


# Unifying the B2B Commerce Experience

Guide







Driving value throughout manufacturing and distribution by dispelling the myths surrounding B2B ecommerce, focusing on the real measures of the B2B buying experience and the characteristics of a truly unified B2B commerce environment.

# Introduction

When industry experts began to realize the promise of B2B ecommerce there were many predictions surrounding the “death” of the B2B salesperson. Large distributors began decimating their salesforces in an attempt to drive transactions entirely online. As a result, B2B salespeople began to view eCommerce as their competition. And right there, many B2B ecommerce initiatives drove to a grinding halt.

Despite massive investments in digital transformation efforts, many distributors and manufacturers are facing online customer adoption rates that are on average lower than 10%. Customers are experiencing frustration, service representatives are burning out from transactional intensity, and salespeople are out of the loop when it comes to digital buying activity. Compounding the problem are B2C ecommerce vendors lured into the B2B market by the nearly \$2 trillion in B2B ecommerce transactions predicted within the next five years. Their hollow promises of fast implementations and massive increases in sales were based on a total lack of understanding of the complex B2B buying process. Poor platform choices caused many B2B ecommerce initiatives to fail before they ever actually began.

“The B2B buying experience is hybrid by nature. It must provide the customer with the ability to move seamlessly between selfservice and full-service elements.”



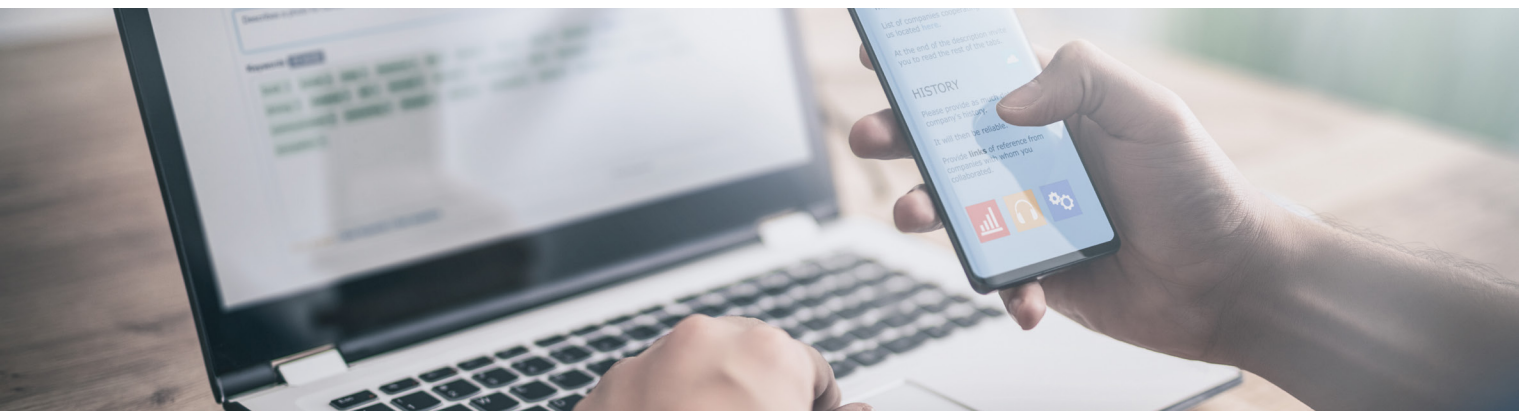
**Jeff Natkze**  
Associate VP,  
Product - Commerce,  
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Buyers want contextual interactions with both human and digital assets across a holistic but non-linear journey. To achieve that goal, we need to look beyond the omnichannel, beyond the individual transaction and even beyond commerce itself. The answer lies not in a hybrid model, but in a unified commerce environment that powers the true measures of B2B. Not just sales, but individual productivity, process efficiency and reduced cost-of-sales.

The characteristics of a truly unified commerce environment include:

- Seamless customer movement between digital and human interactions.
- Strong post-purchase activities that drive both loyalty and valuable data.
- Real-time, synchronous information from the user experience to enterprise systems.
- Fully functional mobile capabilities that support commerce everywhere a transaction can occur.
- Highly engaged, empowered salespeople whether the customer is online or using traditional sales channels.



