create new content through articles, case studies and how-to guides to create a hub that is bursting with information. Sometimes a blog will be part of your set-up and blogs needn't be anything sometimes longer than a paragraph of text. The most important thing here is to create new, content rich material that is of value to your prospects and contacts that will also act as a credible piece of collateral that will aid your sales process and motivate your potential customers. The added bonus is the SEO benefits this content can have can be instrumental in where your search ranking is on Google. If you wrote a new interesting article or blog and published it on your website every week for a couple of years, you would almost certainly see an increase in web traffic through your enhanced placing and with the associated extra visitors that would yield.

2.3 Dynamic search and buying

Understanding that the demographic of your users are different and will search, find and buy products in various ways is critical. So you need to be as dynamic as possible in the way you present, offer and distribute your product.

In a world of web 3.0 we are now blending our digital experience across a range of platforms and interfaces more than ever before. From tablet to TV, Twitter to telephone, we are accessing the internet more, in different places and via different means. That means businesses need to be as sharp and proactive as ever to ensure they are seen, heard and available through these means.

While the 00s saw only the most dynamic businesses embrace social media, it's now seen as a 'must-do'. The basic social platforms you should already be familiar with and you'll need to decide which and what is appropriate for your business. It's worth noting that platforms come and go in popularity and also have a different uptake in different parts of the world. So if you're internationally trading, you'll need to know that Twitter isn't big in China but Weibo, the Chinese equivalent, is. The same goes for age demographics. In my experience Facebook has been popular with the 25–35 age range but now less so with the younger generation. Likewise Twitter and Instagram is more 14–25 years range. You need to test, trial and research what works for you and your business but it is crucial in understanding what your target audience does to communicate and how – rather than just asking around your colleagues in the marketing department.

“A new breed of user is now making purchases completely separate to a business’ main website”

A new breed of user is now making purchases completely separate to a business' main website. They will often hear about a firm in online news, a forum or friend. If this trend is growing then they may not ever experience your traditional web presence and you may not have directly influenced that users buying behaviour or purchasing pattern. One of our clients distributes its podcasts on leadership and management techniques via iTunes and find they are a popular alternative in what is an increasingly hybrid purchasing world. So what distribution channels does your business need to be aware of or present on? What is growing popular in your marketplace and what resource do you put into these emerging ways of buying products? Again you will need to ask these questions yourself as part of a ongoing review of your business strategy.

Another point to be aware of is many will research something online but may make the purchase in person, or vice versa. So having the functionality to process that customer journey is important. Similarly you don't want to put off a customer by forcing them to continue the entire sales process online – particularly if the prospect is a traditional type of business – such as a law firm or accountant.

There are a few other examples where the sales process might be a little different but is potentially crucial to a varied business, the first being event campaigns. You may be reliant on your sales cycle as part of a series of one or many events – so your landing pages will need to be specific to the audience the event was targeting and relevant to the type of event it is (i.e. a one off discount event or corporate hospitality etc.). As before, you'll need to ensure the complete user journey from warming the prospect, to the final sale is comprehensively thought about. Secondly, your sales efforts might be campaign led – driven by a one-off advert (run either on or offline) so your landing pages and product copy will need to reflect the theme of the campaign, with a similar visual identity and content that matches the style and purpose of any advert. The products or services on offer should be easy and quick to view with the further technical detail available perhaps via a pdf or separate microsite.

While there is a lot to think about when planning an excellence digital user experience, I always recommend you stay true to one principal – ensure your business is customer-centric. By revolving how you service and supply your customers around those very users; you can ensure you keep close to the heart of what keeps your customers wanting or continuingly wanting to buy from you.

What is it you like from other digital experiences? What keeps you coming back to the suppliers your business purchases from? These answers can help drive your thinking process when planning your customer user journey. If you are then offering the best, your business can become a truly leading organisation.

Account management

3

POLLY WILSON
STRATEGY DIRECTOR
READING ROOM



If you take nothing else away, I hope the following will show that ecommerce account management is no different to any other form of communications you employ or even come to expect in your own every day life experiences: we all want to know 'what's in it for me?' at the end of the day, we like people to keep it simple and sure, we all want to be surprised and delighted at some point.

From a marketer's point-of-view, the benefits of a successful account management system are plentiful. One can harvest a great deal of information from users; interests, roles, contact information, behaviours and goals. Of course this information can be used to target specific users with personal offers and messages that are likely to be of interest.

In the past, this information has been used purely for marketing purposes, outside the user experience, i.e. 'I see you've purchased Y, would you be interested in X?' In recent years however, technology and advancement in the understanding of user behaviour has made it possible to use this information to transform the customer experience.

The information gathered from user profiling should not only be seen as a means to further intrigue a user to additional services. This information is now being used to explicitly tailor the experience to the user, helping them to do the things they are most frequently doing, for example. Noticing behaviour at a specific time of year; making connections between products and behaviours that may not have been identified before.

Ultimately, an intelligent account-based ecommerce system should be surfacing content and functions it is known a user is likely to be interested in. The system should mould around the user; and it is here that the term 'mutual benefit' really starts to become important.

