

sana
The shortcut to e-commerce

HOW TO PROVIDE AN EXCELLENT CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE IN THE DIGITAL AGE



HOW TO PROVIDE AN EXCELLENT CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE IN THE DIGITAL AGE

CONTENTS

1. The Effects of Digital Disruption on the Customer Experience 4
2. A Good Customer Experience Defined 5
3. Potential Pitfalls 7
4. Providing an Excellent Customer Experience 11
5. Learning From Success 19
6. Conclusion 21



THE EFFECTS OF DIGITAL DISRUPTION ON THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

It's no secret that the digital age has changed a lot about the way customers buy and the way businesses sell. Anyone with an internet connection can access the booming e-commerce market where they can find the best bargain from the comfort of their own home or office. Likewise, online sales has given businesses incredible international opportunities for growth and expansion.

1 THE EFFECTS OF DIGITAL DISRUPTION ON THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Then and Now

Certainly this has changed the way we think about the customer experience. Fifty years ago, a good customer experience was a first-name greeting in a general store, personal shopping advice and some extras in your shopping bag if you were a regular customer. Today it's a personalized greeting when you sign in to your favorite web store, automated product suggestions, and discount codes emailed to loyal customers.

People Are People

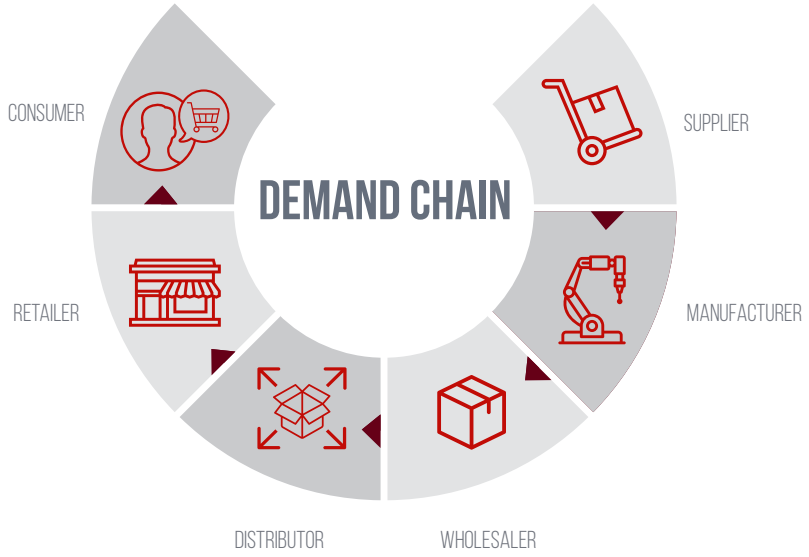
So perhaps things haven't changed as much as we thought? At the end of the day, people are still people, and clients still want the same things: good products, good prices and good service. The way we achieve that has simply advanced.
For those who are just getting their feet wet with e-commerce, or even have yet to take their business online, it may seem impossible to continue to provide the same personalized services that you've traditionally offered with phone calls, face-to-face meetings and giveaways.

However, when done right, online sales offer a path to a better customer experience for more customers across the globe.

What to Expect in This White Paper

In this white paper, we're starting with a look at what a good customer experience means for today's consumers and business clients. Then we're discussing some of the challenges businesses face in providing this experience. The bulk of this white paper will be focused on solutions: what can your business actually do to make sure that your customers are getting the experience they're looking for? Finally, we'll highlight some businesses that have tackled this topic and come out ahead: how did they do it, and how can others learn from their experiences?

Read on to learn how to save real costs in your demand chain and improve your relationship with your customers.



2 A GOOD CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE DEFINED

Broadly speaking, the customer experience refers to the subjective response of customers to direct or indirect contact with a company. This could include interaction with products, packaging and pricing, but also advertising, the retail environment and of course customer service.

The challenge in defining a good customer experience is that it's subjective. Most people, however, can agree on a few essentials, such as clarity, convenience and speed.



Emotional Experience

When we look specifically at this experience online, it can be divided into an emotional experience and a rational experience. A customer's emotional experience is based on elements like their interaction with the design, style and tone of the web store.

Branding is a key element in appealing to your customers' emotional side. When done right, effective branding can also improve their experience with your product and services.



