Understanding & Adapting
to Modern B2B Buyer Expectations

**How B2B Companies Can Improve Buyer
Relationships with Intuitive Digital Solutions**

INSIGHTS
Worldwide Business Research

OROCommerce™

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Executive Summary

Over the past two years, it has become increasingly important that B2B buyers have the same digital purchasing capabilities that they are used to in their lives as consumers. Many B2B companies were forced to switch to digital sales to keep their employees safe during the pandemic, and they are prioritizing digital CX initiatives to meet their customers' demands.

But B2B digital and eCommerce sales aren't just a convenient and safe alternative to face-to-face meetings. Digital is quickly becoming the preferred channel in the B2B space. According to McKinsey & Company, B2B companies see digital interactions as two to three times more important to their customers than traditional sales interactions.[1]

This report explores B2B buyers' current experience with digital B2B sales. It provides information about B2B buyers' current expectations and includes key suggestions for how companies can better serve digital B2B buyers moving forward.
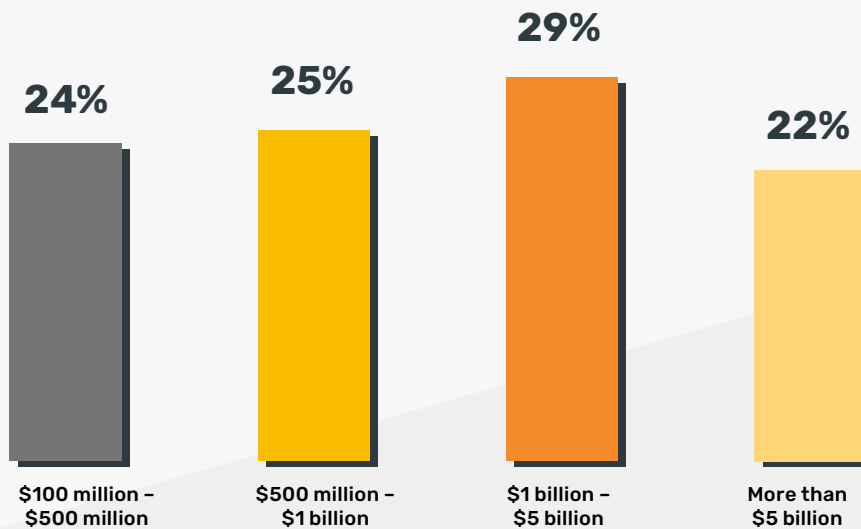
[1] Gavin, Ryan. "The B2B digital inflection point: How sales have changed during COVID-19." McKinsey & Company. April 30th, 2020. https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/marketing-and-sales/our-insights/the-b2b-digital-inflection-point-how-sales-have-changed-during-covid-19
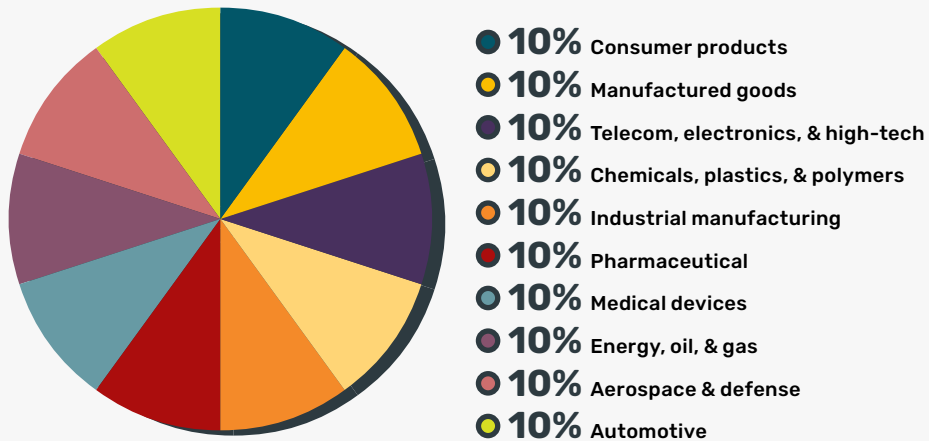
About the Respondents

The WBR Insights research team surveyed 100 procurement leaders and B2B buyers from across the U.S. and Canada to generate the results featured in this report. All the respondents are responsible for and actively involved in at least some key buying or procurement decisions at their companies.