3.1 Showing benefit

I've worked with clients in the past, where the brief has been to increase account creation and sign-ups to services. The problem being, for this particular client, that users were unwilling to create an account with their ecommerce platform; in this instance, they could perform transactions without it.

The client's brief therefore was, essentially, to employ dark UX arts with a view to forcing more account creations and sign ups. Forcible account creation, in order to create any transaction, was one option on the table.

Of course, one of the key drivers of account creation, in many instances, is necessity. Increasingly in the last three years, we've seen major ecommerce sites insist upon account creation in order to process baskets. In the example here, however, users were being given an option to create an account or complete transactions without it.

In this context, we are presented with the reality of user accounts; users, rightly, want to know what's in it for them. In the example I've detailed here, we found through user testing, that the proposition of an account was poorly communicated. Users simply saw no value in the creation of an account and felt it wasn't worth their effort to do so. While forcing users to create an account to perform a transaction is becoming the norm, marketers still have a responsibility to communicate the proposition and convey the inherent benefits of a user profile or account.

Whenever we work on ecommerce platforms that force users to create an account, we always lead heavily on the benefits of doing so throughout the experience. Accounts need to be seen by users as something far more substantial than an opportunity to harvest personal details through which they can be bombarded with spam.

“B2B ecommerce systems have the potential to far exceed user expectations”

To adopt a metaphor, an account is the mouldable putty that sits somewhere between the user and the backend. It reacts to the user's desires, makes them comfortable and presents them with the experience they desire. It shapes itself to make the user's life easier. Again, 'mutual benefit' is of crucial importance in ecommerce account management; an account should be seen as something helpful rather than a cynical spam opportunity.

Recently, Reading Room employed this philosophy on a programme to redesign the B2B ecommerce platform for one of the UK's largest education and training providers. On first perusal of the platform, we were overwhelmed with how complex and esoteric it was to use. It was perhaps the most unfriendly ecommerce experiences I had personally seen; account profile names were a jumble of arbitrary numbers and letters (nigh on impossible to remember, users would have to begin user journeys through areas of the site that, on first impression, bore no relation to intended end goals, the search functionality was almost unusable and none of the content or call-to-actions were weighted – it felt everything had just been thrown onto the interface like spaghetti on a wall.

The project team was aware of the system's failings; from a business perspective, there were concerns that revenue was being potentially haemorrhaged through the system's non-handling of account information. The account system in place was far from dynamic; it simply limited your access to various areas of the site based on your approval status.

The account/user profile system was so static and non-beneficial, that one set of login details would be used by thirty or more users within an organisation. There was no catering for individual usage within the system. The account system here was purely a restrictive framework to prevent users from doing things they were not allowed to.

Oddly enough (although perhaps unsurprising) as soon as we began user testing, we heard users of this system loved it. It was esoteric, complex, impossible to start using without guidance, and yet users felt genuinely attached to it. Why? I believe two reasons: firstly, they had no choice – they needed the products and services offered, so they had to use the system; secondly, users of this system would typically spend up to four hours a day using the system – they are typically college administrators for whom using this system is their job.

Our takeaway from this experience is that sometimes a B2B ecommerce experience can be like Stockholm syndrome; you can hold your users hostage to bad user experience and, if your site is crucial enough, users will grow to like you anyway.

This insight feeds into our experience of B2B ecommerce more widely; the bar for user expectations is set quite low. Which consequently means that by employing the wide range of functionalities, content weighting and techniques afforded by user profiling, B2B ecommerce systems have the potential to far exceed user expectations and grow stronger more meaningful relationships with their customers.

3.2 The nitty-gritty

One current method of growing this relationship, even without explicit profile creation, is with the use of cookies. Cookies can contain any information the developers of the website feel would be beneficial to keep at hand – such as a unique user ID which can later be compared to a database of IDs on the web server.

You'll see this on various shopping sites, you may not have an account but it will remember what you have in your shopping cart. This is a cookie at work, the website checks to see if a local cookie exists and if it does it reads the information stored on it, compare this to data it contains in a database and displays the site to the user.

It's a cheap and very simple method of personalisation, simple because all that is being stored is the current state of the site. That state is then returned to your browser when you next visit the site. A very common use of a cookie is to determine how many people are visiting a site – analytics and logs give you so much but due to various features of the internet they don't give you the entire picture. Adding and tracking a user ID to a cookie gives an extra set of quantitative data to compare your analytics against.

"Adding and tracking a user ID to a cookie gives an extra set of quantitative data to compare your analytics against"

To quickly bust some myths – cookies are not applications, they have no ability to do anything nasty to your system and you should not be worried about them. They are simple text files and can be deleted whenever you want. This simplicity makes them easy to work with, but at the same time limits what you can do with them. People share machines, but cookies do not know. People use more than one system, and again cookies do not know. People delete cookies or simply tell your site they'd rather not use them at all (the option to disallow cookies has been present in browsers for many years, but was brought to attention in 2011 when the EU cookie law was introduced. The legislation basically meant that if you use cookies your users must be made aware of this and allow them to opt out of having cookies installed).

