HANDSHAKE

B2B ECOMMERCE:

## 5 QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU CHOOSE A SOLUTION

INTRODUCTION

If you've been tasked with looking at B2B eCommerce software for your business, you'll find out quickly that there are a lot of options, and it might feel daunting figuring out where to start.

There are some key things to think about first. If you don't get these fundamental things right—things like covering your selling rules, budget, and mobile capabilities—you'll be unhappy no matter what type of B2B eCommerce solution you choose.

This PDF covers the 5 questions you must ask if you're choosing a B2B eCommerce solution. If you can answer "Yes" to these 5, you can feel good about moving forward with your vendor.
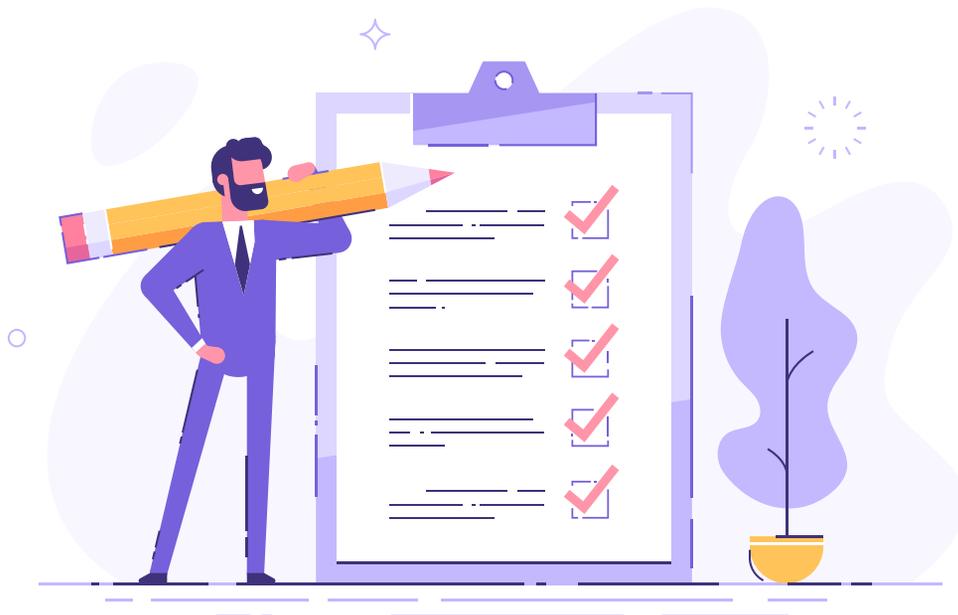
1

DOES THIS B2B ECOMMERCE SOLUTION COVER OUR SELLING RULES?

Arguably the first and most important question you should ask is whether or not your B2B eCommerce solution can accommodate the way you sell to your wholesale customers. This one's a deal breaker.

Doing the work to document an extensive list of your current and even potential future selling rules to ensure your vendor can support them is worth the effort. The contents of your list will vary depending on your particular business, but should include things like:

- Customer-specific pricing and tiers
- Promotions and discounts (even at the customer-specific level)
- Order minimums
- Shipping features (accommodating multiple addresses/ship dates)
- Inventory data (displaying backorders, in or out-of-stock flags, or available-to-ship dates)
- Different payment terms
- Payment processing
- Organizing products in multiple catalogs
- Catalog by SKU, product name, or product attributes
- Order history access and duplication
- Special data or info you'd want customers to see in your catalog

Another way to think about the above list, and what you should be vetting for, is that they are all the things that make a B2B eCommerce solution "B2B."

Your B2B eCommerce solution should be totally tailored to your customers, so when they log in, they should be looking at the products they are eligible to buy, with the prices or promotions that apply to them—the hallmarks of B2B selling.

If it isn't, your customers will be confused and potentially abandon your portal. And, even if they place an order, it will be up to your customer service team to manually adjust the order and communicate back and forth with your buyers after the fact.

THE BOTTOM LINE IS THIS: **If your B2B eCommerce solution does not accommodate exactly the way you want to sell to your B2B customers, you must find one that does.**

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IS THIS B2B ECOMMERCE SOLUTION EASY ENOUGH FOR OUR CUSTOMERS TO USE?

The more your B2B customers are buying things online and on mobile regularly in their personal lives, the more they won't want to use a clunky, difficult-to-figure-out B2B eCommerce platform.

While in the early days of B2B eCommerce buyers had to take what they could get—having to place orders via rudimentary-feeling portals—advances in B2B online ordering have dramatically raised the bar.

