WUNDERMAN THOMPSON

Adobe

B2B Ecommerce Benchmarking Report

A May 2020 update, encompassing a COVID-19 perspective.

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Introduction

Change is the only constant...
Never has this been so abundantly clear and universally felt.

Since Wunderman Thompson Commerce began publishing its B2B ECommerce Benchmarking Report five years ago, we've seen a significant shift in the way manufacturers, wholesalers, and distributors approach their digital commerce channels. Most of it for the better.

Businesses across large swathes of the industry have changed their focus, their strategies, and most importantly their mindsets. Many are striving to become digital-first, starting at the organisational level. And yet, many other B2B companies have yet to substantively address their digital shortcomings for a variety of reasons – none of them compelling.

In the early months of 2020, we have experienced a push towards digital transformation in commerce unlike anything that has gone before – the global COVID-19 outbreak. The pandemic is, of course, first and foremost a human tragedy and a social emergency that may well define our times. Part of that emergency is economic in nature – as people are isolated and lockdowns are enforced across the globe, places of business have been shut down, workers have been sent home, normal trading practices have been severely disrupted.

And yet there is little question of shutting down commerce and industry completely. For a start, there is still a very real need to keep production lines and supply chains running for 'essential items' – everything from food to household items, medical and industrial supplies to personal care products – to get people through the crisis. There is also recognition of the economic imperative for keeping as many businesses trading and people working as possible.

B2B companies that have been slow on the uptake with digital operations are now finding they have little choice but to accelerate. With their staff working from home, with face-to-face sales suspended, with production and supply chain operations obliged to follow guidelines on social distancing and hygiene, eCommerce has suddenly become critical to keeping the wheels of industry turning.

Based on a survey of merchant websites representing wholesalers, distributors, and brand manufacturers undertaken before the COVID-19 outbreak, this report has been updated by Wunderman Thompson Commerce to include new analysis of the findings in the wake of the pandemic. It takes a look at the features, functions and tactics merchants are using in their digital channels, outlining how leaders are adopting increasingly sophisticated eCommerce experiences which graft elements of B2C eCommerce (usability, transparency) onto the more complex aspects of B2B buyer journeys.

With resources at a premium across organisations, this report will serve as a tool to inform future strategy and investment decisions. Adopting best practices won't automatically lead to rapid acceleration and advancement during COVID-19, but they can help prevent organisations from stalling.



MICHAEL PLIMSOLL
Industry Marketing Director
Adobe



Organisational Data

BRAND, RETAILER, OR BOTH?

Manufacturer	34%
Distributor/Wholesaler	29%
Both	37%

2017

Manufacturer	41%
Distributor/Wholesaler	28%
Both	31%

2016

Manufacturer	41%
Distributor/Wholesaler	28.2%
Both	30.8%

Analysis: As in our previous benchmarking reports, we surveyed a broad mix of B2B companies. We characterise brands as manufacturers of their own products, selling in a B2B capacity. Retailers do not sell D2C, but rather act as a distributor for brands. For instance, Wolseley is a B2B retailer and sells thousands of B2B brands, such as Daikin and Bosch.

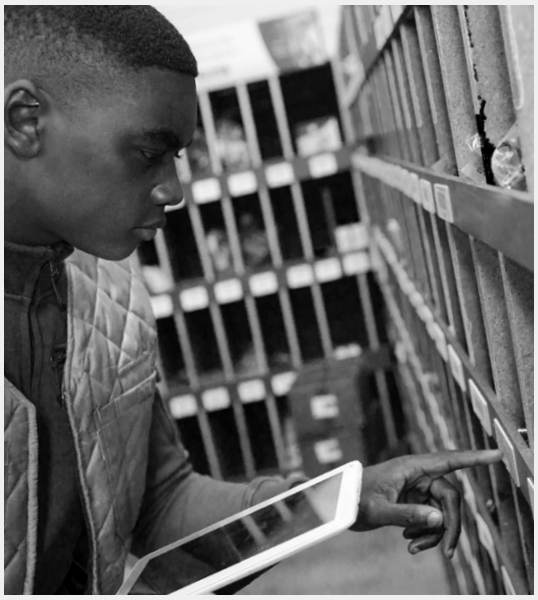
We are also noticing more brand manufacturers allowing for cross-pollination of products from partners and dealers. For example, medical device manufacturer SPS Co. sells their own product lines alongside products from hundreds of suppliers. This cross-pollination can lead to increased visibility but also serves to increase competition.