What is your company's annual revenue?

| 24%	25%	29%	22%
$100 million – $500 million	$500 million – $1 billion	$1 billion – $5 billion	More than $5 billion

The respondents represent companies of varying sizes as measured by annual revenue. At 51%, a slight majority of the respondents represent companies that make more than $1 billion in annual revenue. This includes 22% of the respondents who represent companies that make more than $5 billion in annual revenue.

In which vertical does your company operate?

- **10%** Consumer products
- **10%** Manufactured goods
- **10%** Telecom, electronics, & high-tech
- **10%** Chemicals, plastics, & polymers
- **10%** Industrial manufacturing
- **10%** Pharmaceutical
- **10%** Medical devices
- **10%** Energy, oil, & gas
- **10%** Aerospace & defense
- **10%** Automotive

The respondents' companies are engaged in a variety of verticals, including consumer products (10%), manufactured goods (10%), telecom, electronics, and high-tech (10%), chemicals, plastics, and polymers (10%), and industrial manufacturing (10%).

What is your seniority?

- **6%** C-Suite
- **15%** Vice President
- **2%** Department Head
- **37%** Director
- **40%** Manager
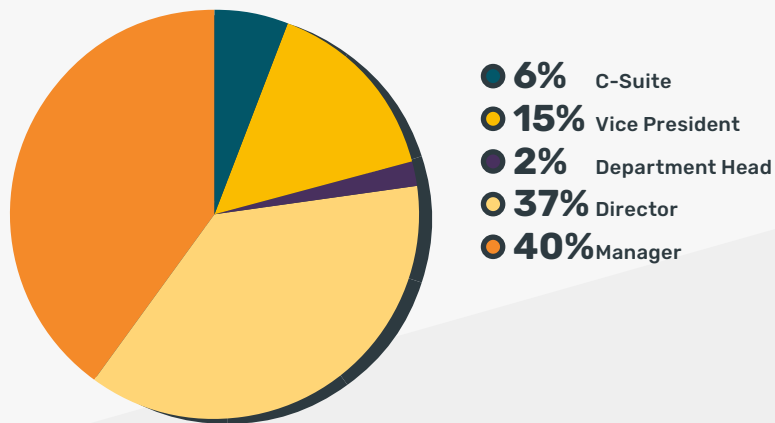
Most of the respondents are either managers (40%) or directors (37%). The remaining respondents are vice presidents (15%), C-suite executives (6%), or department heads (2%).

Key Insights

Among the respondents:

- 64% **prefer digital B2B channels over traditional methods** somewhat more (46%) or much more (18%).

- 74% are either **only somewhat satisfied** (48%), indifferent (20%), or somewhat dissatisfied (6%) **with each of their organization's purchasing processes.**

- 48% claim **more than half of their suppliers currently use a B2B eCommerce solution,** while 23% claim roughly half do.

- 59% claim **50% or fewer of their B2B purchases have been digital** in the past 12 months.

- 81% expect **most of their B2B purchases to be digital in the next 12 months,** including 3% who claim all their B2B purchases will be digital.

- **All use an eProcurement system for at least some of their B2B purchases,** including 67% who use eProcurement for at least half of their purchases.

- 69% claim **50% or more of their B2B purchases are done via mobile.**

- 70% claim **less than half** of their current B2B buying experiences **require a significant amount of manual work.**

- Their three most important pain points concerning the buying experience are **lack of customization, localization, or personalization** (39%), **lack of real-time stock information** (38%), and **lengthy purchasing processes** (34%).

- Over one-third have **used access controls when using suppliers' B2B eCommerce solutions.** Roughly one-quarter have used managed corporate accounts (26%) and contextualized price-lists for corporate accounts (25%).

Most B2B Purchases Will Be Digital in 12 Months

The world of B2B purchasing has changed significantly since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, as many suppliers switched to digital solutions to ensure their buyers could make purchases without having to meet face-to-face. Nonetheless, this change was already long in the works before the events of 2020.

B2B buyers began signaling that they wanted better purchasing solutions at about the same time that the world of consumer purchasing was changing. Consumers are now accustomed to an "Amazon-like" experience when shopping for products, and they expect consumer-facing companies to make the buying process both seamless and personalized. Now, B2B sellers are implementing digital systems to facilitate simple, fast, and contextualized purchasing across the business world.

