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SPECIAL REPORT

THE STATE OF B2B ECOMMERCE

*HOW INVESTMENTS IN CX AND AI
ARE DRIVING SECTOR GROWTH*

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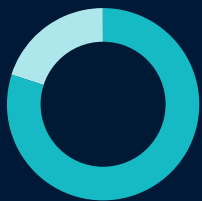


INTRODUCTION

The B2B buying journey has historically been high-touch and highly complex.

Sales reps for many mid-market organizations have deep, long-term relationships with buyers and facilitate most of the process, including developing proposals, negotiating prices, sending invoices and, in some cases, managing post-purchase follow-up. For enterprise-sized organizations, the process is more siloed and complex, with marketing, sales and procurement all getting involved at different stages.

But the ease and personalization found with consumer-facing ecommerce sites, especially robust marketplaces like **Amazon** and **Walmart**, are simply too valuable to ignore. As a result, B2B buyers — and even their counterparts in sales — increasingly demand B2C-level experiences for their business needs, driving organizations to level up their digital experiences.



80% of sales interactions between buyers and suppliers will occur through digital channels by the end of 2025.

-Gartner

“The first big shift happening in this market is that B2B is starting to become very much like B2C,” explained Ray Marciano, Managing Director of **Accenture Song** in an interview with *Retail TouchPoints*. Although there are other factors driving this shift, COVID was a big accelerator: “Many people realized they could self-serve their account, and they could do reorders in a digital manner.”

More than **75%** of B2B companies said their customers now demand a digitized sales process, according to **Deloitte Digital research**. However, nearly as many executives (**71%**) said their processes are still extremely manual. According to **another survey**, B2B buyers largely agree with this assessment, with only **36%** grading their ecommerce buying experiences as “excellent.”

“This disparity between expectations and reality will continue to drive businesses to invest in B2B commerce and related technologies,” noted Ram Chandel, Global Commerce Practice Leader at Deloitte Digital in an interview with *Retail TouchPoints*. And in organizations that already have a B2B ecommerce business, executives are realizing their foundational technology is growing outdated, inhibiting them from supporting growing business demands and evolving buyer needs, Chandel added. “As a result, these companies are looking to consolidate by implementing a single platform to support different businesses and modernize their tech stacks.”

Gartner predicts that by the end of 2025, **80%** of sales interactions between buyers and suppliers will occur through digital channels. The analyst firm also has forecasted a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of **18.3%** by 2028 in the B2B sector, but organizations will need to take specific steps to achieve this high growth level, including:



Understand the new behaviors and demands of target buyers and their committees;



Invest in emerging tech, from composable commerce to artificial intelligence (AI) to improve buying experiences and business operations; and



Embrace marketing and advertising tactics that reach and resonate with buyers across channels.



THE EVOLVING BEHAVIORS AND EXPECTATIONS OF B2B BUYERS

Deloitte Digital has found that the demographics of B2B have largely changed, especially in the U.S., where millennials make up a major share of the workforce.

These individuals came of age with technology, using internet search to find information and discover new brands and products. They grew accustomed to toting their laptops and smartphones to school and work. Now, as B2B customers, “their expectations are deeply rooted in the era of digital convenience,” Chandel explained. “Therefore, the B2B buying experience is not just about shopping and checking out,” he said, adding:

“Customers are looking for end-to-end self-service using the channel and time of their choice for capabilities such as product discovery, configuration, pricing, quoting, ordering, reordering, order tracking and post-purchase service in a seamless user experience.”

Convenience also is rooted in buyers' ability to start, continue and complete their buying journeys on different devices. "As a buyer, I want to be able to start [the process] at home and finish it at work, or maybe vice versa," Marciano said.

The B2B ecommerce experience should mirror the best qualities of a B2C site — even marketplace-driven experiences — so buyers can browse, purchase and receive high-touch service whenever they need it. However, these sites also need to serve the needs of businesses with **various stakeholders that play different roles in the buying process**. This is where composable commerce solutions can provide a lot of value, as they allow businesses to stack feature-rich "building blocks" that align with their unique business (and buyer) needs, according to Chandel.