> **As of 2019, about 65% of distributors and wholesalers (271,310 of 411,007) have at least one eCommerce site, log-in portal, or both.**
>
> – *B2BecNews*

PHYSICAL LOCATIONS

Point-of-Sale Locations

Yes	**30.6%**
No	**69.4%**



Analysis: We categorise physical locations as storefronts that facilitate actual B2B point-of-sale transactions. Manufacturing facilities and corporate offices are excluded.

At present, very few B2B manufacturers are operating physical storefronts. The majority of surveyed B2B businesses selling direct are effectively operating as Etailers. For many product categories, it's simpler and more cost-effective to order and facilitate delivery online than to pick up in-store. Through the lens of the COVID-19 outbreak, of course, this is an advantage and means the majority of B2B sales operations should be in a relatively sound position to continue through the crisis, depending on service levels of their Etailers.

Yet in certain sectors and categories, legacy sales channels persist, particularly entrenched field sales operations, and also show limited innovation in selling models. The temporary halt on face-to-face sales should act as a spur to innovation.

There is nothing to say that manufacturers having physical point-of-sale locations per se is a negative, as long as it is part of a balanced channel approach. For example, as the marketplace concept continues to gain traction, there will be opportunities for early adopters to bridge the online-offline divide and offer hybrid selling environments, with purchase through a third-party site, but fulfilment through the brand, either via delivery or in person at a dedicated collection point. This is comparable to what we're seeing in the consumer space (think 'click and collect' and online-to-offline) but is not something that will progress further until after the COVID-19 pandemic.

PHYSICAL LOCATIONS

Distributor Shipping

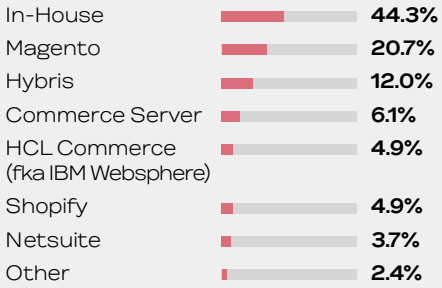
Yes	**22.4%**
No	**77.6%**

Analysis: This relates to the stat above. Order pickup at physical locations is still an effective strategy to merge the online-offline experience. As we've seen with Amazon's forays into bricks-and-mortar retail in the US – Amazon Books, Amazon 4-Star, Amazon Go, Whole Foods – they understand that online-only is not enough to deliver a complete customer experience. (Question: How long until the first Amazon Business outlet opens?)

The future of commerce is blended, catering to customer demands for multichannel experiences. B2B companies with publicly accessible locations (e.g. storefronts, service centres, distribution centres) should seize the opportunity to nurture customers across their journeys by offering customer service, support, shipping and returns at physical locations.

Digital Commerce Offerings

ECOMMERCE PLATFORM



Analysis: The shift from in-house to commercial eCommerce platforms is accelerating, but still a work in progress. Since conducting our first benchmarking report three years ago, the number of B2B sites operating on in-house commerce platforms has declined by over 30%. While in-house platforms still account for the largest single percentage, the trendline seems to point to two things:

1. Commercial enterprise eCommerce platform functionality has advanced considerably to account for complex B2B use cases.

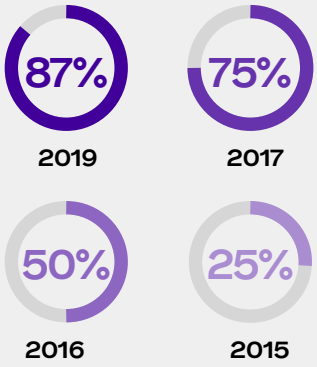
2. It is difficult for companies to uncouple from the technical debt accumulated after years on a homegrown system.

We've reached an inflection point where traditionally laggard B2B digital transformation meets increasing market expectations for streamlined digital experiences. Still, the shift away from custom platforms will continue to be an ongoing process. While commercial eCommerce platforms can lower costs for development, deployment, maintenance, and ongoing enhancements in many instances, winning organisational support for these large-scale undertakings is still a challenge for many companies.

COVID-19 may well shake more B2B companies out of their reluctance to migrate to commercial eCommerce platforms. Spikes in digital traffic, the need to pivot operations quickly towards new areas, the competitive incentive to add innovative new features and experiences in order to stop customers looking for alternative online options now they are more reliant on digital forever is likely to test out just how agile and scalable proprietary in-house platforms are.