What percentage of your suppliers currently use a B2B eCommerce solution?

Category	Percentage
1% – 24%	2%
25% – 49%	27%
Roughly 50%	23%
51% – 74%	41%
75% – 99%	6%
100%	1%
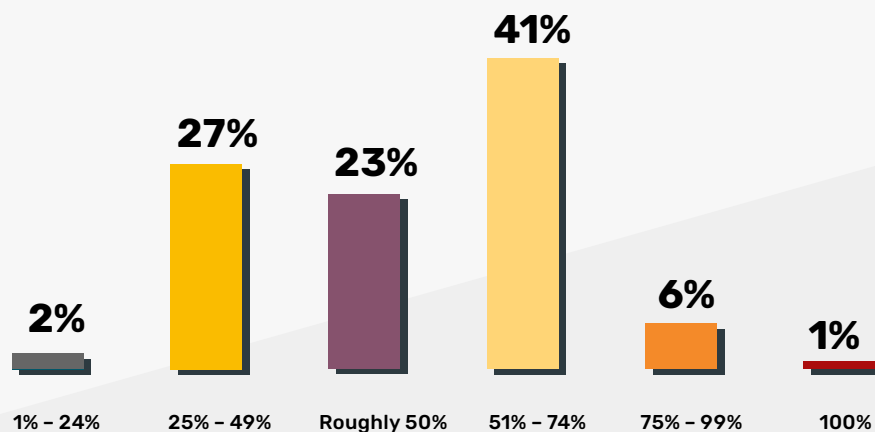
The study featured in this report asked B2B buyers about their purchasing experiences as well as what they expect from B2B purchasing in the future. According to 71% of the respondents, at least 50% or more of their suppliers currently use a B2B eCommerce solution. This suggests that many suppliers are recognizing the importance of the digital purchasing trend and are adopting technologies to meet their buyers' expectations.

How satisfied are you with the ease of your organization's purchasing process as it stands today?

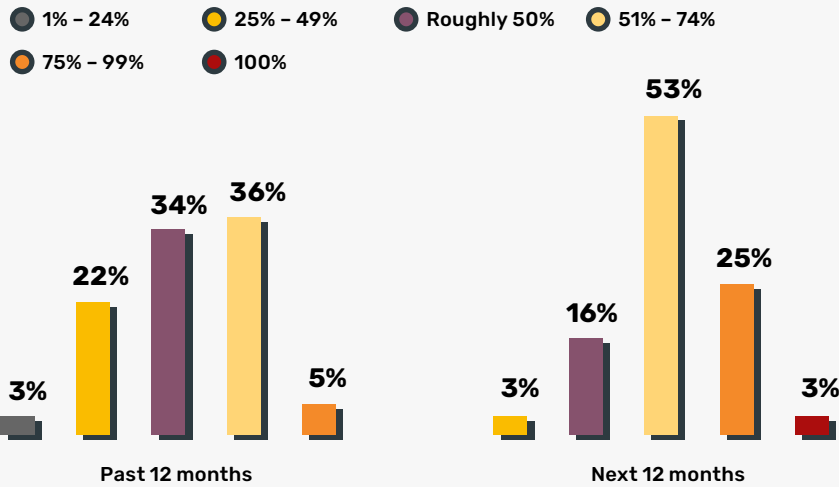|			
26%	**48%**	**20%**	**6%**
Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Indifferent	Somewhat dissatisfied
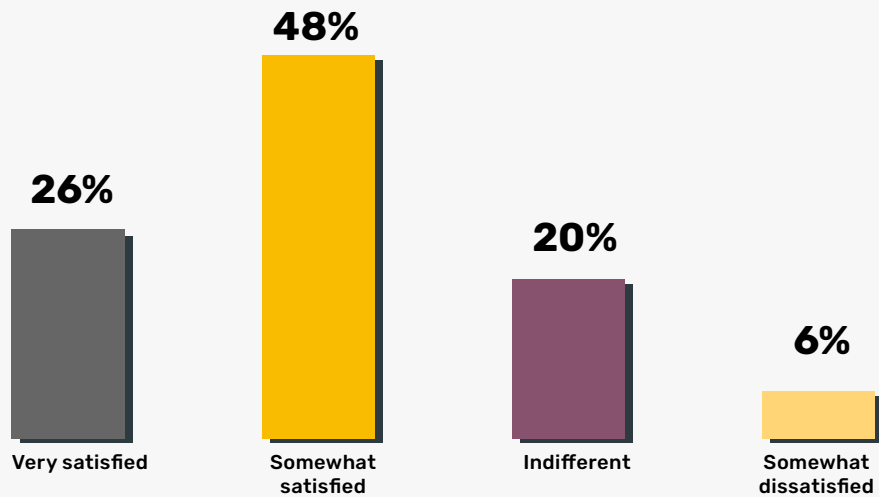
Nonetheless, not every buyer who responded to the study is satisfied with their organization's purchasing process as it stands today. Specifically, 48% are only somewhat satisfied, 20% are indifferent, and 6% are somewhat dissatisfied.