Rational Experience

The rational experience includes three core elements:

- Ease of use: usability, accessibility and standards
- Relevance: content search and customization
- Performance: speed and availability

This is where factors like your ERP, your web store platform and the rest of your IT landscape come into play. Is your system set up to provide your clients with these core elements each and every time they visit your web store? We will be going into more detail on all of these factors later on.



Building a Digital Relationship With Your Clients

All of the points mentioned above are essential to creating a good customer experience. Factors like ease of use, relevance and performance are a given in the eyes of most customers. This means that you'll need to find a way to make your business stand out from competitors that also offer the customer experience basics. This is what makes the relationship you build with your clients so vital.

The idea of building a digital relationship may be intimidating for businesses used to having regular personal contact with their clients. With the right tools, however, you'll find that you can engage with your clients even better in the digital world.

3 POTENTIAL PITFALLS

As with any business goal, commitment is essential. The same is true for your path toward providing a better customer experience. Even so, most businesses have a few worries when it comes to improving their customer experience.

With the right preparation, apprehensions don't have to turn into blocking issues. It's best to face them, learn about them, and move past them as quickly as possible.







HIGH CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS

The stakes are high, and so are your customers' expectations. They want high-quality products at low prices; they want it fast but they don't want it rushed; they want transparency and communication, but they don't want to be spammed.

Customers are people, and people are varied and complex. That doesn't have to mean that the process for making them happy has to be complex, though. This idea is explored in Harvard Business Review article "Stop Trying to Delight Your Customers:"

Our research shows that exceeding their expectations during service interactions (for example, by offering a refund, a free product, or a free service such as expedited shipping) makes customers only marginally more loyal than simply meeting their needs.

This bears repeating: exceeding expectations makes customers only marginally more loyal than simply meeting their needs.

In other words, you don't have to do cartwheels to satisfy your customers when a simple somersault will do.

"Indeed, 89 of the 100 customer service heads we surveyed said that their main strategy is to exceed expectations. But despite these Herculean—and costly—efforts, 84% of customers told us that their expectations had not been exceeded during their most recent interaction."

There appears to be a gap in the market. Chances are that in trying to go above and beyond, your competitors are missing the basics, and that's where your opportunity lies.

Do your customers want their goods quickly? **Yes**.
Is a swift response expected when they need assistance? **Of course**.
Do they take it for granted that inventory availability, product documentation and delivery dates be accurate? **Absolutely**.
Are these things you can reasonably provide with the right tools? **Without a doubt**.



COMPLEXITY

As technology advances, our possibilities expand. Businesses can offer more today than they could 10, 20 and certainly 50 years ago. Not long ago, it was normal to wait a week or two for a delivery. Then the standard became two-day shipping, closely followed by next-day shipping — now many consumers even enjoy same-day delivery.

More Services Please

This places considerable pressure on businesses. They need to increase their offering to remain competitive, but every time they add another service, they're further complicating their processes.

This doesn't even have to mean 24/7 hour customer support. It can be something as deceptively simple as being able to bundle products to offer package deals. Particularly in B2B scenarios, this can require a lot of puzzling to get right.

Intricate Buyer Journeys

Adding new channels on top of the existing complexity may seem like it would only be further complicating matters. Adding the right channels in the right way, however, will give you the tools to offer better quality services while simplifying internal processes. We'll be talking about this in depth in the section Providing an Excellent Customer Experience.



STRATEGY

***The Tension in B2B Customer Experience Management*, published in 2016 by Econsultancy in association with SAP Hybris, highlights strategy as a major hurdle for businesses looking to improve their customer experience.**

According to the report:

- Just **40%** of companies have a strategy that involves departments outside of marketing.
- **50%** of those surveyed indicated that their current strategy doesn't look further than the next 12 months, and
- **74%** of strategies didn't account for the talent necessary to achieve CX goals.

"In fundamental ways, a B2B company's customers and their buying patterns are more complex than those of a business focused on retail customers. Indeed, a B2B company requires specific strategies to differentiate itself via customer experience."

Is CX Strategy Harder for B2B?