It will also be interesting to see how tech trends such as headless commerce and microservices – which represent more agile, responsive approaches to eCommerce platform architecture – play out in the wake of COVID-19. Many commercial eCommerce platforms, such as Magento 2, already support microservices and headless build structures. So the view is that, if you run one of these, your eCommerce operations you may be better placed to react with more dynamism and flexibility to the challenges right now and in the future.

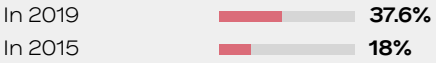
RESPONSIVE DESIGN



Analysis: In 2016, Google introduced the concept of mobile-first indexing, which put the responsive design imperative into high gear. In light of mobile traffic volume surpassing desktop traffic in 2017, the mobile-first responsive experience took precedence when Google officially announced the index shift in March 2018 – the year in which mobile captured 40% of all transactions, according to research from Adobe. Fast forward three years, and responsive design has increased B2B penetration by nearly 40%.

While responsive design may now be regarded as an entry-level requirement, it lacks the capability to deliver the types of personalised, relevant experiences that will define digital in years to come.

MOBILE APPS



Analysis: The number of B2B companies releasing mobile apps has doubled over the last four years. To service end-user needs, native apps can offer functional flexibility for B2B companies. As such, we note that B2B mobile apps tend to serve as value-added tools designed to fulfil a specific need.

For example, for the UK's largest upholsterer "DFS" we developed a mobile app for service managers and delivery staff, improving data and helping reduce costs. In the US, Heritage Parts®, an OEM parts distributor, created a mobile app specifically designed for service technicians in the field, including an offline mode. Gates Corporation, a leading fluid power and power transmission manufacturer, offers mobile apps for common power transmission calculations, crimp specifications for hydraulic applications, and automotive aftermarket parts search functionality by vehicle model and VIN number for installers working in the shop.

The sudden incentive created by COVID-19 to at least temporarily shift the majority of commercial operations to digital will certainly give B2B operators reason to look again at the channels available for maintaining contact with their customers, suppliers and channel partners. Mobile apps are worth further consideration. In the age of convenience-oriented B2B experiences, technology must be less about "cool" features and more about how brands can leverage digital tools to take the most frictionless path to task completion. Native apps can clearly service this purpose, but are not without their challenges. Added development and governance costs and difficulties in driving app adoption and repeat usage have contributed to limiting the number of companies leveraging this digital channel.

Progressive Web Apps

The largely untapped opportunity in our mobile-first world is progressive web apps (PWAs), which provide a native app-like experience within a web-based framework. PWAs enable faster load times, offline operation, and increased functional capabilities without the hurdles related to native apps. We've seen great strides in PWA-adoption around the world and are highly optimistic about their future; we believe it's only a matter of time before mobile apps and responsive design experiences as we know them are rendered obsolete. Again, COVID-19 could well be the trigger that results in PWAs becoming much more widely adopted by B2B companies. Cheaper to develop than native apps, they nonetheless make it possible to deliver a faithful reproduction of your entire eCommerce platform on any type of device, and moreover support functionality even at low internet speeds, or when not connected at all. B2B buyers working from home can still access your full product catalogue and make purchases even when their home broadband isn't playing ball. Similarly, your own people, procurement and account managers, could use a PWA to manage contracts and orders wherever they happen to be, online or off.

Trending Towards Transparency:

Navigating Restricted Access Requirements

ACCOUNT REGISTRATION & ACCOUNT TYPES

Instant	73.8%
Curated	26.2%

Analysis: Year-over-year, fewer sites have curated account registration systems (that require site owner approval) in place, with instant account registration up from 72% in 2017. Prospective customers are more empowered than ever to take purchases to competitors in the face of experience friction, leading B2B sites with access-restriction requirements to find new ways to maintain control over certain products, prices, and information.

Over a third of B2B companies are leveraging account hierarchies and account types to present customer-specific content, enabling more personalised experiences. This can be done without damaging organic SEO or brand engagement. Based on user sign-in or account hierarchies:

- Filter access at various levels of the site experience, including restricted products, product categories, or account-specific CMS pages.
- Control site functionality, including add to cart, Request a Quote, or check-out based on user role.
- Leverage customer-focused UX to guide users to account registration during shopping or prior to checkout.

In the absence of face-to-face service and sales operations through the COVID-19 crisis, businesses are seeing even greater value in personalising digital journeys in order to tie in customer loyalty.