It is important that your B2B buyers can figure out how to place an order using your B2B eCommerce portal, whether that's from a computer or a mobile device, and that it should require little to no training. Here are some ways to determine whether your buyers will be able to figure it out:

- Determine whether your vendor's B2B eCommerce solution is comparable to modern interfaces they are already using online.

- Ensure that key functionality such as catalog browsing, order history access, shopping cart, etc. is clear and intuitive.

- Try placing an order with your vendor's buyer interface and note how it goes.

- If possible, include a few of your most representative customers in your vetting process, having them take a look (or even trial) the interface to see what they think.

- Try out your vendor's mobile buying experience. Is it an app, or do your customers have to access your website on their phone from a mobile browser? If it's an app, it's much more likely to be [user-friendly](#).

KNOW THIS: **The number one reason you will suffer from low buyer adoption of your B2B eCommerce solution is due to a poor user experience.** If your buyers can't figure it out, they just won't use it, so this one is also non-negotiable.

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## DOES THIS B2B ECOMMERCE SOLUTION WORK ON MOBILE?

Modern B2B eCommerce solutions must include the option to place orders from a mobile device, as buyers are increasingly migrating their web activity to their phones. Be thorough when you vet vendors for their mobile capabilities, because something "working" on mobile can be highly subjective.

The most important thing for you to understand is whether or not your B2B eCommerce vendor is offering a native mobile app (one that is downloaded from an app store and can function offline) or a mobile web experience (requiring your customers to access your portal on a mobile web browser from their phone).

NATIVE MOBILE APPS ARE MUCH PREFERRED BY BUYERS IN ECOMMERCE.

The experience is faster, more snappy, and does not rely on having stable internet access to function. So before you sign any contract, make sure you fully understand what type of mobile experience your vendor will require your buyers to use.

Also make sure you have tried it out, to know what your customers will be subjected to.
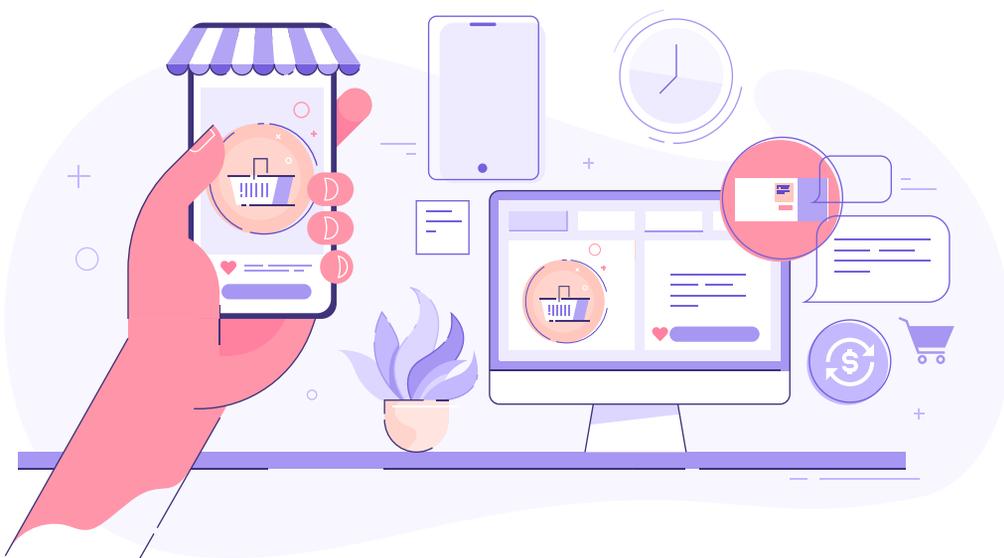
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IS THIS B2B ECOMMERCE SOLUTION WITHIN OUR BUDGET?

For many companies adopting B2B eCommerce solutions for the first time, there is no existing budget line item. If you are at one of those companies, you will have to do some estimation of the potential ROI of a B2B eCommerce solution before you can figure out how much you want to spend.

B2B eCommerce solutions can have big impacts on both cost reduction and B2B order growth, in terms of both frequency and order value.

Some of the cost savings will be pretty straightforward. If you are no longer having to print or distribute paper catalogs, or you can dramatically improve your order accuracy to re-ship less products, these line items will disappear from your budget once you implement B2B eCommerce.

Other costs will be more difficult to calculate but arguably more important, such as the opportunity costs associated with continuing to bog down your staff with data entry. The attempt to quantify the revenue that your staff could be driving if they weren't wasting time with data entry can be very enlightening, if you factor in their potential to find new customers, drive upsell, and retain your current customer base.