"Companies can now provide features that were difficult, if not impossible, to implement earlier," Chandel explained. "For example, best-of-breed search products use AI to show more relevant results compared to the out-of-the-box search results of most leading ecommerce platforms. The same is true for PIM, CMS, OMS and several other areas. AI is helping with deeper personalization, richer content creation, better customer support, meaningful actionable analytics and a faster and more secure development lifecycle."

KEY B2B ECOMMERCE UX CAPABILITIES

- ✓ Account customization
- ✓ Account management features
- ✓ More robust product detail pages (PDPs)
- ✓ Higher-quality images and product specs
- ✓ Add-to-cart and payment capabilities
- ✓ Subscription and reorder services
- ✓ Seamless order delivery/fulfillment



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THE FUTURE OF B2B: UNIFIED COMMERCE AS THE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

By Michael von Bodungen, General Manager - North America, **VTEX**

The B2B ecommerce landscape is transforming. With Forrester projecting the market to reach **\$3 trillion** by 2027 — almost double its size in 2021 — this growth is outpacing B2C, which indicates a shift as businesses seek new ways to capitalize on opportunities.

At the core of this transformation is the adoption of unified commerce, which surpasses traditional omnichannel strategies by integrating every sales and operational channel — online, offline, mobile and more — into a cohesive system. This architecture enables B2B organizations to maintain a real-time, 360-degree view of customer interactions, inventory and supply chain processes.

With unified commerce, data flows seamlessly across touch points, allowing businesses to synchronize complex workflows like inventory management, dynamic pricing and customer-specific catalogs.

The integration of technologies such as AI and machine learning empowers companies to deliver predictive analytics and hyper-personalized experiences, providing precise recommendations that meet enterprise buyers' unique needs.

Delivering an integrated ecosystem that enhances customer experiences while optimizing operational efficiency is a mutually beneficial strategy for B2B organizations. Key benefits include:



Seamless customer journey: B2B buyers expect streamlined experiences akin to B2C. Unified commerce allows customers to initiate an order on a mobile device, refine it with a sales representative and finalize it on a desktop, ensuring context is preserved throughout the process. This fluidity enhances the buying experience and increases satisfaction.



Real-time inventory and optimized fulfillment: Accurate, real-time inventory visibility has become essential. Unified systems leverage data to provide reliable lead times, enabling confident purchasing decisions and improving order fulfillment efficiency. By utilizing data analytics, businesses can anticipate demand fluctuations and optimize inventory management.



Operational efficiency and cost savings: Unified commerce reduces errors and streamlines backend processes, leading to lower operational costs. These savings can be passed on to customers, improving competitiveness in price-sensitive B2B markets.

The switch to unified commerce allowed Bisco Industries, a distributor of components and fasteners, to build a robust B2B marketplace that reduced lead times and increased supplier transparency while enhancing operational efficiency. This transformation enabled the company to offer a wider range of products and real-time data on pricing and inventory, resulting in substantial growth in its customer base and brand recognition.



“After migrating from our legacy ecommerce platform to VTEX, we saw a **40%** revenue growth the first year, followed by an additional **20%** growth over the next two years.”

- Krizia Labayen, Ecommerce and Marketing Director, Bisco Industries

Implementing a unified commerce strategy requires careful evaluation of existing systems, suitable payment solutions and development of cross-channel capabilities. A unified commerce platform offers a data-rich environment that transforms companies into data-enabled organizations, allowing them to aggregate and organize critical data and harness insights that inform strategic decisions.

By adopting a **pragmatic approach to composable** capabilities and robust integrations, businesses can ensure their unified commerce platform evolves alongside changing needs, facilitating quick adaptations to market dynamics. Being data-enabled empowers B2B brands to create frictionless experiences tailored to business buyers' specific requirements while delivering consumer-like convenience. This data-driven strategy enables companies to optimize operations and make informed investments that drive growth, enhancing customer experiences and reinforcing their competitive edge.





AUTOMATING AND STREAMLINING THE SELLING PROCESS

AI — more specifically, generative AI — is getting a lot of hype in ecommerce for its ability to scale customer-facing curation and personalization. However, Accenture Song's Marciano believes that the real boon for B2B organizations is investing in AI solutions that improve back-end processes and streamline operations.