However, cookies become more capable and dubious when you combine them with user accounts. A typical user account, we'll take Amazon as our example, stores:

- Full name
- Home address
- A number of linked delivery addresses
- Date of birth
- Payment information and bank details
- Buying habits

No doubt they'll also store a wealth of information on how long you spend looking at various things, which bits of the page you are most engaged with, how you search, what type of shopper you are; the list goes on.

This information is of course stored behind an encrypted username and password, but if you combine that user data with a cookie you enter a different realm of privacy concerns. If website A holds all this information about you and website B can read the cookie of website A, what is to stop website B requesting all your additional information from website A? The answer on the early web was nothing. Luckily things are now very different and what you can and cannot do with people's data is carefully controlled.

In brief, if you give users the opportunity to create an account so that you can ask them for more information (ideally through progressive disclosure than a large initial form) you need to:

- Process data fairly and lawfully.
- Obtain personal data only for specific purposes, and not process that data for other purposes.
- Stored data should be relevant only for the purpose.
- Personal data should be accurate and kept up-to-date.
- Data will not be kept for longer than is necessary to carry out the purpose it is required for.
- Personal data shall be processed in accordance with the rights of data subjects under the Data Protection Act.
- Appropriate technical and organisational measures shall be taken against unlawful or unauthorized access to, modification of or deletion of the data.
- Personal data will not be transferred outside of the EU, unless that territory offers an adequate level of protection for the data.

What this really means:

- You won't steal or purchase information.
- You won't store everything you can simply because you're able.
- You won't ignore the Data Protection Act.
- You'll not store people's data on your laptop.
- You won't sell people's data.

3.3 Keep it simple

A crucial component in exceeding those expectations is to ensure seamless integration of an ecommerce system within another organisation. The key to this is the successful implementation of user profiles to allow organisations to manage their user resources; letting organisations dictate, through administrators, who can see what data, who can place orders, who can see reports and who can edit data.

In our experience, the key to a successful implementation of a B2B ecommerce experience is the means by which the system allows the user to mould itself around an organisation. Critical to that is the management of user accounts. Whatever your trade or wares, the ultimate goal is to have your system become indispensable to another organisation. To achieve this, you need to create a framework that facilitates a profiling capability.

The challenge here is always to understand the difficulties faced by organisations using your

“Effective B2B ecommerce relies on a group structure of layered permissions and access”

products and services. Core to our process, we've found it pays to reach out to all levels of organisations using a B2B ecommerce platform (or really anything for that matter). Understanding the working culture of customers is vital. Unlike in retail ecommerce, where the focus is very much on the individual, effective B2B ecommerce relies on a group structure of layered permissions and access.

It's important to know what groups system administrators may wish to create, who they will want to put in those groups and, finally, what permissions and resources those groups should have. This, of course, is quite complex functionality and understanding the problems and challenges of your users is, as I mentioned before, of paramount importance.

Naturally, we find that user organisations can vary wildly in terms of size and operation. But they retain a common goal in wanting your services or products. When formulating how you intend to determine user group structures and the nature of user profiles, our advice is to always remember that the simplest solution is often the right one.

With this in mind, you don't want to offer a solution that caters for every use case. Wherever possible, the aim should be to reduce complexity and make the means by which administrators can control groups and access as easy as possible. For us, often the solution to that is pre-defining permissions as much as possible. Experience has shown this approach presents a more simplified, and thus usable, interface for the user.

We've seen implementations in the past where the team has attempted to specify every preference and access right for every group. While intentions are good for this approach, you fast create a level of complexity that is unavoidably translated to the presentation layer. And avoidable complexity, in any form of ecommerce, is never a good thing. As I said previously, like Occam's razor, the simplest solution is often the correct one.

3.4 A proactive approach

Ecommerce experiences are fundamentally about purchasing and information. In the past, the relationship between an ecommerce experience and the user has been reactive; the site remains static, not interested in what the user may have done before. Retail sites have been far faster to implement a dynamism that recognises user behaviour, promote offers and target offers and messaging with a sniper-like precision.

The key difference between B2B and retail is often the esoteric nature of the services provided. In this respect, B2B ecommerce has an advantage in terms of what patterns can be observed from users. The mutual benefits of the modern experience comes from knowing what a user may want, before they know. For this reason, analytics, and the insight gathered from them, form the core evolutionary principle of modern B2B ecommerce.

The creation of an ecommerce system is never the finish line. Proactive service is now the norm; it's now, more than ever, crucial to analyse data to better understand your customers. Homepages should be regarded as fluid states, moulding to the behaviours of users. Offsite interactions (such as email) are equally as integral to the overall experience. The data you gather through account management is gold dust; the silver bullet to ultimate customer experience, if used effectively. That is the benefit for the marketer. But of equal importance, is that the benefit to the customer must be equal; information is being used not to just cynically push offers, but to help know what the customer needs to do, before they need to do it.

3.5 What's next?

Very soon we're going to see several web innovations being combined with user accounts – one of these innovations is the web socket.