B2B businesses have their own unique hurdles, like appealing to a buying unit instead of a single consumer. How can you ensure each member of the unit has a consistent experience? How can you appeal to the sales agent, the GM and the marketing manager? It's important to recognize the importance of strategy and make it a priority to define a solid customer experience strategy from the beginning. Involve all of your departments, plan years ahead, and invest time and money in getting the right talent to achieve your customer experience goals.

LIVING UP TO B2C STANDARDS

It's no secret that B2C companies are leaders in online sales, and as such, B2C e-commerce giants like Amazon have defined customer expectations. The result? A new millennial buyer persona who grew up with the internet and expects to have the same experience for both personal and work-related purchases.

According to Acquity Group, this generation of buyers is 89% more likely to make business purchases online. Equally striking is that 61% of these buyers do research on B2B manufacturing websites, but ultimately place orders with less expensive suppliers. So not only do B2B businesses have a B2C-based customer experience to contend with, they're also now contending with other parts of their supply chains.

Playing Catch-Up

According to McKinsey & Company, B2B customer-experience index ratings are far behind those of retail customers. Where B2C companies typically fall in the 65 to 85% range, B2B companies average less than 50%.

The good news about this is that even though B2C has set the bar high, they've also created a path. While B2B businesses will need to deviate from that path at certain points to meet industry-specific needs (bulk ordering, appealing to buying units, complex catalogs, etc.), the groundwork has already been laid.



4

PROVIDING AN EXCELLENT CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

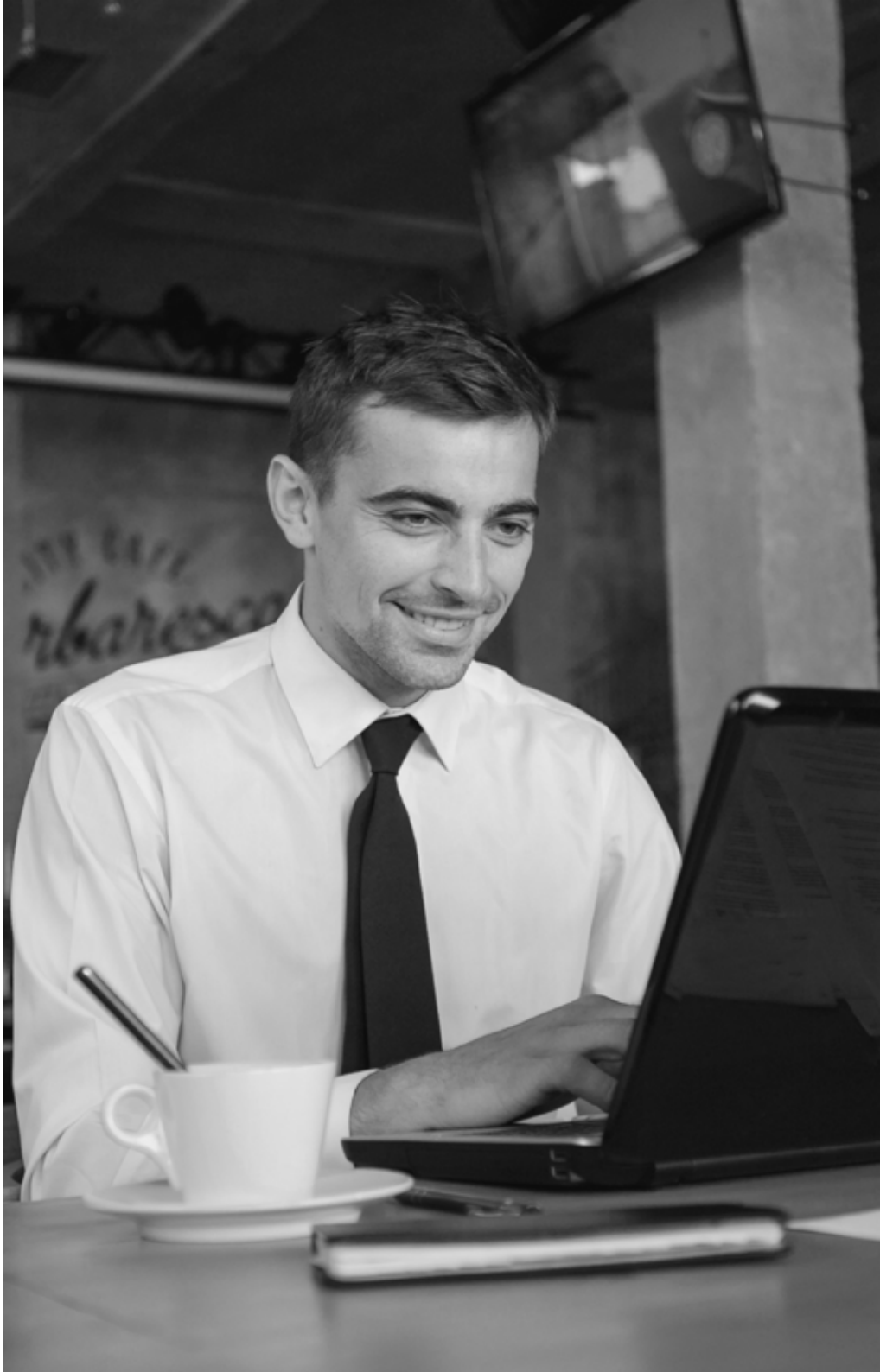
High customer expectations, increased order complexity, figuring out a solid strategy, and struggling to live up to B2C standards can be major obstacles, but they're obstacles that can be overcome. Overhauling your customer experience is a big undertaking, but it's one that will deliver countless benefits in the end.

