
February, 2015

The rise of the empowered customer has converged B2B and B2C e-commerce. Despite similarities in the challenges faced by firms in both categories, B2B firms differentiate themselves by using content as a key lever to help buyers do their jobs.

Definitions:

For the purpose of this research, Aberdeen defines the following as:

**B2B Commerce**: A term used to describe commerce transactions between businesses. These include the sale of raw materials and semi-finished products as well as the sale of products to wholesalers and retailers. The buyer of the products in these transactions is a business. The end-customer making the purchase is doing so on behalf of an organization.

**B2C Commerce**: A term used to describe commerce transactions between businesses and consumers. Unlike B2B commerce, the buyer of the products in these transactions is an individual consumer, not a business.

Changing customer behavior and expectations set the stage for success in B2B e-commerce.

A recent Aberdeen survey of the e-commerce activities of both B2B and B2C firms (see sidebar) has revealed several interesting insights. Among them was the fact that despite the unique nature of their activities, the roadblocks impacting B2B and B2C e-commerce activities are similar (see Table 1).

**Table I: B2B & B2C Firms Share Similar Challenges**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top Challenges (n=163)</th>
<th>B2B E-Commerce Firms</th>
<th>B2C E-Commerce Firms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Customers are increasingly using digital channels to shop; we need to be there</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to reach to a wider shopper base to sell our products</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to differentiate ourselves from competitors through delivering dynamic and transformative digital shopper experiences</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to better respond to empowered customer requests to shop anytime and anywhere seamlessly across multiple channels</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This question was asked as a multi-answer question, meaning that respondents were able to select multiple challenges that influence their e-commerce activities.
The increasing adoption and use of digital technologies has changed more than consumer behavior. The use of smart phones and tablets as well as social media platforms is now commonplace in B2B e-commerce activities. Indeed, the above table shows that the challenge of customers increasingly using digital touch-points is the top reason keeping executives in B2B firms up at night. However, Aberdeen’s March 2014 *State of the CEM Market 2014: It’s All About Better Use of Customer Data* study shows that 99% of companies are already using multiple channels to interact with customers. This means that it’s not the adoption of digital channels that concerns B2B firms, as they already use multiple channels (including numerous digital ones) as part of their e-commerce activities. It’s successfully incorporating these channels within existing e-commerce activities that challenges B2B firms.

A close look at the other findings in Table 1 shows that delivering omni-channel interactions is the primary reason why B2B firms cite customer empowerment as a challenge. Delivering omni-channel customer interactions means that a business interacts with customers across multiple channels and devices while making sure that content delivered through each touch-point is optimized based on customer needs and conveys a consistent message with the ones delivered across other channels. Although both B2B and B2C firms cite changing customer behavior as their top challenge, B2B firms are 33% more likely to struggle with streamlining their existing e-commerce content and workflows to enable omni-channel interactions (36% vs. 27%), compared to B2C firms.

**Key Takeaways**

Based on the above analysis, while it’s accurate to state that B2B and B2C e-commerce have converged, in terms of their priorities and challenges, it’s also accurate to state that B2B firms have their unique needs as well. Specifically, they must lay the
B2B and B2C e-commerce have converged... but B2B firms still have unique challenges that set them apart

foundation so that they can utilize data and content as strategic levers to deliver Best-in-Class omni-channel customer interactions.

Among the steps that successful B2B firms take to lay the foundation for the successful use of data and content, is establishing transparency and integration between e-commerce and back-office systems. Companies with this capability enjoy a 90% greater year-over-year increase in annual company revenue, compared to those without it. Another step taken by successful B2B firms is optimizing the use of search activities to drive e-commerce site traffic and increase conversion rates of buyers visiting the site. This is a capability used 73% more widely by the top performing B2B firms, compared to their peers.

B2B firms now have a unique opportunity where the volume of B2B e-commerce is continuing to increase, and they have already surpassed B2C e-commerce, according to Internet Retailer's 2015 Guide to B2B E-Commerce study. Findings within Aberdeen's January 2015 Steps to Success in B2B E-Commerce study provide detailed guidance on how successful B2B e-commerce firms use activities such as the two noted above to overcome their challenges and take advantage of the growing e-commerce market. Read the report to learn the five core characteristics (and numerous related capabilities) that help B2B firms achieve Best-in-Class results - characterized by greater customer satisfaction, reduced costs and increased revenue.
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Aberdeen's content marketing solutions help B2B organizations take control of the Hidden Sales Cycle through content licensing, speaking engagements, custom research, and content creation services. Located in Boston, MA, Aberdeen Group is a Harte Hanks Company.

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