Web sockets provide a constant real-time flowing connection of data between internet connected devices: from desktops to phones to your car's sat nav. The next generation of the humble cookie will piggyback upon this connection so all your devices are always in sync – you open a page on your laptop and that page is instantly available on your phone. You start filling in a form on your tablet during the commute home and finish that form on your laptop that evening. This is starting to happen now; Apple and Google already offer something near this on OS X/iOS and Chrome/ Android. Soon they'll start to push more data

“Information should be used to know what the customer needs to do, before they need to do it”

around, and this is where things start to get very interesting.

Your phone knows exactly where you are, what you've been doing all day and where your internet activity stopped at the end of the day. With all these devices connected, with all their unique data acquisition capabilities, the provider of the technology is going to be learning an awful lot about you.

Where you spend your physical time will be compared to where you spend your digital time, right down to the various sections of specific pages. Your Twitter activity is already being monitored, with natural language algorithms learning more about you from what and how often you tweet and what tweets you engage with.

When you take that data and mash it into your physical location, your buying habits, the music you listen to and the clothes you wear – you can imagine the possibilities.

This is the next phase for user accounts: real-time sharing of state data on the front end used in combination with a back catalogue of your entire digital history on the back end.

The overwhelming amounts of data we will be able to gather through user accounts in future is gold dust. If in doubt: ask users (of all levels, remember) what they want, remembering that we don't always know what we want until you show us what we don't want so test, test and test again.

Content management

4

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There are many learnings that can be transferred from B2C ecommerce best practice to the B2B environment; however, there are many factors that make developing a successful online content strategy in the B2B ecommerce environment distinctly different and inherently much more challenging. At the heart of this complexity are the very products that B2B companies are selling and the low propensity for these products to lend themselves to an online transactional environment.

B2B ecommerce demands that businesses think very differently about how they use content management processes to drive customer acquisition, optimise the lead time on sales as well as maximise the structure and shape of their product offering.

This chapter looks at how to establish best practice for managing effective content. It will inform of tried and tested planning and management processes for distribution of web content and product information as well as catalogue and customer success management. It will also identify the limitations and challenges for each approach.

4.1 B2B market variations and inherent complexities

The B2B market supports a broad range of ecommerce models that demand varying levels of sophistication in terms of how products are taken to market, how content is communicated to customers as well as how this information is routed to key internal functions such as sales and marketing.

At one end of the spectrum is the traditional B2B environment which describes direct transactions between businesses, however there is also B2B2B and B2B2C ecommerce which involves the selling of products to other businesses, which in turn sell those products to either another business within the supply chain or direct to consumers.

At this end of the spectrum many businesses fail to deploy a cohesive operation and evidence inefficient and sub-standard business marketing practices. This is not limited to a specific channel or web content output and is in fact applicable across the digital marketing board, affecting both consumer engagement and brand prosperity. Complexities are attributed but not limited to:

- Management of various types of content and content platforms.
- Location and frequency of content deployment to the target audience.
- The deployment of extensive product catalogues.
- Pricing in the online environment.
- Integration of multiple supply chains and relationship management.

With these inherent complexities in mind, how can the B2B market space leverage the most relevant experiences of B2C sector? How can best practice content management and consumer engagement techniques be applied within the variance of the B2B market? What common variables are applicable to all B2B marketers in order to operate successful content management? And how does this influence decisions on product information and merchandising in the context of maximising the customer engagement life cycle?

4.2 Cross-channel content management

A successful content strategy is dependent on answering the following key questions:

- How do I drive effective and targeted traffic to my website?
- How do I target my customer base across multiple channels and devices?
- How do I ensure that I deliver a consistent proposition yet offer relevant products and services?
- Which of my customers are likely to be high value, and where are the true growth opportunities?
- Where is the headroom in my current customer base?

“A flexible CMS will provide a business with technical efficiency by making content and purchasing workflows more agile”

Unlike traditional multichannel marketing where campaign assets and content are managed as separate entities, cross-channel content management looks to centralise the approach. The most important consideration here is to bring the management of content into a single environment where marketers can create, edit and proof content, as well as manage business rules for customer interactions across one or multiple channels to ensure on brand and consistent product proposition delivery. In essence this allows marketers to focus less on the logistics required to deliver the correct content and more on creating relevant content experiences for targeted customers.

4.3 Utilising a flexible CMS

At its most basic level web content management provides a business with the authoring tools to allow users with little knowledge of web programming languages to create and manage website content with relative ease. A CMS is the cornerstone of virtually all B2C ecommerce platforms. Associated technical and process benefits are widely understood and are directly transferable to the B2B market.

Typical benefits of a CMS include:

- Administration: a CMS is specifically designed to enable non-technical resource to administer and develop website content.
- Publishing workflow: the option to publish content instantly as well as being able to prepare content to publish for a specific date, e.g. new offers, sales, marketing campaigns and PR.
- Content creation: editing, maintaining and extending content when needed as well as making content changes live on your website quickly.
- Ecommerce integration: by integrating content and commerce on the same site, businesses can leverage the way users interact with specific content and products to drive conversions and sales. This enables businesses to deploy targeted content based on purchasing history and viewing trends and is mutually beneficial for sales and marketing units.
- Collaboration: by creating different users and user groups, businesses can control their publication calendar by assigning certain privileges to each. For example, one group of users could be granted the authority to create new pages and edit content in specific categories of your website, while another group might only be able to proofread and edit pages.