# Re-engaging sales within the unified commerce environment

“Sales enablement” has always been a backwards term. Unified commerce is about sales and service enabling the overall customer experience, not the other way around. For that to happen, salespeople and CSRs need to see the big picture in terms of what the customer is actually doing.

Are they ordering online? Are they abandoning a cart halfway through the process and contacting a service representative? If the experience is truly going to be seamless, a salesperson needs real-time data, and a view into every customer activity including their past history.

Today’s millennial buyers prefer an online experience, and they only want to talk when they know the conversation will provide value. Salespeople need the right information, at the right time, and in the right place to deliver that value on-demand.

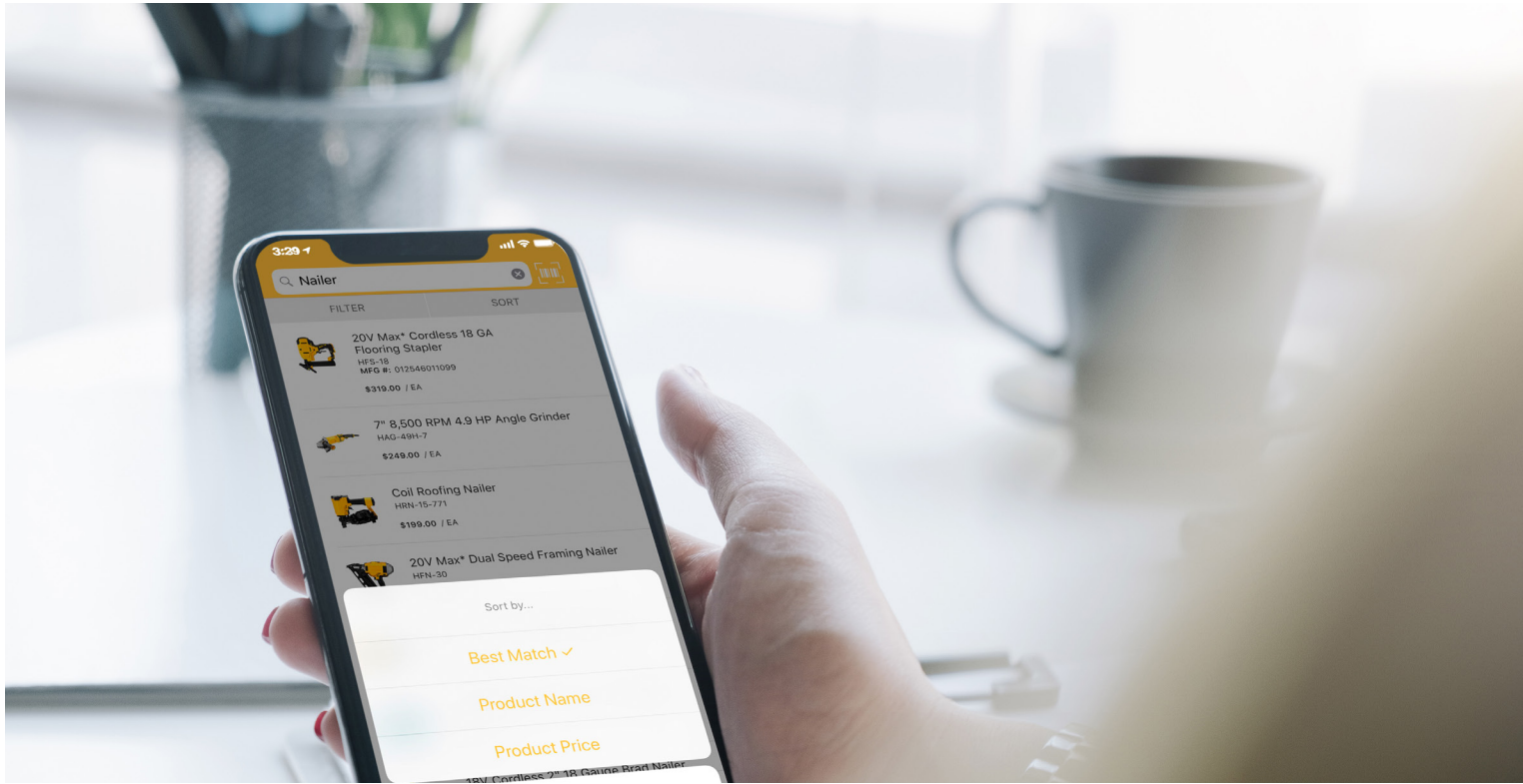
Before they can support a customer, however, a salesperson must be incented to onboard them into the digital experience.

