salesforce

THE MANUFACTURER'S GUIDE TO

DIGITAL B2B COMMERCE

Contents

01 # Introduction

As consumer buying experiences evolve, so must your B2B strategy

The rate of digital transformation in the manufacturing industry is accelerated – fueled by changes caused by the pandemic. In addition, manufacturing customers now expect the same digital engagement from a B2B perspective (including B2B commerce) that they experience with companies like Amazon as individual consumers. Sending countless emails, waiting days for a quote, or dealing with a clunky, outdated website is no longer acceptable. B2B buyers want self-service, and manufacturers know they must adapt.

Customers now conduct meaningful business transactions online – making purchases on their own time without interacting with a sales rep. According to a recent Salesforce report, 70% of manufacturing company respondents have increased their investment in embedded/contextual commerce and 76% are planning to increase investments in B2B ecommerce over the next two years.

Digital to dollars.

In manufacturing, launching a revenue-generating digital commerce channel is no easy feat. Obstacles include investing in costly IT integrations, aligning traditional selling channels with digital, and rethinking certain business processes.

Fortunately, the IT costs associated with commerce have steadily decreased. SaaS-based B2B commerce systems reduce the risk of overspending on technology, as it's more flexible, extensible, and easily configurable – meaning that introducing new or upgraded products and services no longer requires heavy coding and implementation headaches. SaaS-based commerce platforms come with standard, ready-to-deploy B2B commerce interactions that speed implementation and launch. And, they offer greater security measures and frequent feature updates to continue improving its service.

But even with the right technology in place, navigating the digital world for the first time can be complicated. Making the wrong move out of the gate can set businesses behind. To help you plan effectively, the following guidebook offers five key pieces of advice for a smooth digital commerce implementation.

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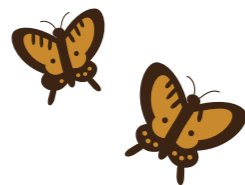
Five Tips for Digital Commerce Implementation

TIP #1

Listen to your customers

If you're making the move to digital commerce, you probably already know your customers want a convenient, easy-to-use channel for self-service purchasing. Even still, tailor it to their specific needs to motivate them to use it once it's up and running. Learn what they really want and where you need to improve their experience.

Talk to your customers

It's the easiest way to uncover exactly what they want. Whether digitally or in person, figure out your customers' frustrations and how they'd like to interact with you online. Their feedback can help you adjust processes and reallocate resources and manpower to solve their problems.

Use a mix of customer interviews, focus groups, feedback from sales and customer service teams, website metrics, surveys, and polls … even shadow your customers or watch how they use their current tools. This qualitative and quantitative data will paint a complete picture.

Document your learnings

How many times have you heard this argument when championing a push for change: We've always done it this way. Even in today's environment, stakeholders may question

the need for a shift toward digital. Documenting your customers' feedback provides more concrete data to help against internal pushback.

It's also important to document their feedback in order to prioritize what you need to address. Customers may have a lot of improvements they'd like to see, so don't fall victim to analysis paralysis. To avoid getting bogged down in the feedback loop, set parameters on your decision timeline. And, your launch will likely have multiple phases, so you don't necessarily need to address every improvement with the first phase.

> Whether digitally or in person, figure out your customers' current pain points and determine the features that will best alleviate them.

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TIP #2

Build and evolve your business case

A digitally-inclined company culture is critical to a successful digital commerce implementation. Internal buy-in and widespread adoption throughout your organization start by building a strong business case for digital.

Common pain points for manufacturing companies include high overhead costs, inability to quickly adapt to market changes, and declining customer acquisition and retention. Manufacturers that still operate with a traditional mindset – in which in-person meetings, phone, or fax drive all transactions – especially feel these challenges. Providing customers a self-serve option gives them flexibility to order how they prefer. In fact, 66% of high-performing B2B companies say they are investing in a self-serve experience.

With 83% of B2B organizations already selling online and ecommerce being the top sales channel in which they are investing, it's clear that ecommerce is not just a tool for B2C companies. It's critical for B2B companies to meet customer needs and to continue growing their revenue.

eCommerce can lead to better correct-first-time/"perfect" order rates because manufacturers can check an order before it is booked to make sure it complies with all the requirements. This prevents orders with mistakes from flowing through to the ERP where they can cause issues with production scheduling and inventory. Plus, orders cannot be processed until these mistakes are cleared up, so it can also affect revenue recognition (or if pricing/margin mistakes aren't caught, it leads to revenue/margin leakage).