A flexible CMS will provide a business with technical efficiency by making content and purchasing workflows more agile and also has the commercial flexibility to wrap itself around complex product offerings as well as being able to adapt to a diverse range of business models.

Above all, web content management solutions need to provide B2B marketers with the full spectrum of integrated digital marketing capabilities that will enable them to control and optimise the customer engagement strategy.

4.4 Ensuring brand consistency

A key attribute to effective communication is consistency of content. As an organisation's online presence grows a primary challenge is not only providing appealing and accessible content, but also ensuring every bit of content delivered to a customer contributes a comprehensive, cohesive, and well-coordinated picture of the organisation. Coordination of content across landing pages, microsites, internal and external websites is important, not only because this helps to draw the customer to the point of actual transaction, but also for its key role in maintaining brand consistency.

4.5 Email marketing

While email is an established and well-used B2B marketing channel, it remains highly versatile and is one of the most effective channels for customer engagement and acquisition. However, the creation of engaging campaign content with a compelling call-to-action is only one part of the formula and a successful web content management strategy needs to have the following key capabilities, accessible within a single integrated environment.

- Segmentation: successful customer targeting depends on the ability of the marketer to segment customer data and profile key attributes that enable them to tailor messaging and content. It is essential that customer data

“Proactively engaging and interacting with prospects via personalised content is paramount to the lead nurturing process”

is directly integrated into the content management environment and is easily accessible, avoiding excessive manipulation or customisation.
- Personalisation: proactively engaging and interacting with prospects via personalised content is paramount to the lead nurturing process and is the key ingredient to moving a customer's buying cycle. Yet personalised content should not come at the expense of efficiency and any customised content needs to be easy to deploy and administer and provide for learnings to be easily transferred to content campaigns.
- Split testing: being able to determine which messages are most effective for which customers is essential to driving conversions and increasing campaign success. Integrated split testing capabilities provide the framework for marketers to optimise campaign content, subject lines and product messaging.

4.6 Social media channel integration

To support effective social engagement, web content management needs to consider social profile management capabilities. Any solution needs to have the capability to integrate with social media networks, such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as the ability to deal with both anonymous and registered users. An appropriate CMS will provide access to social media metrics and ratings functionalities, have the ability to enable commenting on editorial content as well as support for threaded discussions, and the facility to support social community members with sharing and rich media uploads. Solutions should also provide for content moderation workflow, i.e. demonstrate tools and processes that allows marketers to manage behaviour as well as set community standards and rules.

4.7 Cross-device content management

Not only does the content creation and the augmentation process need to support multiple channels seamlessly it also needs to accommodate a broad range of content contributors and sources and have the capability to adapt to an ever-increasing range of devices and platforms.

The goal for businesses is to create a content experience that allows users to engage seamlessly with all the traditional ecommerce actions such as browsing an online store and conducting side-by-side product comparisons. In addition, this experience needs to ensure reception of marketing messages, promotion codes, accessibility of store location information and inventories and, of course, conversions. From a usability perspective this means content is required to be responsive and optimised for multidevice accessibility for maximum reach within a business customer base.

Developing a successful ecommerce multidevice content strategy is, however, much more than just harnessing a content management process that provides for best practice response design. It is about ensuring you have the capability to define who your target customers are, understand what type of device they use and what kind of product content they consume.

Key considerations for a marketer when developing a multidevice ecommerce content strategy are:
- Why are visitors coming to your website?
- What are they trying to accomplish?
- Do visitor goals vary based on device?
- Is your audience device agnostic? I.e. as a business do you craft one experience and adapt for all devices.
- Is your audience device specific? I.e. as a business do you craft a unique experience customised for specific devices.

4.8 Content management automation

Not only does web content management need to provide for customer segmentation and campaign management, it also needs to provide inbuilt content and marketing automation capabilities which marketers can leverage for workflow management. This enables businesses to focus on what counts by eliminating repetitive tasks and streamlining efforts as well as being able to leverage integrated customer data and insights to ensure key campaigns are fully optimised.

“Personalising a brand and creating a persona with which customers can have a one-to-one experience is key”

As an example, let's consider content management and automation in relation to email marketing:

- Tell you who receives, opens, reads and clicks your email marketing messages.
- Allow you to easily search, segment and organise your email lists based on demographics, past behaviours and custom fields you create.
- Define specific types of conversion goals and engagement processes, i.e. sales or other actions such as download or information request.
- Tie into any split testing capabilities, i.e. test subject lines, content headlines or different types of conversion call-to-actions.
- Have both the technology and experience necessary to increase the likelihood that your email messages are targeted to the correct customer base.

Automation attempts to convert prospects through more targeted efforts, such as sending progressively more relevant communications or even presenting custom content web pages when the prospect returns to the website. This helps to guide the prospect through the stages of the buying process and provides better insight into where they stand within that process.