Understanding that the digital solution can enable them to focus on high value, consultative activities can incent sales to bring more customers into the digital fold. The result is that sales and service productivity is increased, the cost of sales is reduced, and the customer’s individual needs and preferences are being met in a highly customizable, personalized buying experience.

A lot of B2B commerce work is mundane and repeatable. Sales and service representatives often get dragged into providing these tasks and this is where ecommerce can replace their busy work. Most sales people didn’t get into sales just to take orders. They want to add higher value wherever possible.”



**Mike Bernard**  
Head of Audience and  
Product Marketing,  
Episerver



## Beyond responsivity to a fully functional mobile experience

Considered their mobile device essential to their work, with Gen X (aged 36-51) not far behind at 76%. A recent Google study found that 42% of B2B researchers used a mobile device at some point during the B2B purchasing process. Beyond sales reluctance a major factor in low adoption rates for B2B eCommerce is the simple fact that most systems merely provide a responsive mobile experience. Responsivity alone doesn't meet the complex needs of B2B buyers or sellers. The fact is that many manufacturers and distributors in particular are losing out on massive productivity and efficiency gains by not factoring fully functional mobile into their strategy.

Native mobile apps for B2B eCommerce need capabilities that mirror the multitude and complexity of tasks within the B2B buying process. That means providing user-specific, rich product catalogs, specific pricing and product recommendations and sophisticated, automated order and re-order functionality. Mobile functionality also has to be personalized for each individual user as well. That's simply not possible without a unified commerce environment in which information can be dynamically extracted based on the scenario, on the customer, and on the individual role.



70%

Of customers stop doing business with a brand due a poor support experience

## Managing Beyond the Sales Transaction

Pew Research reported recently that more than 70% of customers stop doing business with a brand due to a poor support experience. Unifying the B2B commerce cycle is even more crucial after a purchase occurs, where the customer experience is perhaps even more complex.

It is at this phase, where returns, re-orders, and other frequent, repeatable B2B activities create high transactional intensity, that the benefits of a unified commerce environment can really pay off. And if the ecommerce solution is not fully connected with the backend business systems, this is where customers can be lost in the blink of an eye.

When information isn't shared and synchronized in a real-time fashion valuable productivity is lost. To meet the important goal of improving efficiency, a fully unified commerce experience will provide a "single source of truth" across every aspect of the buying cycle, from the order, to fulfillment, to returns. When post-purchase transactions are handled seamlessly and smoothly, customers will not only return, they'll increase their business with that manufacturer and distributor. When salespeople and service reps are able to handle problems knowledgeably and quickly, not only digital trust but brand loyalty is increased as well.



## Conclusion

At Episerver we've always known that the real convergence is not between B2B and B2C, but between human and digital interactions. A holistic journey is a reality for many manufacturers and distributors who continue to engage in their B2B eCommerce initiatives with the right goals in mind and the right technology partner.

A unified B2B commerce environment does drive more sales, it's true. But more importantly it drives more value for the entire organization by increasing efficiency, reducing costs, and accelerating productivity for every single person involved.





# About Episerver

Episerver empowers businesses to scale through the most customer-centric approach to digital experiences. Its Customer-Centric Digital Experience Platform™ features best-in-class content management, robust commerce and intuitive data and personalization solutions. The platform has consistently earned industry, analyst and media recognition for its vision, capabilities and customer commitment. Episerver's 900+ partners and 825+ employees in offices around the globe are proud to help more than 8,000 customers enrich their customer lifetime value, increase revenue and grow their brands.

Learn more at [episerver.com](https://www.episerver.com).