PRICES PRIOR TO LOG-IN

2019

Show Pricing Prior	74.4%
Do Not Show	25.6%

2017

Show Pricing Prior	71.8%
Do Not Show	28.6%

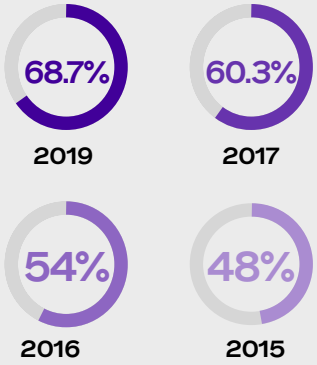
Analysis: Showing pricing prior to log-in has increased slightly from 71.8% in 2017. We predict this will only increase as B2B buyers increasingly demand transparency to inform pre-purchase exploration and purchase decisions. Price visibility, or lack thereof, is also a factor in SEO rankings.

For sellers with price restrictions or customer-specific pricing, consider workarounds that increase communication and transparency by displaying non-universal pricing tiers or "prices start at" / "login to see your price" messaging. Encouraging customers to reach out to sales, engage in live chat, or to create an account can also be effective. With the physical distance between brand and customer imposed by the COVID-19 outbreak, any opportunity to encourage direct communication should be taken.

Drive purchase through product:

Customer-Focused Sales Enablement

CROSS-SELLING & UPSELLING



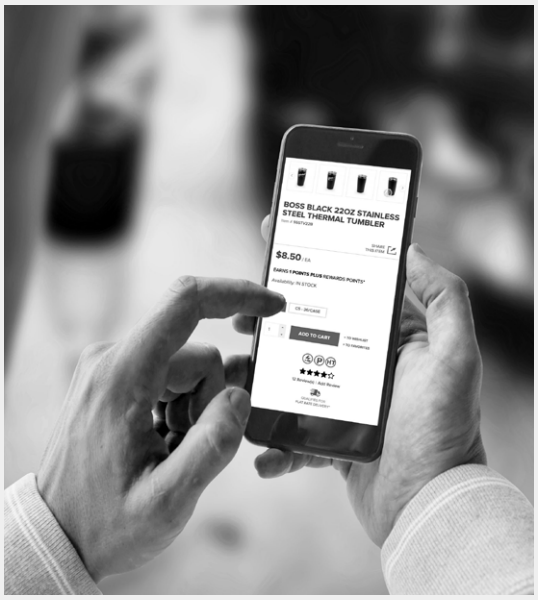
Analysis: We've seen an almost 50% increase in B2B merchants adopting B2C merchandising strategies, since our first benchmarking report, and it's no surprise why. Customer acquisition costs are at an all-time high. Companies that are able to increase sales volume and frequency among existing customers reap the benefits of cost-effective, efficient, and sustainable success, with Forrester Research estimating that cross- and upsells are responsible for anywhere between 10% – 30% of eCommerce revenue.

Coupled with increasing customer demand for one-to-one sales experiences, we predict that cross-selling and upselling will not only continue to permeate B2B commerce strategies, but businesses that leverage CRM and data-driven predictive analytics to deliver dynamic, personalised product recommendations will yield higher conversion rates and AOV.

We have already noted how finding ways to personalise the digital journey will help to replace some of the value lost from the suspension of face-to-face sales operations during the COVID-19 outbreak. As well as guarding against customer churn, using digital merchandising strategies to upsell and cross-sell will also help to mitigate any loss of revenue caused by the disruption.

RATINGS & REVIEWS

2019	**40.5%**
2017	**39.7%**



Analysis: In the age of the customer, user-generated content (UGC) and peer influence are important factors in driving purchase. Product ratings and reviews have been shown to increase B2B buyer purchase intent, while boosting organic SEO through UGC, yet less than half of B2B digital businesses use them.

It's important to note that B2B customers generally produce fewer product ratings and reviews than their B2C counterparts. To drive adoption and optimal business value, B2B businesses should consider:

- Enable anonymous (but verified) reviews to mitigate customer fears of competitor visibility
- Embed opportunities to submit reviews within product pages and follow up communications
- Incentivise customers by incorporating reviews into Rewards programmes
- Leverage prompted review templates, such as "what problem does this product solve for you?" or "how did this product drive business value?"
- Syndicate ratings and reviews to supplier and manufacturer partners to increase the total number of ratings across the channel.