In fact, one of the most seismic shifts driving growth and change in the B2B world is the rise of new sales reps who demand access to tools that empower them to sell more, better and faster. “These are younger, up-and-coming reps who grew up [with tech] that is seamless and easy to use, and they’re expecting the same thing as they get into their business job,” Marciano explained.

“It’s all about how you can leverage technology to help empower workers to take care of some of those more administrative tasks — everything from reporting to invoicing to receiving payment,” he added. “That way, **when they do spend time and have an interaction [with a buyer], they can focus more on the consultative part of the relationship.**”

AI also can provide the depth of insights leadership teams need to gauge how salespeople are performing, identify new opportunities and effectively forecast long-term results. “It’s all about serving data and insights so that the sales teams can be better at who they go after and work with, and taking away some administrative components of that process,” said Marciano. “Robotic process automation eliminates steps that require manual entry and moves those into an automated workflow.”



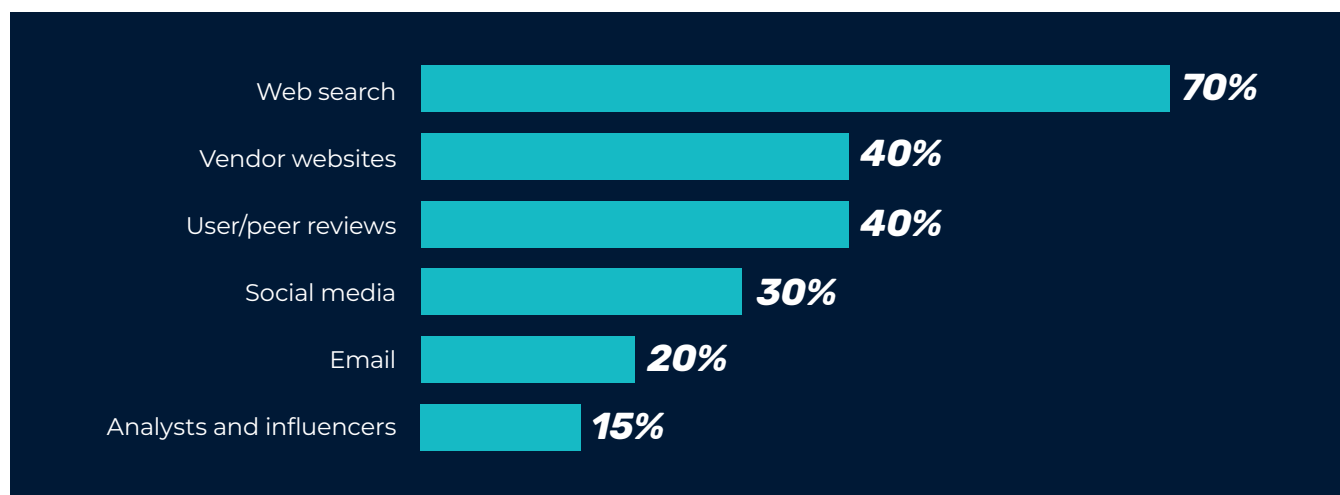
RETHINKING THE B2B MARKETING MIX

To capitalize on the predicted growth of B2B ecommerce, organizations are diversifying their marketing and advertising strategies. After all, **77%** of B2B buyers begin their path to purchase with their own research. And in the current financial climate, **20%** of buyers have spent more time researching to ensure they're getting the best combination of price and value.

Organizations can employ different marketing, advertising and engagement tactics to build trust and drive credibility across all channels, especially since **26%** of respondents to [Demand Gen Report's 2024 B2B Buyer Survey](#) indicated that more people were involved in the decision-making process for their latest purchase.

"B2B marketing is very different from traditional marketing," Chandel noted. "It requires an approach and systems suitable to target appropriate decision makers, influencers, product users and procurement."

To that end, *Demand Gen Report* found that buyers referred to the following channels while researching possible vendors and solutions:



Moreover, half of the surveyed buyers noted that they were served ads from solution providers they had selected during their decision-making journey, and **30%** of this group said this positively impacted their view of the chosen brand.