In this section, we're tackling seven essential factors that will help you provide an exceptional buying experience in your web store.

1. USABILITY

When we talk about usability, we're talking about factors like load speed, page structure and graphic design. Is your web store easy to navigate? Can your clients find what they're looking for?

Creating a fantastic customer experience means providing easy-to-follow search paths so your clients don't get lost while they navigate your web store. They should be able to find the information they're looking for quickly and easily. Test your main categories and sub-categories. Make sure that your logic is also your clients' logic



Faceted Search

Faceted search is another feature that every modern web store must have. This allows your customers to narrow down what they're looking for based on multiple features or attributes. In a clothing store, this means they could look for all medium-sized cotton t-shirts in solid colors, for instance. The possibilities are endless.

HTML Editor

HTML editors are valuable tools for your system administrators. You want to ensure your web store has an HTML editor that gives you the freedom to create the kind of content you want while also optimizing your editing experience.



In-Site Editor

A good in-site editor will make adjusting your website quick and easy. You can edit your web store navigation directly, and even adjust individual navigation points individually.

BOM/Kitting

Support for bills of materials/kitting is important for B2B web stores in particular. If a client is looking for a computer, for example, and wants to view the list of hardware the computer consists of, they'll need the BOM.

Your ERP system may contain data on many spare parts that are used to manufacture a product but aren't actually intended for individual resale. Industrial and technical wholesale and manufacturing companies know all about the complexity of composite product structures. With integrated e-commerce, you can automatically make BOM/kitting available in your web store without having to reconfigure your kits and related components.

2. RELEVANT, CAPTIVATING CONTENT

Don't underestimate the importance of good text. In the digital world, written content often takes the place of what used to be face-to-face conversations and meetings. Instead of sending salespeople door to door, businesses are publishing content online to reach out to current and potential clients.

Publishing blogs posts and articles and being active on social media will undoubtedly enhance both your brand awareness and your clients' all-around experience of your brand. Where usability is concerned, it's important to ensure that your product texts, assistance pages and FAQ are up to snuff. For this, use the 3 Cs as a guideline: clear, captivating, concise.

Clear

Perhaps the most important point is that your texts are easy to understand. Do they convey the point you're trying to make? Do they provide the information your clients need? Grammar and spelling should also be on point – there should be no questions about the meaning of your texts, and poor writing will devalue your brand, leaving clients questioning your professionalism.

Captivating

Besides providing information, your product texts should also be convincing — they're supposed to stand in for your salespeople, after all. Again, this goes back to knowing your clients. What are they looking for? What kind of people are they? What is interesting to them? These are questions that your should ask yourself when writing product texts.



Concise

Make your texts easy to skim for clients who don't have much time. Long texts aren't always bad — in fact, they can help you when it comes to search engine optimization (SEO). But it's important to make your client's experience the priority, and their time is at a premium.

Functional Design

Entire books have been written about UX design, and that's because it's important! We couldn't possibly tell you everything you need to know about functional website design here, but we can offer you a few tips that will make a big difference – whether you have a UX designer or not.

