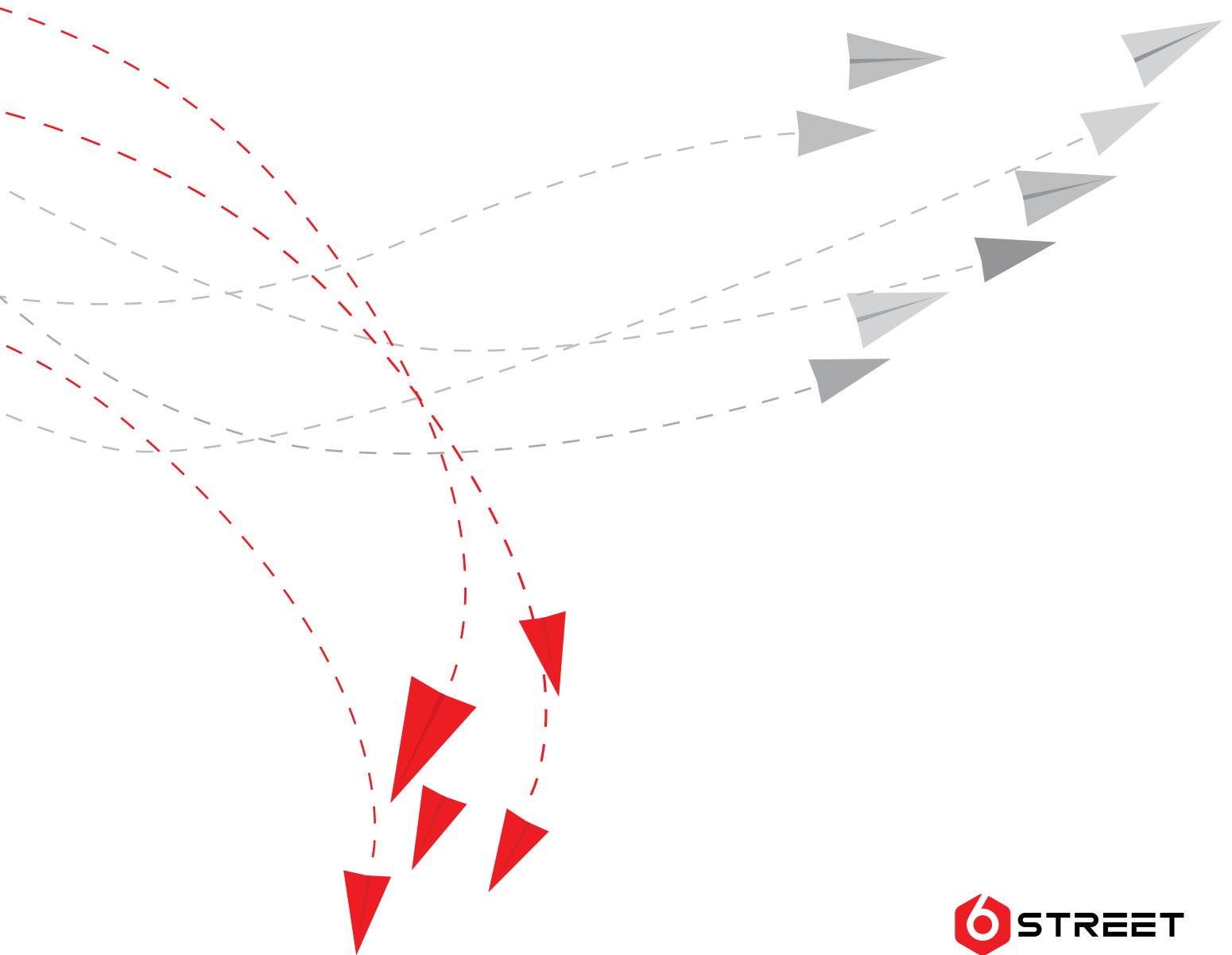# Insights

5 Pitfalls That Will Doom Your B2B Ecommerce Strategy

6 STREET

If your business-to-business (B2B) company doesn't already have an ecommerce strategy and online store, it's time to take the plunge. Here are 5 major pitfalls to be aware of as you set out to implement a new B2B ecommerce program, or look for ways to improve your company's current online offerings and overall sales.

For B2B companies, selling online presents an opportunity for massive growth. The B2B ecommerce market is estimated to reach $1.2 trillion by 2021 and account for 13.1% of all B2B sales in the United States, according to a recent report by Forrester. Frost & Sullivan also predicted that the global B2B ecommerce market will increase to $6.7 trillion by 2020, reaching twice the size of the business-to-consumer (B2C) online market.

To stay competitive, B2B companies will need to develop and implement B2B ecommerce programs that not only fulfill orders, but also grow loyalty and increase purchase frequency. Whether you're developing a new B2B ecommerce site or looking to improve your existing ecommerce strategy and results, check out the following 5 pitfalls to avoid:

$3.3 Trillion
B2C
eCommerce

$6.7 Trillion
B2B
eCommerce
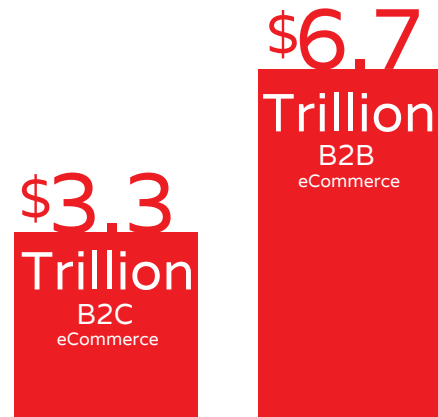
2020 Global Forecast

1. Ignoring the user experience

Once you've decide your company needs a B2B ecommerce strategy, your initial inclination might be to create an ecommerce site that simply lists your company's products. However, that would be a huge mistake, although most people these days are familiar with using B2C ecommerce sites (e.g., Amazon.com and Alibaba.com), such B2C websites function differently from their B2B counterparts. For example, B2C companies usually offer many products at the same price to all customers, whereas B2B companies typically offer contractual pricing that can be pre-negotiated. That means that each customer who logs into a B2B ecommerce site could see completely different prices and products.