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TV FOR ALL: HOW CONNECTED TV MAKES TV ACCESSIBLE FOR B2B

By Eric Hatzenbuehler, Director of Performance Marketing, [MNTN](#)

TV advertising — once a bastion of advertising success for B2C brands with massive budgets — has entered a new era. Connected TV (CTV) has democratized the TV screen, allowing B2B brands to find measurable performance outcomes beyond the usual digital channels like paid search and social.

Here's how CTV has made TV advertising more accessible and actionable for B2B brands:



Precision targeting

Linear TV offers little control over who sees your ads, and that creates wasted impressions. With CTV, marketers can target audiences with specific job titles, industries and company sizes, and even wield features like MNTN Matched — the world's first keyword-based audience builder for CTV — to employ AI and keywords to reach the relevant stakeholders and decision-makers who are most likely to convert.



Measurable performance

Where traditional TV lacks the performance capabilities that B2B marketers have come to know and love with digital channels, CTV closes that gap with robust cross-platform measurement and reporting. It lets B2B advertisers track conversions, get insight into campaign performance and optimize their strategies for maximum ROI. And for brands running omnichannel campaigns, CTV's performance-driven approach seamlessly integrates with channels like paid search and social — offering a 360-degree view into the effectiveness of their campaigns.



Cost efficiency

Traditional linear TV is notorious for requiring hefty budgets and long lead times. But CTV campaigns can be more cost-effective, allowing B2B brands with more limited budgets to reach audiences on the biggest screen in the house.



Creative flexibility

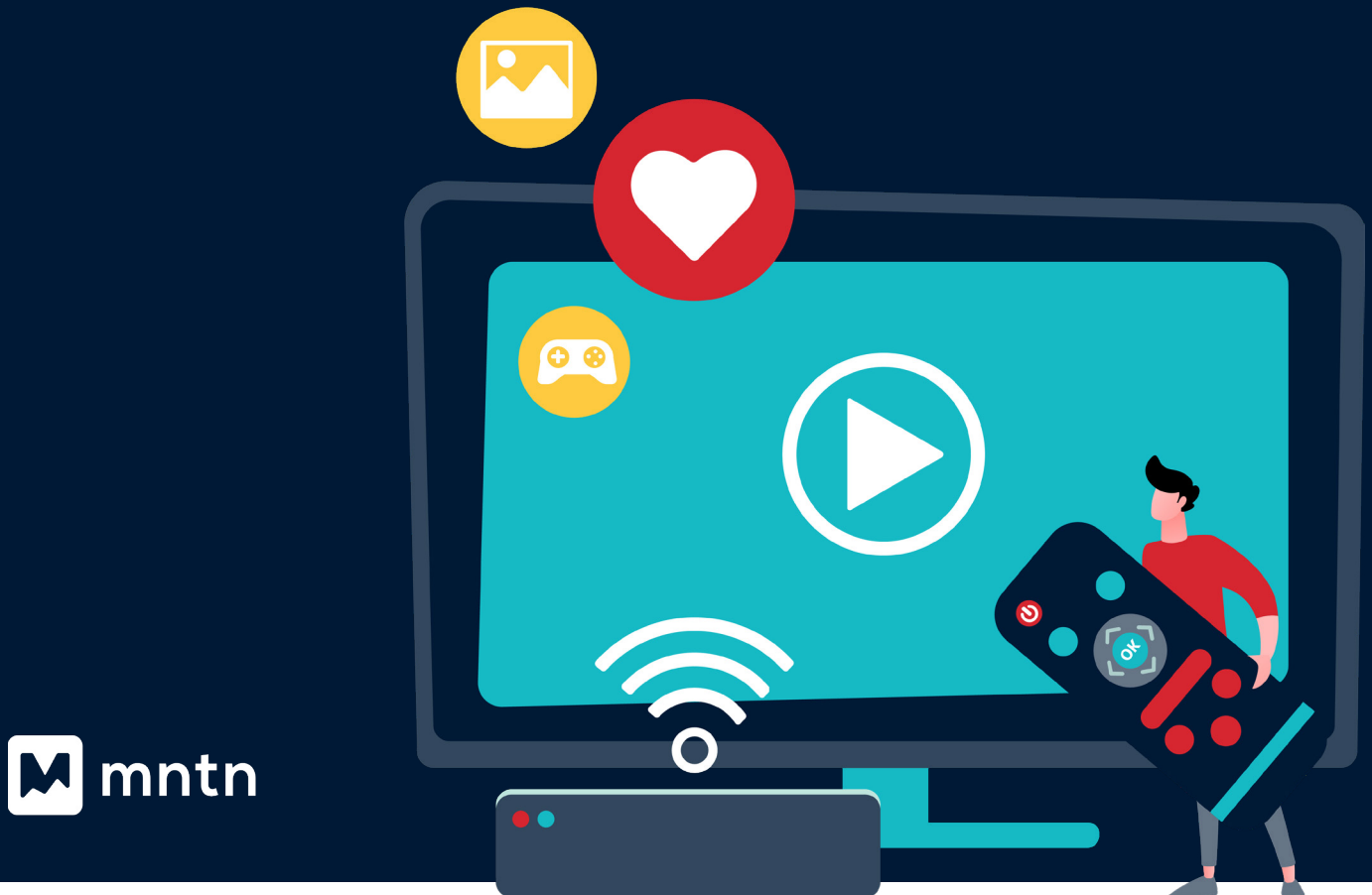
Speaking of entry costs, many B2B marketers assume they need expensive creative to advertise on TV, but with CTV, brands can repurpose existing video assets from their search and social campaigns. No video assets at all? No problem — solutions like QuickFrame or MNTN's Creative-as-a-Subscription (CaaS) allow B2B brands to produce TV-ready creative without the price tag associated with a traditional agency. And with the flexibility to refresh campaign creative based on performance, B2B marketers can fine-tune their messages and keep audiences engaged.