> Providing proof points on how digital commerce can address your specific challenges or business goals will help generate internal buy-in.

Generate internal buy-in

Getting stakeholder alignment for top-down buy-in for digital commerce is a must. You also need sales, IT, customer service, legal, and marketing involved with clear roles and decision rights. Planning and prioritizing the needs foreach implementation phase requires full visibility and team contributions.

Prioritization of objectives when choosing a digital solution

Digital commerce brings value to B2B through revenue, customer satisfaction, and growth. An innovation focus is a shift in thinking (and possibly goals) that must have buy-in from executives on down. Market growth can be difficult to achieve without adapting to new customer and market needs – and unless everyone in the organization embraces a digital mindset, it's impossible to evolve with your customers.

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TIP #3

Make commerce complementary to your sales team

Launching a digital channel for sales should be complementary to your traditional processes. An omni-channel approach to commerce offers customers more options to purchase when and how they want – whether they prefer a high-touch sales process with a rep or a low- or no-touch digital process. Commerce should enhance the ways your customers order and receive service from you.

With customers making ecommerce orders via a self-service platform, sales reps can serve as trusted advisors instead of order takers. Instead of doing routine tasks, they can better engage customers and provide greater value through consulting, upselling, and cross-selling customers. While it's tempting to think that online and offline commerce are mutually exclusive, digital commerce is not (nor should it be) a substitute for your sales team. Instead, it should help reinforce the sales and customer relationship.

Get more out of your sales staff

A recent Salesforce survey of more than 1400 commerce leaders found that digital has enabled many businesses to retrain their sales staff to serve in higher value-add roles. Thirty-seven percent of survey respondents reported their sales teams' roles have shifted in response to the growth of digital. And, 63% report sales reps have become more of a trusted advisor for customers rather than an order taker. Sales reps are able to leverage more holistic customer insights and to recommend more relevant products or services (cross sell/up sell). Customers gain easier access to pricing and product catalogs and offers.

86% of business buyers expect a trusted advisor relationship with sales reps.

Customers still value human interaction, so your self-service channel should never completely replace sales team's relationships. But buyers also care about flexibility and ease of doing business, so an omni-channel approach helps unify the customer experience across all touchpoints.

Here's a recommendation for you:

Robotic Arm

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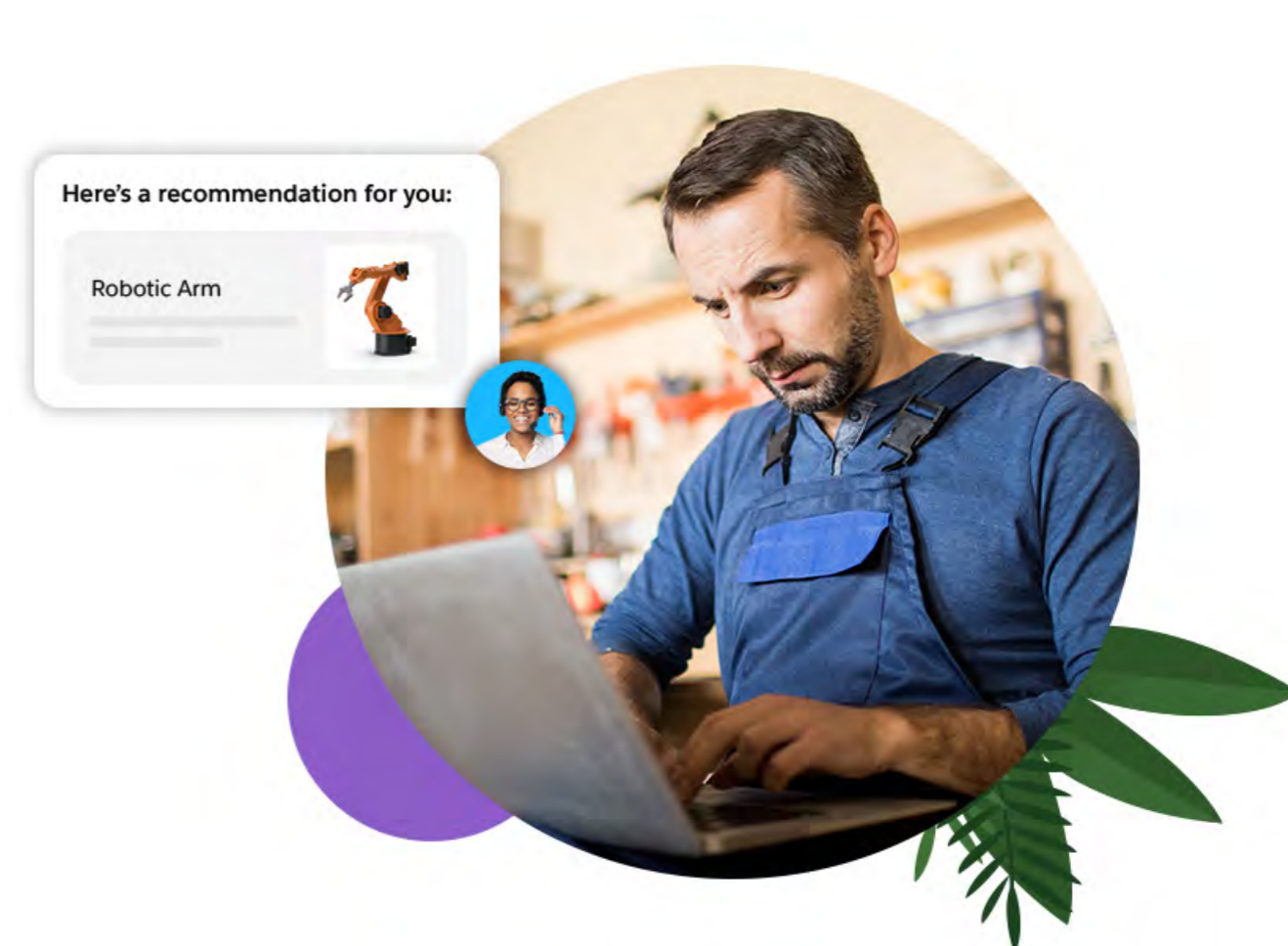
Understand how you'll live with digital commerce

To effectively launch a new digital channel, you need to set your business up to embrace a digital-first mindset. That requires roles that support and advocate for digital commerce at all levels of the company and focus on constantly improving your offerings.

Sales Team Concerns

Developing a digital-first culture starts with getting your sales and service teams on board. Your sales teams may be worried about the impact on their sales opportunities, customer relationships, or even their jobs. In reality, employees benefit with less time spent on manual tasks that are automated or shifted to self-service. This allows them to focus more time on higher value activities.

Ecommerce amplifies the amount of data at sales reps' fingertips exponentially, improving their ability to cross-sell and upsell, and ultimately drive more revenue. Make it clear to your sales teams that a shift toward digital will only enhance their ability to close deals and improve customer satisfaction.

Digital Marketing Support

For manufacturing companies seeking to grow revenue with digital, there are several skills that are necessary to make digital a successful channel, such as search engine optimization (SEO), content marketing, and digital merchandising.

These are critical to commerce success, as keywords and SEO content will make your company more visible when customers search. Once they reach your site, content marketing provides information to help visitors understand how you help them with their problems. Digital merchandising drives visitors to buy and enables cross-selling and upselling based on their browsing and purchase patterns.

In addition, it's challenging for organizations to change their business model (such as launching a direct-to-consumer channel) alongside a commerce launch. This may add unique complexities depending on your situation. So, digital marketing skills gaps may also provide a reason to focus commerce initially on augmenting existing channels, like field sales and customer support.

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**TIP #4**

Understand how you'll live with digital commerce
Continued

Light Lift for IT

Do you need to overcome a gap in your company's IT skills? That's where cloud-based technology systems come into play. Most only require minimal (if any) coding knowledge to maintain. You may have explored upgrade solutions for your traditional on-premises systems that required years-long and complex IT development initiatives. But with cloud-based technology, current site administrators with little coding experience can often modify and support systems with ease.

Easily updating cloud-based systems through configuration instead of heavy coding helps you keep up with evolving market dynamics and customer expectations. With the rapid pace of innovation in B2B technology today, a digital-first mindset will give you the flexibility and agility to adapt and scale over time.