4.9 CMS and CRM Systems

As well as streamlining market efforts, content management processes need to integrate tightly with Salesforce automation and other CRM tools. However, careful consideration needs to be given to how content management is fed into the sales or CRM process. The primary objective here is to allow the business to use data to segment and personalise campaigns, as well as provide the sales team with insights into how their prospects engaged with those campaigns and what type of content, messages and engagement action they were most receptive to. With this information, a sales representative can have productive conversations with the prospect and increase the likelihood of moving the prospect through the buying process.

4.10 Balancing automation and engagement

While automated solutions provide efficiencies, it is important to find an optimal balance between content automation and genuine content engagement and conversation, especially in relation to social media. Social media presents B2B operators with an opportunity to gain exposure to their customer base but it also comes with an inherent risk of negative exposure. This risk hinges on the ability of brands to engage with their audience not only in a creative manner but also in a genuine way with a human face or persona rather than a 'fake' personal presence.

Personalising a brand and creating a persona that customers can have a one-to-one experience with is key to maintaining goodwill among users who wish to interact with your brand.

Finding your optimal balance between automation and conversation may take some time. Pay close attention to how your audience reacts to both your automated and manual actions on individual social networks. Use these reactions as feedback and make adjustments to your mix.

The key considerations for finding this balance are:

- Don't automate direct messages on your social platforms.
- Don't schedule posts too far ahead.
- Don't forget to check the timing and appropriateness of your posts.
- Don't forget to make room for ad hoc and spontaneous updates.
- Don't distribute content you haven't approved.
- Don't treat updates the same way on all social networks.

4.11 Product information and catalogue management

While B2B ecommerce operators must address complex business requirements, customers are in essence looking for a B2C-style product content environment that provides recommendations, product faceted navigation and sophisticated search as well as related products and personalised offers based on the purchase history. A B2B product management environment needs to enable the marketing team to perform essential merchandising activities such as editing product attributes and site content, and adding or removing catalogue items without assistance from developers. It is important to extend

“It is important to extend merchandising capabilities beyond basic product information”

merchandising capabilities beyond basic product information but look to be flexible enough, react to visitor activity and adopt merchant-defined actions that will enhance the customer experience such as:

- Personalising the products and content that interest the customer.
- Delivering targeted promotions to the right customer at the right time within the sales cycle.
- Ensuring product information is correctly displayed for the customer based on the type of device they are using.
- Delivering personalised search results, including highly relevant cross-sell and up-sell offers.
- Limiting irrelevant results or empty search result pages by redirecting customers to relevant category pages.
- Providing tools such as product recommendations and knowledge management capabilities to ensure the customer is making the right buying decision.
- Displaying relevant, featured products along with the search results.
- Linking directly from the search results to the customer's shopping cart.
- Observing visitor behaviour and automatically delivering relevant recommendations based on factors such as demographics, buying history or the behaviour of other visitors.

4.12 Summary

Ecommerce web content management needs to be fully integrated into all the key aspects of an operator's ecommerce function with a particular emphasis on campaign development and marketing. It needs to have the capability to supply and transfer data directly into CRM solutions and enhance the account management process.

The most important instructions for successful content management can be summarised as follows:

- Enable cross-channel optimisation to provide a flexible, personalised service.
- Deliver a consistent brand experience across channels.
- Create an experience optimised for a mobile audience.
- Deliver a rich customer product experience that allows for personalised content targeting.
- Provide for dynamic merchandising and precision marketing.
- Automate key marketing and content management workflows, where appropriate.
- Present targeted offers and customised promotions.
- Enhance the customer experience with search capabilities.

More than just online payments

5



MIKE NI
CEO
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Companies buy online like consumers, so treat them that way. Forrester reported that in the US alone, B2B ecommerce would be a $529 billion market by the end of 2013 – twice the size of the $252 billion US B2C ecommerce market. Gartner reported 70 per cent of ecommerce will shift from B2C or B2B models to focus more on the customer experience.

The sales of digital goods and services have been disrupted by a convergence of new technologies and trends – cloud, mobile, consumerism of IT, access to information – which empower demanding B2C and B2B buyers, creating an urgent need for a new sales approach focused around the individual.

Avangate calls this shift 'B2i' or business-to-individual. B2i sales must embrace and empower the experience – the explosion of touchpoints that happen both during and after the purchase process; understand that the traditional funnel is dead; satisfy shifting buyer demand for disruptive models such as trials, freemiums, and subscriptions; and reach new markets and micro-verticals.

5.1 The 'uberisation' effect makes payments hot again

Until now, the buyer-to-seller relationship has mostly been conducted on a one-to-one basis, with the seller handling everything, including the processing of payments. 'Uberisation' introduces a new factor into the equation – one whose sole function is to handle the payment part of the transaction. By removing payments from the conversation, 'uberisation' leaves the seller free to focus completely on servicing the individual buyer. With the emphasis now on the experience and ongoing relationship – and not the transaction – the seller can concentrate on long-term strategies like adding new features and services in order to drive sustained revenue streams.

The 'uberisation' effect is not just limited to certain companies. Every industry which provides services to consumers and businesses can benefit from this frictionless buying experience, which requires the processing and managing of online payments and once considered a commodity – the ability to accept online payments – is now the most integral piece of your growing business.