Generating new demand

Paid search and social can help capture existing demand, but there's a lot of competition to contend with for the same inventory. CTV, on the other hand, is a master at generating new demand. By targeting high-intent audiences who might not yet be in the buying cycle, CTV allows B2B marketers to increase awareness for prospects before they actively start their search for new solutions.

Ultimately, CTV has turned TV into a viable performance channel for B2B marketers, allowing them to unlock the potential of the biggest screen in the house and differentiate themselves in an increasingly competitive market.





EMBARKING ON THE B2B TRANSFORMATION JOURNEY

The line between B2B and B2C buying experiences continues to blur, which is creating more urgency for businesses to assess and revitalize their ecommerce experiences.

“Four or five years ago, they were too distinct,” Accenture Song’s Marciano said. “They operated very differently, but now you’re seeing they’re basically interwoven. So many principles on the B2C side, like creating a 360-degree view of the customer, apply in B2B. How do you truly understand who that buyer is, knowing that those buyers cut across multiple life stages and demographics? How do you understand what’s important to them so you can serve up the best solution?”

To truly understand and respond to these varying expectations, Chandel emphasized the importance of a long-term vision.

“Companies should create a multi-year transformation roadmap to gradually modernize their B2B commerce ecosystem,” he said. “Capabilities should be prioritized based on customer demand (voice of the customer), current and future business needs and business value. **For a successful transformation, commitment from top commerce, sales, marketing, service and technical leadership is critical, as customers are looking for an end-to-end experience, not just order placement.**”

LEARN MORE...



MNTN is the Hardest Working Software in TV, bringing unrivaled performance and simplicity to Connected TV advertising. Our selfserve technology makes running TV ads as easy as search and social and helps brands drive measurable conversions, revenue, site visits, and more. MNTN is one of Fast Company's Most Innovative Companies of 2023 and was recently named one of the Next Big Things in Tech for its upcoming VIVA creative suite.

www.mountain.com



VTEX (NYSE: VTEX) is the composable and complete commerce platform that delivers more efficiency and less maintenance to organizations seeking to make smarter IT investments and modernize their tech stack. Our pragmatic composability approach empowers brands, distributors, and retailers with unparalleled flexibility and comprehensive solutions, enabling them to invest solely in what provides a clear business advantage and boosts profitability. VTEX is trusted by 2,600 global B2C and B2B customers, including Carrefour, Colgate, Motorola, Sony, Stanley Black & Decker, and Whirlpool, having 3,500 active online stores across 43 countries (as of FY ended on December 31, 2023).

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info@retailtouchpoints.com



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alicia Esposito, VP, Content

Alicia is an editor-turned-content marketer, with a passion for all things focused on digital-powered experiential retail.