These respondents may be struggling with internal systems that don't make it easy to make digital purchases from multiple providers. However, they could also be struggling because some of their suppliers use separate systems that don't communicate with their own, or they could be dealing with suppliers that have no digital buying solution at all.

Buyers who must switch between purchasing systems and manual purchases may find that their buying experience is slow and cumbersome. A better experience would put all of their purchases in a single digital space, enabling them to make purchases quickly and easily without having to log into multiple solutions. This would also enable buyers to manage their spending through a single interface and better control rogue spending.

What percentage of your B2B purchases have been digital in the past 12 months, and what percentage of your B2B purchases do you expect to be digital in the next 12 months?

● 1% – 24%   ● 25% – 49%   ● Roughly 50%   ● 51% – 74%
● 75% – 99%   ● 100%

Past 12 months: 3%, 22%, 34%, 36%, 5%

Next 12 months: 3%, 16%, 53%, 25%, 3%

Thankfully, buyers expect digital purchasing to become the norm for most of their suppliers as soon as a year from now. Although 59% made 50% or less of their purchases through a digital solution over the past 12 months, 81% expect most of their B2B purchases to be digital in the next 12 months. This includes 3% who claim all their B2B purchases will be digital.

Ultimately, it's up to suppliers to meet their buyers' expectations and put the systems in place to support this change. Buyers can implement digital systems internally, but if their suppliers' systems don't integrate with them, they may run into barriers during the purchasing process and default to manual purchasing.

Buyers Are Leaning into Mobile and eProcurement Purchasing

Like consumers, B2B buyers are also interested in new, innovative, and more convenient ways to make purchases. They want their suppliers to understand their unique business needs and contextualize the purchasing experience, so they can take advantage of discounts and more easily manage their spend.

In their simplest form, procurement systems enable buyers to make purchases over the internet. However, eProcurement systems have evolved significantly since their inception to optimize the buying system for customers. Some of the best solutions enable buyers with self-service ordering, marketplace features, and proprietary integrations with other popular applications.

What percentage of your B2B purchases are done through an eProcurement system?

3%	30%	32%	32%	3%
1% – 24%	25% – 49%	Roughly 50%	51% – 74%	75% – 99%
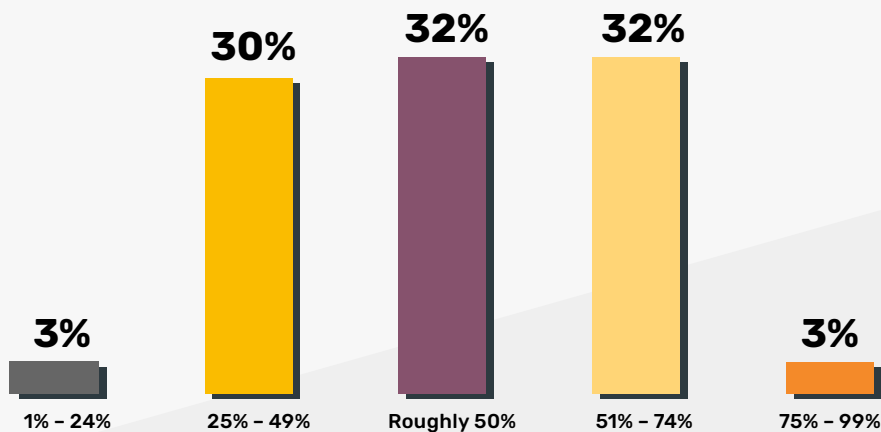
All the respondents make purchases through an eProcurement system for at least some of their B2B purchases. This includes 67% who use eProcurement for at least half of their purchases. If buyers expect their use of digital purchasing to increase in the next 12 months, they likely expect more of their suppliers to implement eProcurement systems in-house.