User-Friendly Checkout

Is your checkout process clear at a glance? It should be.
Your customers go through a lot of effort deciding what they want and adding their items to the shopping cart. There's nothing worse than getting to the final checkout stage only to learn there's an extensive checkout process.

Make sure your customers know what to expect when finalizing their order. One of the best ways to achieve this is by displaying your checkout phases at the top of the shopping cart. This lets customers know where they are in the process, and how many steps they still need to complete before finishing.

Other important features that contribute to a user-friendly checkout include:

- Automatic shipping calculations
- Local payment options
- Variety of payment options (such as pay on account for B2B clients)
- Automatic product alternatives for out-of-stock products
- Related product suggestions

If you have an integrated web store, all of this can be configured in your ERP and made available directly in your web store.

Mobile Responsive Site

According to Mobify, 30% of mobile users admit to abandoning a purchase if the web store isn't fully optimized for mobile browsing. Another study done in 2014 by Google/Millward Brown Digital claims that 42% of B2B buyers use a mobile device at some point during their purchasing process, and that that number had grown by 91% over the two previous years. With smartphone activity increasing so rapidly, they have seen mobile queries actually triple.

Smart devices are here to stay, and they will only become more vital to the buyer journey. If you want to offer your clients absolute convenience, you need to make it possible for them to research, prepare and purchase from any device.

Bonus: Having a truly responsive site eliminates the need for native apps, which are costly and complicated to maintain for different platforms.



3. CONSISTENCY

If you're familiar with omnichannel strategy, you'll know that it's vital to provide a consistent experience for your customers at every touchpoint.

Are your clients getting the same messaging from your business on LinkedIn as they are in your web store, or on the phone with your agents? This isn't just important for your branding and sales, it's important because people are comfortable with what's familiar. They look for patterns, and they want to know what to expect.

Offering your clients a consistent look, voice and experience across channels will help make them comfortable with your brand, and will increase their trust in your business.

Watch our webinar, Developing Your Omnichannel Strategy, to go into more depth on this topic >>



4. SPEED

Integrating your web store with your e-commerce platform is a sure-fire way to speed up just about everything.

When your web store pulls customer information directly from the ERP, this speeds up your clients' order process immensely. Besides shipping and billing details being filled in automatically, integrated web stores also make it possible for customers to create new orders based on past orders, and even set up future order drafts in advance.

You can test this out yourself. Go to your web store and try to place an order. Can you:

- Quickly find the right product?
- Easily place an order and edit it if necessary?
- Easily enter your personal details like billing and shipping address?
  For repeat customers, the web store should be able to provide this information automatically. Furthermore, B2B web stores should make it easy to select multiple shipping and billing addresses.
- Make a payment?
  This may seem like a no-brainer, but if you're doing business internationally it isn't always easy to ensure that the main payment providers will be accepted. Your web store should support international payment providers, and it should have the proper security in place to help you prevent fraud.

Visit your own store often and see what it's like to go through as one of your customers—this is a great way to pinpoint potential areas for improvement.

5. SECURITY

Proper security starts out with control over who is accessing your most sensitive information. Ideally, you'll want to have a system that allows you to appoint different user roles with corresponding authorization, such as administrators and regular users.

There's a lot to consider when it comes to securing your online sales portal. First of all, your e-commerce software should be tested and certified. It's also a good idea to consider closed source software. This means that the source code is only reviewed by carefully selected parties, ensuring the very best quality without compromising security.

Other important points to take into account are firewalls, IP restriction, VPN, failover systems and data redundancy.

For more in-depth information on this topic, read our Security Guide >>



6. PERSONALIZATION

As technology advances, the options to personalize your web store for each user become more plentiful and more advanced. Personalized pages aren't just nice for your users, they also mean more conversions. In fact, personalized pages often deliver 10-15% increase in your conversion rate.