Once you determine your cost reduction and revenue increase projections, you can then set out to look at a subset of B2B eCommerce solutions that make sense given the reality of your budget. Your best value will be a strong off-the-shelf SaaS solution (because these are developed with the most customer data points and therefore accommodate the most standard B2B buyer workflows).

However, it's critical to allow for tweaks and customizations particular to your business, because even if your business doesn't **currently** need to customize your B2B eCommerce solution, you will want assurance that any future changes in the way you sell will not require you to re-platform. This, in the end, will be very expensive and offset any savings you might have been celebrating with a "cheaper" solution.

A special warning on custom solutions. Often, custom B2B eCommerce software projects end up being much more expensive than originally intended. Either the vendor gets in over their head (dragging out the length and, in turn, billable hours for the project) or it becomes very costly to upgrade and add features over time.

Custom B2B eCommerce solutions often become money pits, which is why many businesses are switching from custom-built software to SaaS solutions.

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WILL THIS B2B ECOMMERCE SOLUTION STAND THE TEST OF TIME?

Closely related to point #4, make sure your B2B eCommerce solution will cover your needs for the long term, because it is cost-prohibitive and difficult to move your company and your customers off an existing solution.

A B2B ECOMMERCE SOLUTION THAT CAN STAND THE TEST OF TIME HAS THESE IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS:

• **It must do mobile very well.** eCommerce (and everything) is moving towards these tiny devices in our hands, and if your solution does not excel at mobile (and as a reminder, this means apps, not mobile websites) you better hope they figure it out soon.

• It must have a **buyer interface that looks modern.** Technology and eCommerce in general is changing at a rate where things can quickly look outdated. If you are working with a provider that has a modern interface, it's a sign of their priorities, and that they continue to update their interface to remain relevant.

• You must get regular **access to updates and feature additions** without having to incur extra fees or contract additional resources to implement them. Companies that must face additional costs to iterate on their B2B eCommerce solution often choose to forgo changes to save budget, and this leads to outdated software.

• Back to Question #1- it must be able to **accommodate your selling rules**, not only what you currently have in place, but also what may change in the future. If you choose down the road to change your promotional structure, institute ordering constraints, want to bring in custom data into your portal, etc. you just need to make sure your B2B eCommerce solution is flexible. Ask this question, or you will regret it.
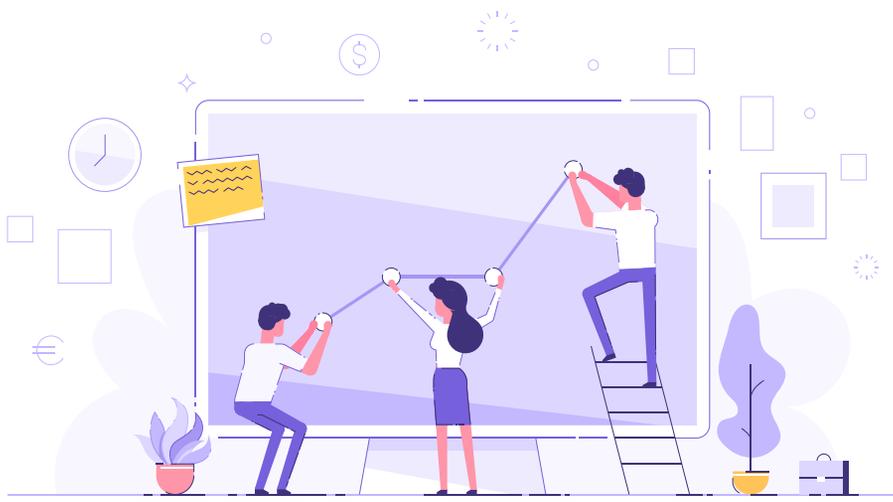
HELPING YOU WITH B2B ECOMMERCE

This guide serves as an important reminder that there are key things you need to nail down in your B2B eCommerce search. We can also help, advise you on your current search, discuss in more detail on any of the questions in this guide, and share additional benefits of using a SaaS B2B eCommerce solution like Handshake.

Sign up here today to set up a 10-minute call, and we'll go from there.

ABOUT HANDSHAKE

Handshake provides the B2B Commerce platform for manufacturers and distributors that powers standout ordering experiences both in-person and on-line. Companies using Handshake transform their sales effectiveness and drive operational efficiency, delighting customers and growing lasting relationships.

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