The demand for services has renewed momentum within the payments industry. Case in point is the recent eye-popping $800 million acquisition of Braintree by PayPal. That's not to mention the skyrocketing valuations of new arrivals like Stripe, which just received $120 million in funding and now has a valuation of over $1 billion.

The combining factors of social, mobile and cloud technologies have created the foundation for widespread innovation in payments. Innovations in online and mobile payments are being led largely by consumer solutions. PayPal made it easy to send money to friends and family or to pay for that much wanted item on eBay. Square made it easy to exchange money with anyone, taking the friction and infrastructure out of payments for consumers and businesses, making credit and mobile payments easy and affordable. Stripe, perhaps the most business-oriented of the newer payments solutions, offers APIs to help businesses accept payments and/or tap into new payment methods.

Pure payment providers like PayPal, Braintree, Square and Stripe do one thing well – provide the ability to take and process payments in a variety of ways – but is that enough?

Payments are a part of the commerce engine, but without all the components of a full customer centric solution, companies often find themselves hitting the payments wall.

5.2 Hitting the payments wall

Payment solutions are popular and ubiquitous because they are (relatively) easy to implement. With growth comes complexity and the need to scale smartly to meet increasing operational and business customer demands. You can scale payments to keep up with demand, but if you leave out commerce – which most payment processors

“Companies need to optimise offers for each prospective buyer”

don't consider – you're most likely going to leave behind other essential business functions like marketing, back-office operations, distribution and customer management.

The typical payment processor will only be able to provide coverage for a single country or region or limited number of payment methods. If your plans or your customers take you beyond that, you'll need to source and sign a processor for every region or country for which you intend to sell. The addition of every new processor means a new development project to integrate it, and more time and resources spent to maintain it.

The final consequence of this is lost time and resources – to contract management, to the API development necessary to integrate multiple payment processors, to operation debugging and to staffing and training to ensure ongoing maintenance. The effect of all this time spent to shore up payments, paradoxically, is the loss of the core business focus and momentum that put you in the position to expand payments in the first place.

The bottom line is that future growth is now being inhibited by inflexibility and inability to scale. To avoid hitting the payments wall and achieve true customer-centric commerce, ask yourself:

- Are you invoicing your clients correctly, can you verify their VAT number in real time, are you prepared for multi-state taxation, or to collect internationally?
- Can you accept POs or deal with purchasing departments sometimes wanting to pay offline?
- How are you supporting chargebacks? There is a strict limit on chargebacks that most card networks such as Visa and MasterCard will tolerate – about one per cent. Anything more and the business risks getting banned permanently from these networks.
- What about refunds? Do you have a money-back guarantee? If so, if your call centres can't scale to meet the volume, the negative social response you receive may destroy your brand.
- Is mobile part of the plan? The day where you could get away without a mobile cart and payment strategy are long gone. If you can't handle mobile, take 20 per cent off whatever revenue you expected, and move on.
- Can you handle subscriptions? Subscriptions are the best way to lock-in long-term revenue, but if you are unable to support renewals and recurring bills, you're going to have to table them until you can.
- What about risk and anti-fraud? The strength or weakness of the filters you use to detect risk and fraud have a direct correlation on chargeback rate. How do you know if yours are calibrated correctly?
- What about your back-office operations? If you're selling internationally, payments are inevitably going to involve more than one processor. This means somehow reconciling them all with financial applications and accounting for foreign exchange fluctuations.
- Cart abandonment: Are you capturing cart abandonments and utilising retargeting strategies – follow-up marketing messages, integrated emails and discount offers – to encourage conversions?

Additionally, do you offer:

- Dunning management: Do you have the capability to automatically send and collect recurring invoices?
- Automated renewals: Can you set your customers on an automatically recurring revenue plan and store credit cards for the most frictionless experience?
- Grace periods: Can you set grace periods for subscriptions to give a chance for customers to self-renew, thereby reducing support costs?
- Customer notifications: Can a series of notifications be set up that will periodically greet the customer – seven days in advance, one day in advance, on the day of – to ensure that this trickle feed will ensure churn control?
- Coupons and discounts: Is there a way to integrate coupons and discounting to entice renewals?
- Channel partner renewals: Direct renewals are easy, but can you extend the same renewal offers through VARs, distributors and other channel partners?

Hitting the payments wall exposes the limitations of traditional payment processors and identifies the need to go beyond payments, which requires a combination of integrated smarter payments, commerce and distribution. Companies can choose to buy these pieces separately or try to build them themselves. Whatever the choice, it almost invariably requires an additional integration–

“Companies need to optimise offers for each prospective buyer”

layer – all of which requires time and money for R&D, implementation and ongoing maintenance. A third way is to put it all together under a single platform – one that integrates seamlessly with any existing business system – a true customer-centric commerce system.

5.3 Customer-centric commerce

Customer-centric commerce is about aligning all the elements of the customer relationship to meet businesses' needs. This breaks down into three main areas:

- Enabling buyers to transact anywhere, at any touchpoint.
- Introduce new business models and constantly optimise.
- Reach global markets with ease and build a local, personalised relationship.