> With cloud-based systems, current site administrators with little coding experience can often modify and support systems with ease.

Configuring a new app:

Label

Choose layout

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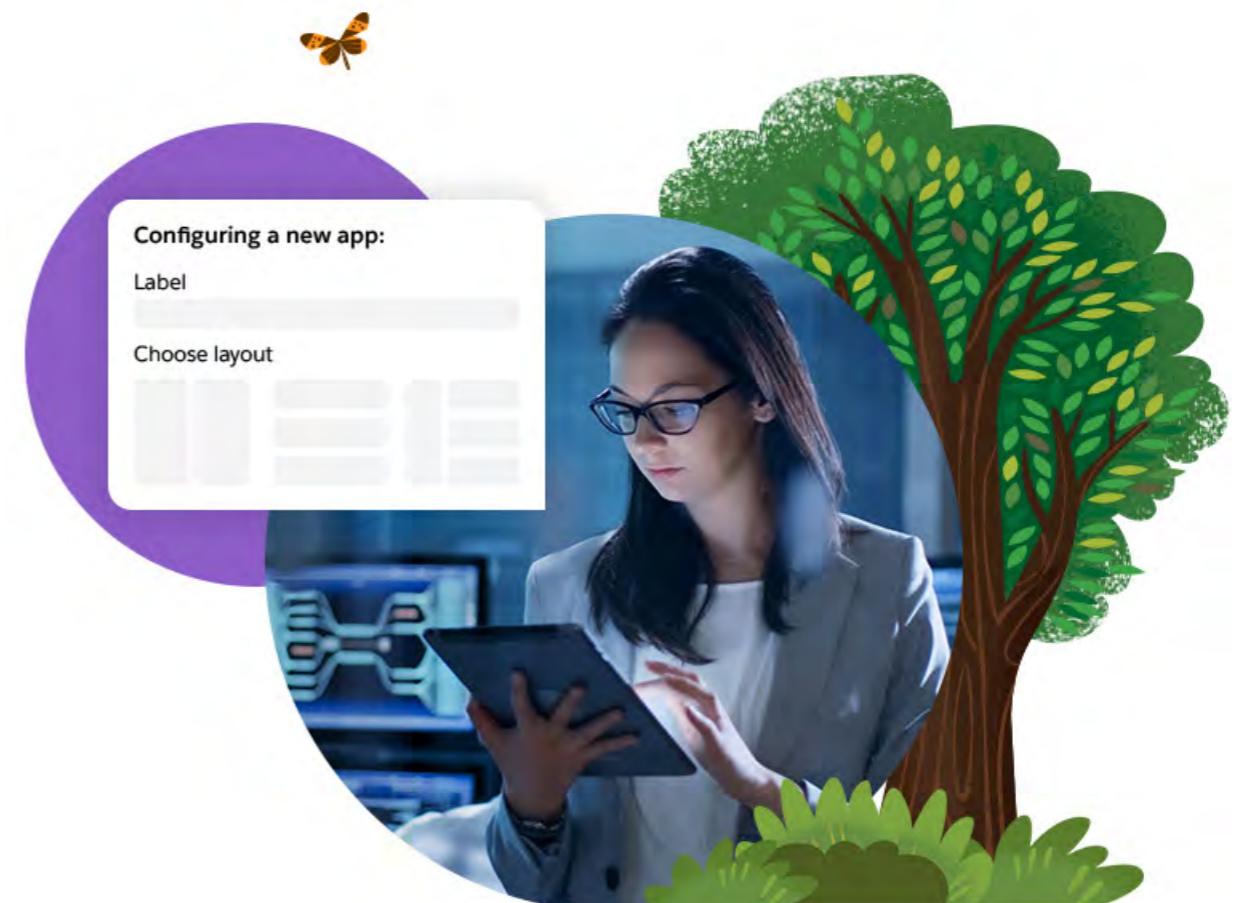
TIP #5

Take a minimum viable product approach

Be realistic about the features you include in your first launch. You don't have to launch a polished end product that contains every desired feature with your first release. Get the first phase completed and iterate.

The old adage "Perfect is the enemy of good" holds true for commerce and digital transformation. Unlike ERP systems or other investments that don't require many changes once set up, successful commerce programs are constantly evolving to meet customer expectations and seize new opportunities.