What percentage of your B2B purchases are done via mobile?

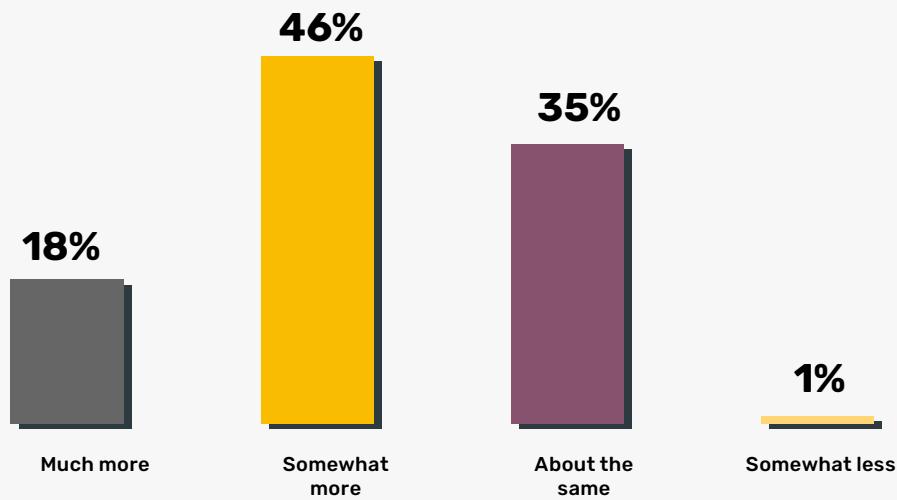| 1% – 24%	25% – 49%	Roughly 50%	51% – 74%	75% – 99%
4%	26%	35%	34%	1%
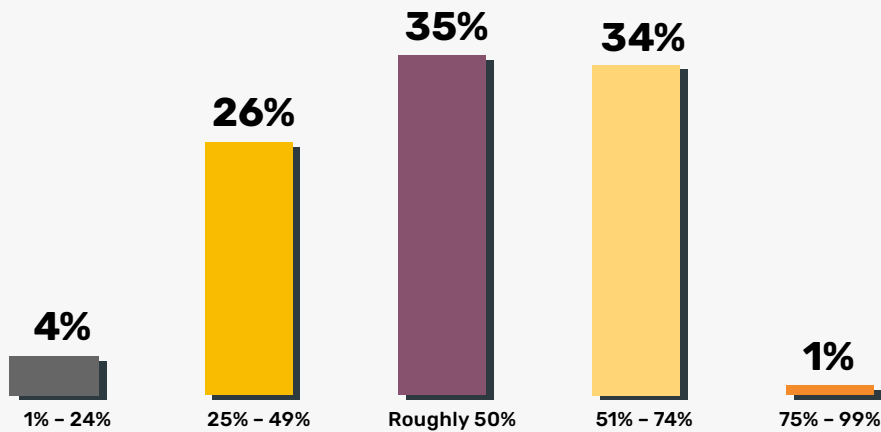
Moving forward, having an eProcurement system or integrating with buyers' eProcurement solutions won't be differentiators for suppliers. They'll need to onboard solutions that provide buyers with more accurate contextualization and more convenient ways to purchase, such as through mobile.

Consumers have already adopted mobile purchasing in almost every market. According to Forbes, 45% of eCommerce sales in 2020 were completed on a mobile device, but most consumers still felt it was easier to make purchases on a desktop computer instead of a mobile phone.[2]

Suppliers who want to tap into the mobile trend must be able to deliver intuitive purchasing experiences on their buyers' smartphones. This may be easier to accomplish in some verticals more than others, especially considering the size and impact of some B2B purchases. Nonetheless, it could be a differentiating factor in the buyer experience.

[2] Danziger, Pamela N. "Mobile Commerce Is The Under-The-Radar Story In Consumers' Flight To Digital Shopping." Forbes. May 16th, 2021. https://www.forbes.com/sites/pamdanziger/2021/05/16/mobile-commerce-is-the-under-the-radar-story-in-consumers-flight-to-digital-shopping/?sh=571ba1f326a6

To what degree do you prefer digital B2B channels over traditional methods?