Strong performance in each of these areas will ensure buyers receive the instant gratification, rapid response and relevant experience they demand, building the foundation for a loyal customer relationship over time.

From app store searches and mobile browsing to self-service customer portals, every point of interaction with the customer represents an opportunity.

Especially in the B2B world, no single model works for every buyer. Because every customer will respond to a different combination of features, product bundles, payment and distribution options, companies need to optimise offers for each prospective buyer. Today, this requires experimentation with 'freemium', trial, and subscription models to identify what appeals most to individual buyers.

And getting to the third point, an increasingly global market requires powerful distribution and processing tools that can distribute products and accept payments in any language, currency and market. These relationships may be established directly with the vendor or by way of trusted channel partners and affiliate networks.

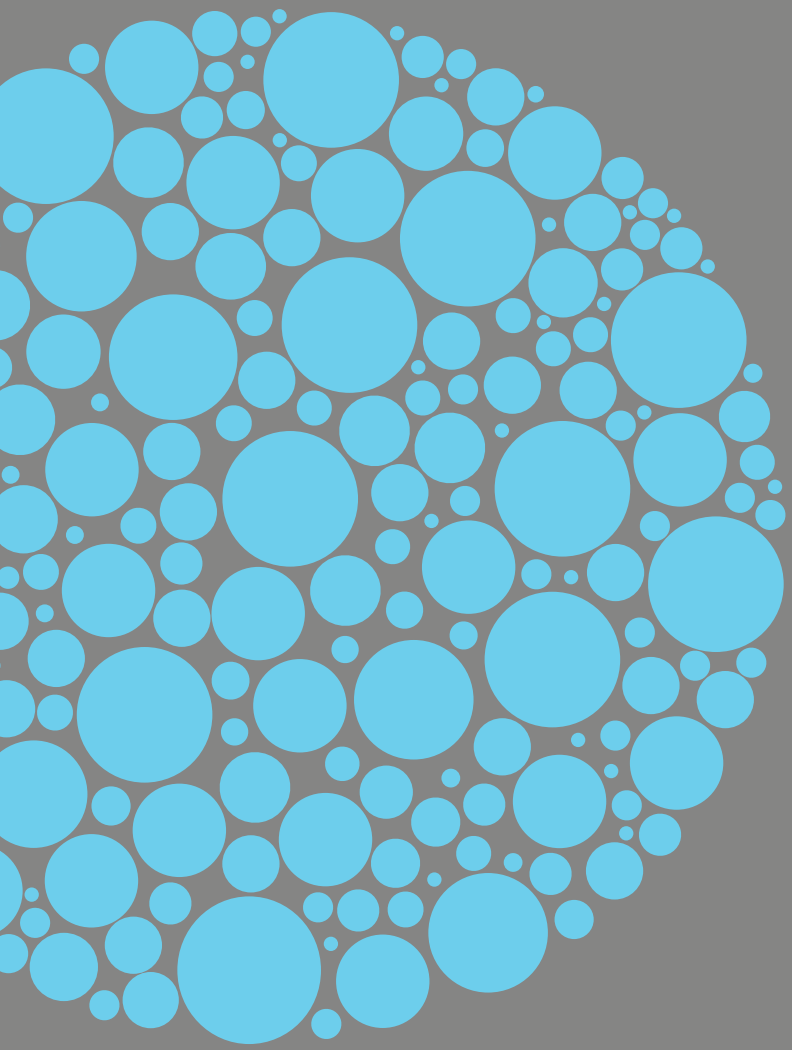
5.4 Five ways to get ready for the future of commerce

Payment platforms are expensive – and companies are spending a lot on them. Avangate research suggests companies spend upwards of 11 per cent of revenue, in addition to their payment provider investment, to cobble together commerce-centric functionality such as marketing tools, financial and back office operations and international expansion.

To successfully sell digital goods and services to a global audience, companies need a combination of smarter payments, customer-centric commerce and flexible distribution methods.

Get ready for the future. Use these five ways to go beyond payments to commerce and turn your online business into an online success.

1. Incorporate touchpoints – companies need to incorporate every customer touchpoint, from the first website click to the last sales call, into a customer-centric commerce perspective.
2. Create a unified perspective – it should be possible for professionals to attain a unified perspective on the customer experience from their commerce system. Only by looking at all the factors can companies achieve the right perspective.
3. Enable flexibility – companies need to be flexible and accommodate any changes customers want to make in their commerce experience – product, pricing, subscription duration, personalisation and more.
4. Personalise elements of the experience – to be truly customer-centric, commerce needs to get personal, with more than personalised payment methods. Regionally specific experiences, personalised offers and custom communications go a long way toward creating a great commerce experience.
5. Keep the customer at the centre of your vision – trends in technology and shifts in markets require a shift to customer-centric commerce – that's certain. What's uncertain is how companies will deal with this need. Companies need to automate their ability to transact at any touchpoint, optimise business models and reach global markets faster and more intelligently than ever before – all while retaining the ability to focus on their core business. Companies need to go beyond payments, into commerce and not only meet the needs of their audiences but also to meet the needs of their business.





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