For B2B web stores in particular, personalization can be vital to ensuring a positive user experience.
B2B clients have often already set up personalized product catalogs and pricing with the sales contact, and they want to see that reflected when they log into your web store.
It pays off though, because according to Salesforce's "State of Service" report, **82% of business buyers say that personalized customer care moderately or heavily influences their loyalty.**

Essential features to personalize for your B2B clients include:

- Pricing
- Product catalogs
- Shipping and delivery information
- Emails: abandoned cart emails, special offers and discounts

ERP integration lets your web store display all user-specific catalog, pricing and personal details stored in your ERP system. It offers your clients the added convenience they need to quickly find what they need and get their purchasing done. An added bonus is that it reduces administrative tasks for your back office

7. SELF SERVICE

Today's consumers want to engage on their own terms. The adult millennial generation is accustomed to being able to do everything online, from finding information to purchasing products to communicating, and they expect the same when they make orders for work.

Many businesses who don't yet have an online sales portal may feel like giving their clients self-service options seems less personal, but the reality is that it empowers clients and offers them the convenience they want.

There are a number of features you should be offering your clients within your e-commerce platform to ensure they can make purchases, do admin, make returns and follow up on orders at their own convenience.

Offer a Searchable FAQ

This will ensure that customers (and potential customers) can get the answers they're looking for as quickly as possible.

Some tips for an effective FAQ include:

- Optimize the search functionality in your FAQ.
- Show related FAQ articles directly in your web store.
- Make sure that your customer service agents are able to fill any gaps left by your FAQ.
- Collect data and satisfaction surveys on every customer service interaction to improve them ("Was this article useful?"). Make sure it is shared internally with the account managers and customer success managers.

Attach Manuals and DIY Instructions to Product Descriptions

Especially if you have technical products, it's great to be able to offer product manuals and instructions directly from your web store. Potential buyers don't have to wait for the product delivery to start their preparations and research.

This also saves your back-office employees time. Manuals tend to get lost and thrown away before they're needed. If you make them available in your web store, your clients will have direct access when they need them. Likewise, if an agent needs to provide a manual, they'll know where to find it, too.



TRANSPARENCY

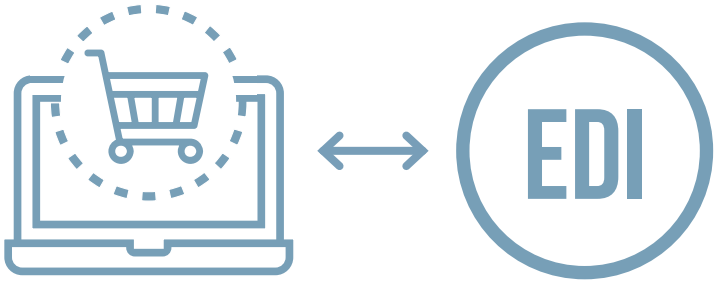
'Out-of-date information' is just another way to say 'wrong information.' Your pricing, inventory and product specifications need to be up to date at all times. Web stores already have an advantage on this compared to old-fashioned paper catalogs, but not all web stores are created equal.

When you integrate your e-commerce solution with your ERP system, you can use ERP information directly in your web store. With this type of setup, your web store will automatically be updated with any new information you enter in your ERP, and vice versa.

View, Edit and Process Quotes in Real Time

In practice, this means that your sales agent can create and save a quote in the ERP while talking to a client on the phone, and the client can access it immediately via the web store.

Essentially, any information entered in your ERP can be made available to clients in the web store, and information entered in the web store is likewise available immediately in the ERP. It doesn't get more transparent than that.



MAKE PURCHASING DELIGHTFUL

Using a website should be a pleasure for a customer — even if it's a work-related visit, you want to try to find a way to make it enjoyable.

This, of course, may feel like quite a challenge if you are focusing on a B2B market, but it's in the little things. Visiting a slow, outdated web store, for instance, feels like a chore, and it's not going to make your client excited for their next purchase.

Offer your clients a fast, responsive, personalized web store. Make your design inviting. Make it easy for your clients to find what they're looking for. Offer them attractive product photos and excellent product descriptions.

A modern web store made with the client in mind makes purchasing easy and if not enjoyable, at least not something to dread.

Gather and Use Customer Feedback

One of the best ways to measure customer satisfaction is to talk to your clients. This doesn't have to be face to face: you can also get their feedback in the form of surveys, ratings on sites like TrustPilot.

Customer service and customer experience and inextricably linked, so use your customer interactions to get feedback and improve. Providing a great customer experience is a continuous process of learning and making adjustments.