18%	**46%**	**35%**	**1%**
Much more	Somewhat more	About the same	Somewhat less

Most B2B buyers also prefer digital B2B channels over traditional methods. Specifically, 64% prefer digital channels somewhat more (46%) or much more (18%) than traditional channels like phone calls, emails, and even face-to-face meetings. This implies that B2B buyers continue to expect the same ease and convenience they're accustomed to with consumer purchases when buying products and services for their organizations.

Most Purchasing Systems Are Intuitive, But Pain Points Remain

Buyers typically adopt digital purchasing systems when they provide clear benefits to the procurement process. Faster purchasing cycles, easier decision-making, and personalization are attractive features. Typically, any solution that reduces manual work and streamlines the buying process can improve buyer satisfaction.

Nonetheless, not all systems are created equal. While some may provide faster buying processes, they may not be as easy to use as others. This is sometimes the case with legacy digital purchasing platforms.

What percentage of your current B2B buying experience requires a significant amount of manual work?

1%	32%	37%	26%	4%
0%	1% – 24%	25% – 49%	Roughly 50%	51% – 74%
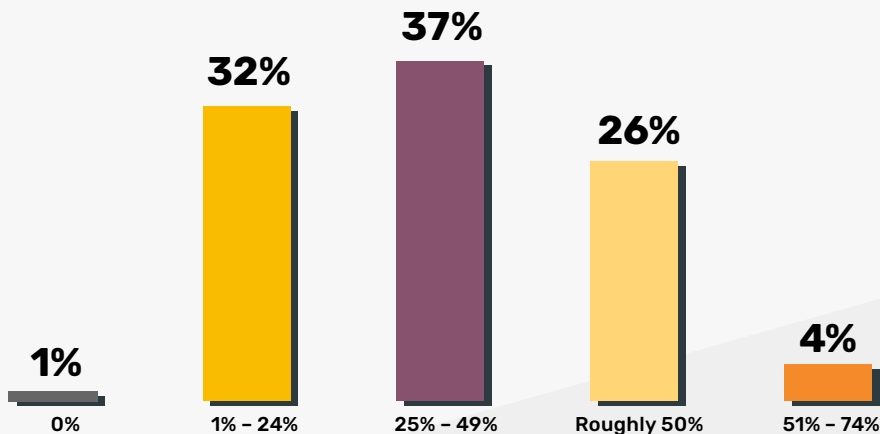
Buyers may also be forced to work with a patchwork of solutions when purchasing from multiple suppliers, and some of their suppliers may have no digital solution in place at all. Most of the respondents to this study say they aren't currently engaged in a significant amount of manual work during the buying process, as 70% claim less than half of their current B2B buying experiences require a significant amount of manual work.

Suppliers have paid close attention to the digital trends in consumer-facing industries and have adopted solutions that mirror the consumer buying experience. Designing the B2B buying experience to mirror those of consumers makes it easier for B2B buyers to adopt eProcurement and digital purchasing programs.

Still, there is room for improvement in the digital B2B purchasing process. According to the respondents, their top three pain points concerning the buying experience are lack of customization, localization, and personalization (39%), lack of real-time stock information (38%), and lengthy purchasing processes (34%). About one-third of the respondents (33%) also cite a lack of personalized prices and discount information as a pain point.

Suppliers should work to implement systems that take their buyers' contexts into account, including pricing information. Procurement leaders and category managers work hard to achieve cost savings with their suppliers, and they'd prefer that those savings be reflected automatically in the purchasing system they use.

It would also benefit the buying experience if buyers knew how much stock was available for specific products when making purchases. This is especially important now, as supply chain disruptions have made some good and products difficult to obtain.

Which of the following are your top pain points in terms of some of your buying experiences today?

Lack of customization, localization, and/or personalization
39%

Lack of real-time stock information
38%

Lengthy purchase processes
34%

Lack of personalized prices and discounts information
33%

Disjointed sales and buying systems that don't communicate
32%

Few or no digital interactions between buyers and sellers
29%

Lack of self-service options
24%

Lack of up-to-date information about the current state of orders or deliveries
20%

Lack of searchable information about products or services
19%

Missing features that are standard in consumer eCommerce
19%

Lack of ability to differentiate between suppliers
13%

Finally, suppliers should do anything they can to reduce the length of the purchase process. This is an important strategy for consumer retailers, as any barriers between the buyer and their purchase could lead to lost revenue or a more cumbersome buying experience.