One thing that will be interesting to monitor is whether the break in networking events and industry conferences during the COVID-19 outbreak will result in more B2B customers taking to the internet to air their opinions. Trade shows provide a highly valued forum for buyers and customers to learn about available products and services, try them out and share their thoughts and opinions with fellow professionals. In the absence of those opportunities, online ratings and reviews offer one means of maintaining that sense of professional community.

PRODUCT AVAILABILITY & NOTIFICATIONS:

Shows Product Availability:

Yes	**45.3%**
No	**54.7%**

Back-in-Stock Notifications:

Yes	**43.7%**
No	**56.3%**

Analysis: Buyers don't care how companies manage their inventory.

They care that their business partners can deliver the products they need when they need them. We've spoken with multiple B2B companies who fear that showing available inventory provides unwanted intelligence to their competitors. However, what they really need to be scared of is not meeting their customers' expectations!

> **84% of buyers indicated inventory transparency is an important feature.**
>
> *– 2019 B2BecNews Buyer Expectations survey*

Businesses that display real-time product availability on their sites reduce friction within the buying experience. If products are out-of-stock, offer customers a substitute product (when applicable), the estimated availability date, or an opt-in for back-in-stock notifications to help save the sale.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, now is the time for B2B suppliers to really nail down how they communicate product availability. Customers have enough to worry about and are unlikely to forgive orders going unfulfilled because they were not informed that a product was not available. There is a sense of collective responsibility involved with this – everyone is meant to be pulling together, so don't pass supply problems down the line. Clarity in all forms of communication will also help customers who are buying digitally for the first time acclimatise.

QUICK ORDER & REORDER:

Quick Order/Reorder Functionality:

2019	**53.8%**
2017	**30.8%**

CSV/Punch Out Ordering:

Yes	**36%**

Quick Order Fulfilment Messaging:

Yes	**51.4%**

Analysis: B2B commerce is all about efficiency, regardless of the purchase channel. According to Forrester (2018), 70% of B2B buyers reported that buying from a website is more convenient than buying from a sales rep, and low-consideration, high-frequency purchases are most rapidly shifting online.

To meet this demand, we've seen a corresponding increase in quick order (add to cart directly by product name or SKU) and reorder (re-purchase directly from order history) functionality, complemented by fast order fulfilment and shipping messaging to promote purchase within catalogue, checkout, and global banner experience elements.

Ordering via .csv file uploads is on the decline, expected to be replaced by more intuitive quick order experiences. PunchOut catalogues, which connect a customer's preferred procurement system seamlessly to the B2B eCommerce platform, are still useful for high-volume buyers with complex ordering requirements. The time and effort required to enable highly tailored punch-out purchasing processes are significant, but the long-term relationships this functionality fosters can be well worth the investment.

For the reasons outlined above under product availability, removing as much friction from purchasing journeys as possible should stand out as a priority during the COVID-19 crisis, alongside personalisation and strong communication. When times are tough, customers look for convenience as well as reliability. Introducing seamless ordering and reordering options now will help to boost customer satisfaction and loyalty long term.

Connected Customer Care:

Leverage the Site Experience to Deliver Digital Self-Service

FILTERED SEARCH

Yes	85.9%
No	14.1%

Analysis: Most B2B buyers are shopping with a specific product and application in mind. To navigate complex manufacturers catalogues, often with very similar SKUs, buyers are turning to search. (This mirrors consumer behaviour on Amazon where 63% of product discovery is by search, according to the Future Shopper 2020 research.) Filtered search makes it easy to find the right product, to the right specifications, to simplify product discovery and conversion.

In a world where Artificial Intelligence and Search are rapidly converging, we expect to see B2B companies invest in search technologies that serve dynamic results and faceted categories for each request. Through a combination of API integration, custom code, and machine learning, B2B companies have the opportunity to optimise result relevance in real-time, based on defined merchandising priorities, user behaviour data, and query parsing.

LIVECHAT

in 2019	47.6%
in 2017	28.2%
in 2016	44.9%

PASSIVE 80%	ACTIVE 20%
HUMAN 85.3%	BOT 14.7%

Analysis: Livechat has proven to be an effective way to provide real-time, one-to-one assistance to customers. It is also quite costly for organisations and difficult to scale, which is why industry adoption of this functionality has barely budged over the four years we've tracked this.