Manufacturing companies competing with existing ecommerce giants don't have time to wait in getting a digital storefront to market. You should first focus on launching a minimal viable product (MVP) that supports your most important business goals. It should incorporate your customers' highest priorities, provide a solid foundation on which to build, and begin earning revenue as soon as possible. This approach is beneficial for two reasons. First, it starts driving sales in just a few months, rather

than years. Second, you can collect feedback along the way to stay ahead of changing customer and market demands. With this immediate feedback you can make quicker updates to your site.

The flexibility of cloud-based commerce systems makes this possible. As mentioned above, configuring cloud solutions and updates can be done with clicks, not code. When it comes time for more complex enhancements, cloud platforms allow you to leverage built-in core capabilities and launch within a matter of days. On-premises systems, by contrast, are simply not agile enough to rapidly implement change.

Configuration for cloud solutions can be done in clicks, not code – meaning that most changes can be handled by business employees with little development experience.

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How One Company Created a B2B Commerce Storefront

A leading distributor of lighting products and accessories wanted to open an ecommerce channel to sell its catalog of lamps, ballasts, and sockets to electrical distribution companies, specialty lighting, and original equipment manufacturer (OEM) industries. It needed a commerce platform that could easily scale and meet evolving customer demands without significant developer and IT support.

> The organization chose Salesforce's B2B Commerce solution for its ability to provide smooth digital commerce implementation.

The company sought to enhance customer engagement by providing customers more visibility to products and current inventory, not replace its existing channels. It also understood that trying to change its business model at the same time as launching the new platform would spread itself too thin.

The company focused its initial launch scope on B2B, providing a digital commerce solution for registered users and resellers only, and drove configuration of the store and business readiness activities to support that initial launch. To expedite some business processes, the company leveraged Salesforce workflow rules and out-of-the-box shipping tables to simplify pricing of shipments. Because it was spending significant time and resources on manual quoting processes for wholesale customers, the organization needed to drive increased revenue

and improve efficiency. Salesforce B2B Commerce helped it automate the quote-to-cash process, get to market quickly, save costs, easily scale, and enhance customer engagement.

Salesforce's B2B Commerce solution provides a seamless self-service purchasing experience. This means feedback is easy-to-access and allows the company to develop new features and adjust products and services strategically based on customer needs. The company can focus on digital B2B commerce today while leaving the door open to new business models in the future when it can invest the resources necessary to make them successful. Salesforce's flexible, configurable platform makes it easy for businesses to evolve as customer and market needs change.

Through digital commerce, this company offers customers a resource to research products and place orders when it's convenient for them. And, customers who prefer to order through traditional channels still have that option. The deep connections Salesforce provides between commerce, sales, service, marketing, and other channels ensure customers get a consistent ordering experience no matter what channel they choose.

04 # Conclusion

Salesforce B2B Commerce helps manufacturers grow revenue

Digital innovations have transformed the way manufacturers interact with customers. Business buyers now expect seamless self-service digital buying experiences and will remain loyal to businesses that deliver on this need. As a result, manufacturing companies face a fork in the road they can no longer avoid: invest in robust digital commerce systems or risk losing customers to competitors who do.

But while this decision seems obvious, manufacturers know that this change isn't going to be easy. The tips outlined in this guidebook are crucial for businesses looking to drive real revenue from a shift toward digital. Setting your business up for digital success starts by listening to your customers about their needs and expectations, and ends with building a solid business case to ensure that internal stakeholders are wholeheartedly on board.

Manufacturers of all sizes should consider SaaS-based commerce systems that give them the infrastructure and flexibility necessary to compete. With a system built in the cloud, businesses can launch quickly, constantly adapt based on customer feedback, and deliver self-service commerce.

And they can do this all without heavy implementation investments and extended time to market. With a flexible, scalable commerce solution in their arsenal, manufacturers will be equipped to thrive in the digital world.

> **With a system built in the cloud, businesses can launch quickly, constantly adapt based on customer feedback, and enable self-service.**

Want to learn more?

Ready for a digital sales channel, but not sure where to start? Check out Salesforce Manufacturing Digital Bootcamp can help you create a:

- 7-part business plan
- Robust business case
- 90-day roadmap

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