Quick Answer: How Do We Overcome the Top Barriers in B2B Commerce Adoption

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B2B commerce has seen increasing client interest as more sales activities are moving to digital channels. However, barriers to adoption exist. Application leaders must use collaboration tools and automation technologies to facilitate self-service and assisted transactions.

Quick Answer

How do we overcome the top barriers in B2B commerce adoption?

- Top barriers to adoption include an inability to negotiate, complex or unavailable products, and longer durations required to close deals.
- Using rules and artificial intelligence (AI) to automatically approve certain terms can reduce the burden of negotiation and shorten the sales cycle.
- Supporting a variety of commonly used collaboration tools allows customers to get immediate help and negotiate.
- Integrating product configuration tools with digital commerce helps to support the selling of complex goods and services.
- Organizations should offer consistent and transparent pricing across channels, and align sales teams so they become digital ambassadors.

More Detail

The Top Barriers to Adoption

The Gartner 2020 B2B Digital Commerce Survey shows that the top barriers to buying and selling on websites include: ¹

- An inability to negotiate
- The complexity or unavailability of some products and services
- Longer durations required to close deals (Figure 1).
Respondents from North America and APAC feel strongly about the need to deal with a person, while Western European respondents are particularly concerned with the challenge of selling complex products. Dealing with a person doesn’t have to be face-to-face. It can be done virtually via chat, video or conferencing.

**Figure 1: Top Barriers to B2B Selling and Buying Through Websites**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selling</th>
<th>Buying</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>38% Takes longer to close the deal through a website than through a salesperson</td>
<td>43% Website does not support negotiating complex agreements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36% Our customers want to deal with a person</td>
<td>41% Some of the products/services are not sold on website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33% Website does not support price negotiation</td>
<td>36% Cannot get the best price or negotiated price on a website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29% Our products are too complex</td>
<td>32% Takes longer to purchase through a website than to speak to a salesperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27% Lack of buy-in from sales team</td>
<td>30% Website doesn’t support the necessary payment method</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 180 selling organizations, n = 197 procuring organizations, excludes “unsure”

Q. What are the top three barriers to selling/purchasing B2B products and/or services through websites at your organization?
Source: Gartner 2020 B2B Digital Commerce Survey 751315_G

**Gartner (May 2021)**

**Use Rules and AI to Automatically Approve Terms to Reduce the Burden of Negotiation and Shorten the Sales Cycle**

Digital commerce sites should allow customers to enter proposed purchase commitments such as products, volumes and timing. They should then show the appropriate terms or even automatically approve terms in real time, using rules and AI. Application leaders can work with sales and marketing to define terms that qualify for autoapproval. Complex deals may not be fully automated, but the
commerce site can make product recommendations or propose the best configuration based on the customer's requirements and previous configurations.

AI-driven and real-time pricing engines can consider factors such as competition, customer profile and stock availability, and come up with the best price for each buying situation. These engines can also personalize the price based on customer profile and attributes, and indicate that the price they see is a spot price that is time-bound and subject to change. This model has been employed successfully to optimize profits for travel and transportation, telecom, energy and utilities, chemical, and financial service companies. Organizations can also offer discounts for new customers to convert them on the spot, or alert them of volume discounts in order to upsell.

Support a Variety of Commonly Used Collaboration Tools to Allow Customers to Get Immediate Help or Negotiate

Chatbots, live or video chat, call-me and co-browsing tools can be integrated with digital commerce platforms to give buyers immediate access to sales or service support. This is helpful when selling complex goods, where the customer may be confused, unable to perform an action on the website, or just looking to talk to a person.

Consider supporting employees’ personally obtained apps for customer collaboration. The Gartner 2021 Digital Worker Experience Survey shows that 41% of workers use personally obtained apps or web services for customer collaboration. This is more pronounced in APAC, where 48% of the workers do so. These tools include mobile messaging apps such as WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, WeChat and LINE. The survey shows that 60% of employees use mobile messaging for work on a daily basis. This is more obvious in APAC, where 69% of the workers use such apps (compared to 48% in North America and Europe).

Support collaboration tools (whether sanctioned by the organization or obtained by workers themselves) as part of your omnichannel sales strategy. Ensure that you put in place behavior guidelines when communicating with customers via personal messaging apps, and implement monitoring, archiving and privacy solutions to ensure compliance.

Integrate Product Configuration Tools With Digital Commerce to Support the Selling of Complex Goods and Services

Deploy product configuration on commerce sites to capture customer requirements and map them to product options and features. You can recommend choices and ensure that only valid combinations of products and features can be sold. If the product is too complex:

- Bundle common combinations of features and options into simpler packages and make them available online (see SpaceX's rideshare example).
- For configurable products such as machinery, use visual configurations to show product details of the chosen options and features.
B2B organizations can extend configure, price, quote (CPQ) to customer self-service to automate the quote process for moderately complex products. This provides an alternative way to launch digital commerce. Subscription management can also be used to sell subscriptions and recurring services. When integrated with digital commerce, customers can easily compare plan and billing options. They can change delivery frequencies and add-ons, or request upgrades or downgrades.

Offer Consistent and Transparent Pricing Across Channels, and Align Sales Teams So That They Become Digital Ambassadors

Offer transparent pricing on-site to let customers explore product combinations. Encourage customers to log in or create accounts to see account-specific pricing and savings compared to the listed price. Enforce consistent pricing across channels to avoid “channel-picking.” Support sales and service teams with AI to suggest counteroffers without compromising business objectives. Give them visibility into account interactions to support relationship building and customer retention. Provide training for digital commerce tools, focusing on the benefits of richer functionality and faster performance in order to get sales buy-in. Finally, align sales incentives so that they get compensated based on account assignment rather than channels. Sales user adoption is essential to digital commerce adoption and should be taken seriously.

Recommended by the Authors

Increase Profits and Delight Buyers by Becoming a Digital-First, Omnichannel B2B Seller

5 Ways the Shift in B2B Buying Will Reconfigure B2B Selling

Market Guide for B2B Price Optimization and Management Software

Expert Insight Video: How to Succeed With B2B Digital Commerce

Evidence

1 Gartner’s 2020 B2B Digital Commerce Survey: This primary research was conducted online from 27 October through 15 December 2020 among a total of 379 respondents in North America, Western Europe, and APAC. Respondents were either selling or purchasing organizations, spanning various industries. Organizations were screened for having at least 250 employees, and being business-focused or a blend of business- and IT-focused. Respondents were required to be at the Director level or above and work in a department relevant to selling or purchasing. Selling respondents had to sell to businesses and currently use — or plan to use in the next three years — websites for B2B sales. Procuring respondents had to purchase products or services from other businesses, and currently use — or plan to use in the next three years — websites for B2B purchases. Disclaimer: Results do not represent “global” findings or the market as a whole, but reflect the sentiments of the respondents and companies surveyed.

2 Gartner’s 2021 Digital Worker Experience Survey: This study was conducted online during November and December 2020 among 10,080 respondents from U.S., Europe and APAC. Participants were screened
for full-time employment, in organizations with 100 or more employees and required to use digital technology for work purposes. Ages range from 18 through 74 years old, with quotas and weighting applied for age, gender, region and income, so that results are representative of working country populations. Digital technology includes any combination of technological devices (for example, laptops, smartphones and tablets), applications, and web services that people use for communication, information or productivity.

Disclaimer: Results of this study do not represent "global" findings or the market as a whole, but are a simple average of results for the targeted countries covered in this survey.

3 SMALLSAT RIDESHARE PROGRAM, SpaceX.