Chatbots were touted as the answer to enable cost-effective, infinitely scalable customer service. The reality, however, is that chatbots, in their current form, can rob brands of valuable human-to-human interactions, leaving them often better suited for simple use cases like FAQs. The most successful implementations to date involve hybrid implementations where the chatbot hands off the customer interaction to a customer service agent for more complex needs.

There are reasons to expect the response to COVID-19 to accelerate adoption of live chat platforms and chatbots in the B2B sphere. In truth, most customer service is handled remotely nowadays anyway, either via the telephone or some form of digital platform. But when your commercial teams can't pay a visit to a client to check everything is ok with a new product or provide some training for onboarding, an alternative needs to be found. Video chat and collaboration platforms like Slack or Google Hangouts are ideal for this purpose.

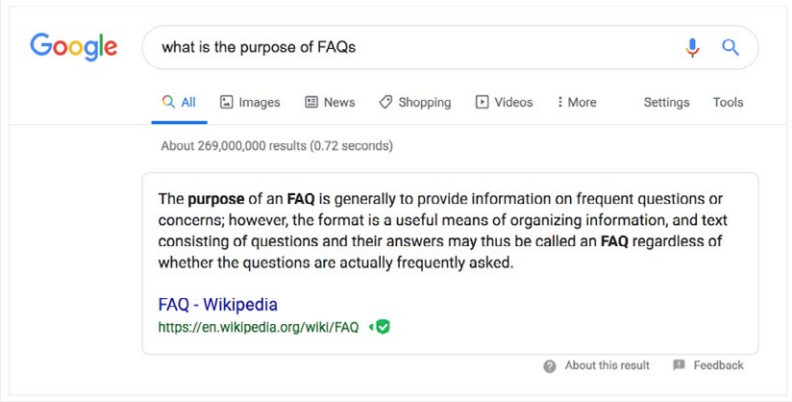
At the same time, with the majority of people working remotely all of a sudden, you might find you get a sudden spike in online queries and requests as people try to juggle working at home with looking after children and so on. Rather than risking less-than-prompt responses because you don't have enough staff to deal with the hike in traffic, chatbots can help by filtering out and dealing with the most straightforward queries, or at least advising customers that there may be a delay dealing with their query, taking details and booking in a call back.

FAQS

Yes	**67.8%**
No	**32.2%**

Analysis: FAQs are a digital service mainstay. We're seeing a resurgence, which is in no small part due to the rise in voice search, mobile self-service expectations, and personal/home assistants.

FAQs effectively drive organic SEO, particularly with appearance in pre-results (Google Snippets). Google rolled out "Near Match" snippets in 2018 to serve users answer snippets that aren't the exact match, but close enough to provide the information they're searching for. This increases brand feature opportunity, so long as FAQ content aligns with customer search queries, needs, and channel goals.



Near Match Snippet - source: Google

Best Practice

- Conduct frequent keyword research to adapt question format to popular customer search terms and phrases.
- Ensure answers align to channel goals to steward customers to completion. Commerce-enabled B2B sites, for example, have the goal of driving purchases, so the content needs to provide information that enables effortless purchase decisions. For non-commerce sites with goals to drive site visits, newsletter sign-ups, or brand awareness, FAQ answers may link customers deeper into the site experience to encourage brand exploration and action.
- Keep FAQs aligned to the pathways users follow during goal completion to ensure information is visible.

FAQs are also ideal for keeping your customers up-to-speed with what is happening throughout this period of uncertainty. With widespread disruption to operations and services across the board, customers will want to know if you are still trading, how they can continue to do business with you, what changes they can expect, how you are complying with hygiene and social distancing requirements and so on. As noted above, many B2B companies could find themselves suddenly inundated with customer queries at this time, so a thorough COVID-19 FAQ section on your website will both provide a convenient solution to customers and avoid all of your staffing resources being taken up. As this is a rapidly changing situation, it will be important to keep these FAQ sections regularly updated. Going forward, this could provide a valuable learning opportunity for businesses in the SEO value of keeping their website content fresh.

Content and the Customer Journey

PRODUCT DESCRIPTIONS

Original	**33.7%**
Duplicate	**66.3%**

Analysis: In this context, "original" content means product content is unique to a given site. "Duplicate" content refers to identical product descriptions that appear on multiple (often hundreds) of different eCommerce sites.

SEO is an important traffic source, and having a strong, defensible SEO strategy requires unique, relevant content. Duplicate content, or using the same content on multiple pages of a site or across sites, creates competition between those pages and reduces the likelihood of ranking. More than two thirds of B2B businesses present duplicate content, and it's no secret why. Authoring unique product descriptions for massive catalogues can be time, cost, and labour intensive. That does not mean having unique content isn't beneficial to the business. Far from it!