Conclusion:
Improving the B2B Buying Experience

In their final line of questioning, researchers asked the respondents to describe what they believe suppliers could do to make their digital B2B buying experiences better. The respondents offer a range of suggestions, but the three most prominent themes in their responses are visibility, predictability, and communication.

"A lot depends on visibility," says a vice president at an automotive company. **"Sellers or suppliers can provide visibility with digital solutions.**

Similarly, a manager at a chemical, plastic, and polymer company says, **"I want to mention that visibility is essential, and suppliers will have to transfer that visibility in order for us to have good buying experiences."**

Other respondents suggest predictability could be instilled into the process through "tracking and supply" solutions, "digitization," and "Automations, as they would increase accuracy which covers half of the buying experience," as one telecom manager puts it.

But communication appears to be the most dominant theme throughout the responses. Buyers want suppliers to communicate with them over their digital tools. Most importantly, they want suppliers to understand their needs and respond with solutions.

"If suppliers learn about us and our buying patterns, and follow them with greater predictable accuracy, this will create a good buying experience," says a vice president at a consumer products company.

"Suppliers need to revolutionize communication from their side to allow us to add automations and digital intelligence to the process," says another vice president at a consumer products company.

Suppliers have made significant progress in building out their eProcurement and digital purchasing solutions. However, these responses suggest that buyers are ready for the next level of engagement and collaboration.

Not only do they want to be able to make digital purchases with ease, but they also want their suppliers to understand their businesses and respond in real-time to their needs. By incorporating new communication and intelligence tools into their systems, and by adding automation where possible, suppliers could significantly improve the buying process and revolutionize the way businesses procure the goods and services they need.

Key Suggestions

- If you haven't done so already, **begin transferring most, if not all your B2B sales onto digital platforms.** Buyers expect their suppliers to conduct most of their business digitally in the next 12 months.

- **Deploy solutions that empower buyers with more convenient ways to purchase,** such as through mobile or their native eProcurement systems. B2B buyers are already making mobile purchases in their lives as consumers, and they expect the same level of convenience in their business transactions.

- **Adopt tools that provide your buyers with customization, localization, and personalization.** The lack of these features in the buying experience was a key pain point among the respondents.

- Implement a system in which **the buyer can obtain real-time information about what products and goods are in stock.**

- **Build in automations to ensure predictability in your buyers' purchasing processes.** Ensure your digital solutions include robust communication and intelligence tools, so you can learn more about your buyers and provide them with more personalized, contextualized services.

OROCommerce™

Exceptional Digital B2B Experiences Now and Into the Future

Customer experience is now the leading brand differentiator – more important than price. B2B buyers nowadays purchase more through eCommerce and spend more in a single transaction than at any point in history. That's why for manufacturers and distributors, buyer needs must be at the center of eCommerce platform evaluation efforts.

You need a platform that's robust enough to support the complexity of enterprise B2B selling out-of-the-box, yet scalable, customizable, and easily adaptable to changing needs.

OroCommerce was designed from the ground up to do exactly that.

With OroCommerce you:

- Get a robust set of native B2B functionality, namely:
  - Corporate accounts hierarchy with roles and permissions
  - Multi-organization, multi-website, and multi-warehouse management
  - Order management & RFQ workflows
  - Personalized catalogs and pricing
- Go to market and gain ROI faster thanks to the platform's flexibility
- Deliver superior customer experiences with personalization tools
- Gain efficiency by integrating with existing systems, including:
  - CRM (Microsoft Dynamics, Salesforce) or leverage our built-in CRM, OroCRM, that is included at no additional cost with the OroCommerce license
  - ERP (Epicor P21, SAP, Unit 4, MDS ERP, Microsoft GP)
  - PIM (Akeneo, Pimcore, Salsify)
  - eProcurement (PeopleSoft, SAP Ariba, Coupa)
- Deploy on any public or private cloud or use the OroCloud environment
- Future-proof your business with a robust platform and 24/7 customer support

Trusted by B2B Brands

"We chose OroCommerce because it gave us the flexibility and functionality to implement our digital strategy exactly how we wanted it."

Matthew Roach,
Senior Director of eCommerce
at Animal Supply Company

And Industry Analysts

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