4 LEARNING FROM SUCCESS

Many businesses are taking the right steps to improve their customer experience. Of course, for every different type of business and every different type of client, there's another way to achieve great results.

Just Getting Started

For businesses that haven't embarked on their e-commerce journey yet, establishing an online sales channel is the first step. The important thing is to set up the correct foundation from the beginning, making it easier to adapt to new technologies later on.

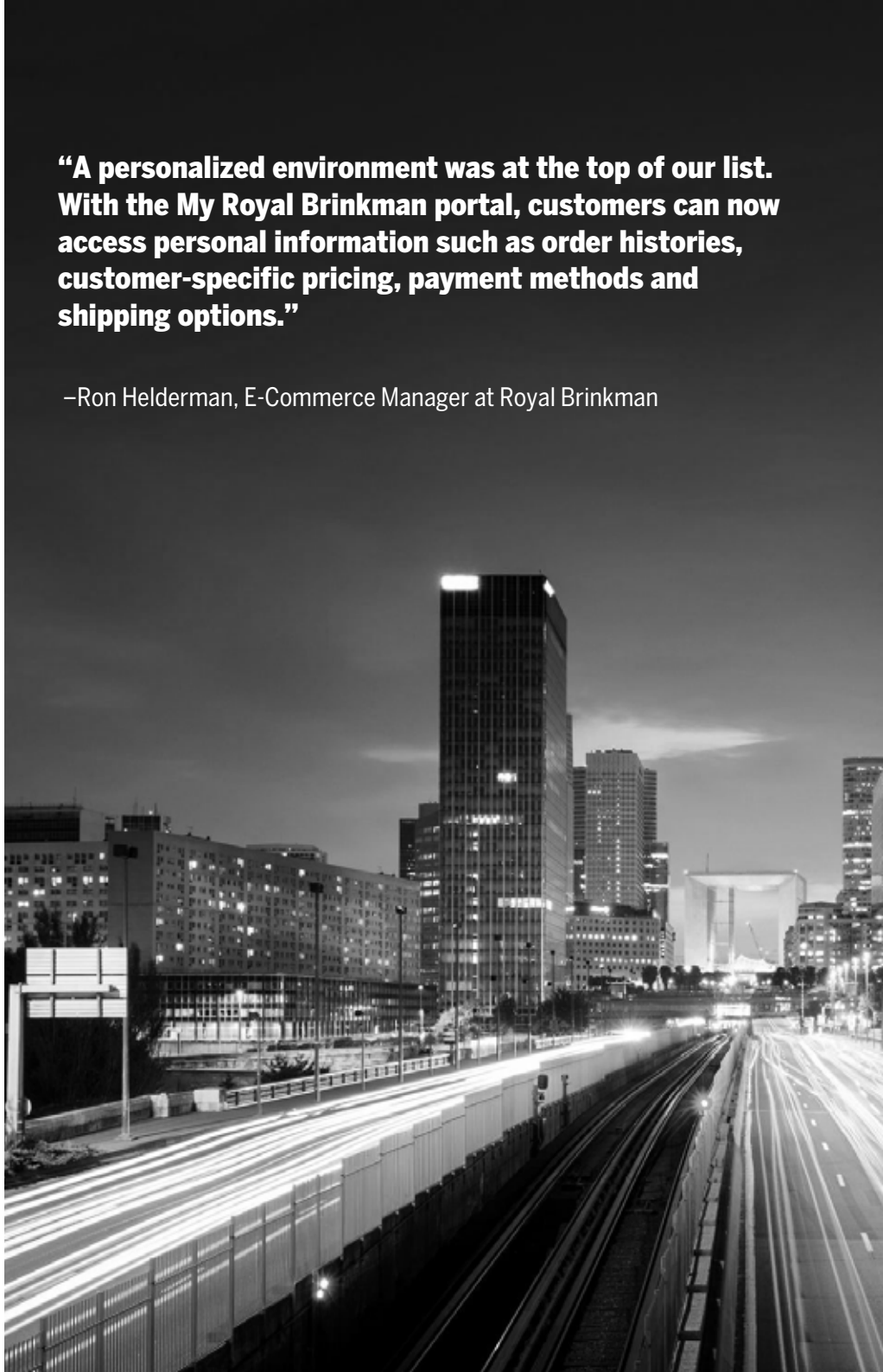
Royal Brinkman is the perfect example of a traditional family business that started looking into online sales because they wanted to make it easier for clients to place orders and access personal details.