To most effectively optimise product page SEO value:

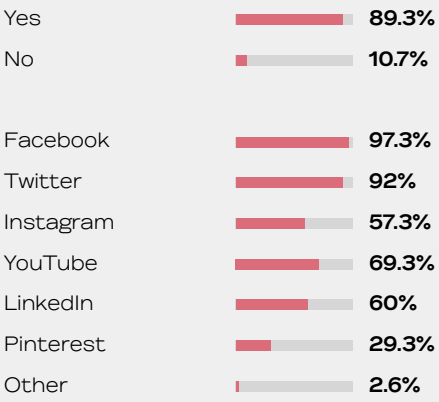
- If using serialised URLs for product variations or duplicate content across sitepages, implement canonical URL tags on the master URL to instruct search engines which URL to index.
- Prioritise writing unique product descriptions for top-selling, highest traffic, highest margin, or highest priority products in phases. Start with the top 1% of products and work down from there.
- For manufacturers, consider creating dual sets of content for top products, one set that is used exclusively on owned channels, and a set that is supplied to distributor and wholesale partners.

In the context of the COVID-19 outbreak, the benefits and indeed necessity of having clear, usable, discoverable unique product content on your site are more obvious than ever. If your company supplies goods that are considered essential or in any way relevant to tackling the crisis, then these items need to be treated as your priority.

As well as looking again at your product descriptions for SEO purposes to ensure customers can find what they are looking for quickly and easily, this is also an opportunity to review the quality of the content in those descriptions, especially in terms of clarity of benefits and authoritative sources to back up your claims. After all, your customers are relying on you to supply products that keep themselves, their staff and customers safe and well.

For all types of goods, B2B businesses should be thinking in terms of making it as easy as possible for customers to switch to your digital channels. That puts an added onus on search – new digital customers may feel daunted by the prospect of looking through an online catalogue, so it is your job to make it as easy as possible for them to find what they are looking for.

SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE



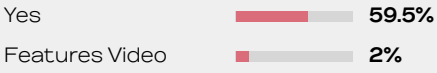
Analysis: When it comes to B2B social media, presence is priority over paid promotion. With a longer sales cycle and larger stakeholder pool for purchase decisions, we see B2B social media channels focus more on brand awareness, employee engagement and recruitment, and relationship building, as opposed to B2C counterparts that leverage social as a sales conversion channel.

There is, however, potential for this to shift as a consequence of the present conditions arising from the COVID-19 outbreak, particularly in terms of how brands and retailers look to fill the void left by the suspension of face-to-face contact. Sales teams might not be able to give presentations in person at the moment, but they can repurpose much the same content as promotional videos or podcasts to share on their chosen channels. That in turn links in to the use of social collaboration platforms like Microsoft Teams and Slack, and teleconferencing tools like Zoom, to host virtual meetings, webinars and conferences, in order to maintain communications with all stakeholders, internal and external.

Many B2B companies, while happy to engage with social media, have been guilty of treating it as a standalone, specialist area. What the COVID-19 experience may do is help businesses see social media for what it really is – another communication channel that should be aligned with broader digital communications strategies and form part of a balanced channel mix.

At the same time, with resources at a premium, companies need to be smart about their social strategies. We are surprised by the number of B2B companies utilising Pinterest given the consumer shopping focus of this social network.

CONTENT / KNOWLEDGE HUB



Analysis: Self-service content is the most scalable form of help that B2B companies can offer their customers. One well-prepared article or explanatory video can help thousands of customers, without service agent intervention. Given the "evergreen" nature of this type of content, it is very cost effective for companies to make investments in this area to broaden the customer experience.

As suggested above, we would expect the proportion of B2B businesses embracing video content to increase as a consequence of COVID-19. Video is a highly flexible medium; it can be used for sales, it can be used for engagement, it can be live-streamed for instant communication, it can be shared across channels – and research consistently shows video is the type of digital content users gravitate towards above all others. Video also provides a foundation for brands to experiment with immersive technologies such as AR with their digital offering, to help recreate more of that 'real life' experience online.

As personalisation becomes more widespread, we expect intelligent, content-forward, self-service experiences to follow suit. AI-powered analytics will be used to identify the drivers and inhibitors in the customer experience. So, if data indicates there's a high volume of search inquiries or extended time-on-page around product registration, UX and content teams can leverage these insights to optimise related processes/interactions and inform future content development efforts.

> **91% of customers report that they would use a knowledge base if it met their needs.**
>
> *– Zendesk*

With predictive personalisation, B2B brands can highlight specific content and information based on industry, role, or other user behaviours. For example, users that have recently purchased will see installation, configuration, and registration how-to's, while post-purchase users see troubleshooting and maintenance guides aligned to product lifecycle and usage. This has all again been given a new urgency by the COVID-19 crisis, as B2B businesses look to juggle the combined challenges of handling a spike in digital traffic, providing customers with an experience that will keep them coming back, and of course helping them deal with their own issues via a reliable, convenient, quality service.



Conclusion

When it comes to digital in general and eCommerce in particular, the B2B market has come a long way since our first B2B benchmarking report was released in 2015. Among those trends are:

- A shift to more sophisticated platforms, balanced with user-centred experiences
- An increase in full-funnel transparency, from availability to fulfilment
- An increase in opportunities for full-funnel commerce
- A rise in customer empowerment through digital self-service

More B2B companies realise that a digital-first approach is a must to compete and we expect that to accelerate in the wake of COVID-19. Many are making the organisational and technology investments necessary to transform their businesses. As a result, B2B eCommerce is evolving, and borrowing from B2C with the understanding that digital commerce experiences need to adapt to specific user needs, purchasing motivations, and workflows.

With in-person commerce all but suspended for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic, eCommerce has just become more important than ever to B2B businesses – without it, they would not be able to trade at present. But once it is all over, the experiences and lessons taken from the crisis cannot be put back in the box.

Once customers see they can buy from you using your website or app without a hitch, once they see they can get the sales pitch through a teleconference or at their own convenience through your digital content without having to schedule a meeting, once they realise they can find exactly what they are looking for, both in terms of product search and self-help aftercare – that is what they will expect. There will be no going back.

Wunderman Thompson Commerce will continue to keep a close watch on the B2B landscape, and we look forward to sharing more insights and a fresh look at the data driving eCommerce in this new decade.

We work with many of the world's leading B2B organisations collaborating closely to define and deliver their digital channels and eCommerce operations. Contact us to discuss how we can help you today.

Methodology:

This report is the result of a heuristic survey of relevant merchant websites in July and August 2019. All information collected is publicly available. Information on each merchant's website was accurate at the time the survey was conducted, but is subject to change due to the iterative nature of the web. Our B2B survey is comprised of data collected from 84 wholesalers, distributors, and brand manufacturers, including a sampling of the clients of Gorilla Group, a Wunderman Thompson Commerce company.

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About Wunderman Thompson Commerce

Wunderman Thompson Commerce is a global eCommerce consultancy that brings strategic clarity, technical know-how and creative inspiration to help retailers, manufacturers, and brands deliver winning commerce capabilities across all major digital commerce channels: marketplaces (including Amazon), online retailers, D2C and social commerce.

Our end-to-end offer includes strategy, people and technology enablement, plus channel execution. With over 1500 commerce experts, and key strategic partnerships with Adobe, Salesforce, SAP, HCL and IBM, we help global organisations deliver capability, platforms, and sales.

Wunderman Thompson Commerce is a WPP company. We are part of Wunderman Thompson, a creative, data and technology agency built to inspire growth for its clients. Wunderman Thompson brings together over 20,000 creatives, data scientists, strategists and technologists in 90 markets.

Clients include AkzoNobel, DFS, Halfords, Jumbo, RXBAR, Sainsbury's, Selfridges, Specialized, Ted Baker and Tempur.

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About Adobe Experience Cloud

Adobe Experience Cloud is a comprehensive set of cloud services designed to give enterprises everything needed to deliver exceptional customer experiences.

Comprised of Adobe Marketing Cloud, Adobe Advertising Cloud and Adobe Analytics Cloud, Experience Cloud is built on the Adobe Cloud Platform and integrated with Adobe Creative Cloud and Document Cloud.

Leveraging Adobe Sensei's machine learning and artificial intelligence capabilities, Adobe Experience Cloud combines world-class solutions, a complete extensive platform, comprehensive data and content systems, and a robust partner ecosystem that offer an unmatched expertise in experience delivery.

To learn more about Adobe Experience Cloud, visit https://www.adobe.com/uk/experience-cloud.html

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