Read Royal Brinkman's story >>



"A personalized environment was at the top of our list. With the My Royal Brinkman portal, customers can now access personal information such as order histories, customer-specific pricing, payment methods and shipping options."

–Ron Helderman, E-Commerce Manager at Royal Brinkman



From Website to Web Store

If you already have a website but aren't reaping the benefits of online orders and automated order processing, you'll be able to relate to Eichholtz's journey.

For them, taking their customer experience to the next level meant offering better transparency and faster order fulfilment.

"You can now see where you are in the order queue, you know what you ordered, and you can even schedule your order delivery time. This is really what clients value the most when making purchases."

–Joes van 't Leven, Finance and Control Manager at Eichholtz

Integrated e-commerce gave Eichholtz the results they were looking for: they reduced their order fulfilment from 36 to 6-7 days.

Read Eichholtz's story >>



Early E-Commerce Adopters

Then there are those businesses who jumped on the e-commerce bandwagon early, but haven't updated their approach since.

Labelmaster had a web store, but it no longer offered the features and functionality that their clients expected.

"Our customers have very high expectations with respect to their e-commerce experience. It was critical that we find a platform that would give us the functionality and flexibility to escort them through their journey of engage, learn, find, select and buy."

–Robert Finn, VP of Marketing at Labelmaster

Using their ERP as their single source of truth made it possible for Labelmaster to go from 16 different databases to 1. It gave them a way edit content and images quickly and easily, and helped them provide a consistent customer experience across channels.

Read Labelmaster's story >>



5 MOVING FORWARD

Creating an excellent customer experience is vital to the health and longevity of every business. As technology advances, we will undoubtedly see the needs, wishes and expectations of customers change, along with the tools that can help us provide what they're looking for.

We are quickly approaching an era where it will be nearly impossible to have a truly successful business without a web store. Some would argue that the time has already come.

Moving Forward

We hope we've been able to offer some valuable advice on what you can do to offer you customers an experience that will keep them happy and turn them into loyal clients. If you would like to learn more about the connection between e-commerce and the customer experience, please don't hesitate to get in touch with our e-commerce experts.

GET IN TOUCH



Resources:
https://www.mckinsey.de/files/customer-experience-compendium-2016.pdf
https://hbr.org/2010/07/stop-trying-to-delight-your-customers
http://www.marketing-profs.com /chirp/2013/11087/b2b-buyers-traits-by-generation-infographic
http://resources.mobify.com/50-mobile-commerce-stats.html
https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/consumer-insights/the-changing-face-b2b-marketing/
https://www.salesforce.com/hub/service/state-of-customer-service/
https://econsultancy.com/reports/the-tension-in-b2b-customer-experience-management/
https://www.webpagefx.com/blog/marketing/top-10-b2b-digital-marketing-trends-2017/
http://www.envalo.com/a-solid-b2b-website-design-can-increase-sales/
Moores, M. (2016). 5 lessons for successful B2B eCommerce. Industry Week

© 2017 Sana Commerce. All rights reserved.
This document contains proprietary information protected by copyright. No part of this document may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording for any purpose without the written permission of Sana Commerce.

ABOUT SANA COMMERCE

Sana helps businesses all over the world reach their full potential. We offer the shortcut to e-commerce. How? Through 100% seamless integration with SAP and Microsoft Dynamics. Our e-commerce solution leverages existing business logic and data in powerful and user-friendly web stores. This lets our clients focus on improving their customer experience, streamlining sales processes, and increasing sales volume and frequency.

Sana Commerce is a certified partner of Microsoft Dynamics and SAP. Our innovative approach and strong partner network have made Sana the driving force behind over 1,200 web stores worldwide. Thanks to our extensive experience and expertise, we can offer more than just a product — we also support services such as online marketing, Search Engine Optimization (SEO) advice, hosting and design.

Future-proof your business and join our e-commerce movement.
For more information, visit www.sana-commerce.com

www.sana-commerce.com | info@sana-commerce.com

sana
The shortcut to e-commerce