B2B companies often struggle to create a successful ecommerce site because they take the easy way out and fail to take the time to understand individual

customers, those customers' pain points, and what works best for them online. The online experience is a customer's gateway to a B2B company's brand and interaction with the company. That's why the user experience is one of the most important aspects of B2B ecommerce that you need to get right. The typical B2B user experience should focus on the types of products sold, how they're sold, the options available, and how they're shipped. Implementing the right user experience for your ecommerce site can be the difference between your company increasing sales or losing customers. Understanding each B2B company's products, sales process, and service process—and coupling that with a streamlined, intuitive user experience—is a must for success.

In addition, the user experience should be optimized beyond desktop usage to ensure that your B2B ecommerce site is mobile friendly. This is essential for driving B2B ecommerce sales today. While most of your company's online orders will come during the work day when your customers are more likely to be using desktop computers, standard working hours are not the only time customers may want to order products.

Thanks to mobile phones and tablets, your customers are no longer locked into placing orders only during standard working hours when their sales reps are available. And lucky for you and your Salesforce platform developer, Salesforce Commerce Cloud and Salesforce CloudCraze come out-of-the-box to render well on both desktops and mobile devices. This makes it easier than ever for your B2B customers to purchase from you any time, any place.

2. Being unprepared for data problems

Prior to launching an ecommerce site, most B2B companies' product data was likely accessed only by their internal teams, such as sales and service. The product

data—how it's been setup, categorized, and structured—has worked fine. But when you shine a spotlight on that same data in a B2B ecommerce store, all of its ugly inconsistencies will become apparent. This has to be the most under-rated problem in the B2B ecommerce space. We've seen many customers and systems integrators fail to realize the huge task involved with data preparation as they begin their journey into B2B ecommerce.

To tackle this problem, begin by determining which data are critical to be presented publicly. In this context, "publicly" means any data that will be available to any users on the B2B ecommerce store. For example, data such as product name, descriptions, and categories, as well as stock keeping units (SKUs) and other unique product codes, are a good starting place to start cleanup. Provide your B2B ecommerce customers with as much information as possible in these fields, ensuring that it's also easy to read and understand without the need to contact a sales agent. Keep in mind that the goal is to enable your customers to have total self-service and the least amount of friction to make a purchase. Any time customers have to reach out to a sales representative, they will lose confidence in the B2B ecommerce offering.

There are many other areas that may require data cleanup, as well. Product filtering sets (e.g., product size, color, height, weight, length, width, etc.) will need to be standardized. Some products may be measured in inches, for instance, while others in centimeters. And even if all the lengths are listed in centimeters, are they consistently marked as "cm" or "centimeters"?

Some might argue that data preparation is a whole project in and of itself. Whether it becomes a separate project or a track within creating a B2B ecommerce site is a decision made on a case by case basis. Either way, it needs to be planned for and tackled as soon as possible because having bad data can negatively impact the project timeline.

"…the goal is to enable your customers to have total self-service and the least amount of friction to make a purchase"
Jonathan Keel, 6 Street

6 STREET

3. Neglecting customer loyalty management

Not having a customer loyalty strategy in B2B ecommerce programs is another pitfall we often see. Customers want to feel special. In B2C, customer loyalty programs award points for buying food and drinks at restaurants, for example, or

booking flights with airlines. Consumers not only earn points that they can redeem for products, but also get special perks for being loyal customers. In addition to good products and service, loyalty programs help keep them coming back.

B2B customers are no different. In fact, they are not only the same in the sense that they want rewards for loyalty, but they feel they deserve it even more! After all, on a B2B ecommerce site, customers are probably buying huge quantities of product to use in their places of business. Having a loyalty management system in place as a part of your B2B ecommerce strategy automates the special perks your customers deserve. Perks can include everything from earning points to use for buying more products, to special discounts, to non-monetary rewards (e.g., being invited to special access events for top customers or other VIP rewards).

Companies like Salesforce, for example, provide special perks for their top customers and partners. Salesforce even has partner tiers such as Silver, Gold, and Platinum. Each tier gets their own perks, most of which usually involve special events and services for executives at each of their companies. These types of non-monetary perks really drive home to your customers that you value each of them and their loyalty to your business.

4. Failing to take service into account

When it comes to B2B ecommerce strategy, all customers should not be treated the same. And this goes beyond just contract pricing. You need to think about your customer journey. For example, let's imagine a company sets up a B2B

ecommerce site and directs all their customers to start using it. Although all their customers could benefit from access to the new ecommerce site, this company failed to consider the special needs of a few customers who buy massive amounts of products from them regularly. Some of these large-volume customers may prefer to talk to a real person at the company (i.e., their sales representative) and purchase over the phone. While a B2B ecommerce site gives your customers 24/7 self-service, it's important to make sure that all customers have the opportunity to communicate and transact with your company on a level that matches the level of customer service they've come to expect.

In addition, be sure your B2B ecommerce strategy incorporates aspects of your customer service, as well. In the past, for instance, if your customers went through a sales rep to place an order and had an issue with that order, they may have contacted the sales rep again for assistance. Simple, right? What happens now when they make purchases through your company's ecommerce site? Do they call their account executive or do they call a service desk? Does every customer follow the same process or do some customers get special service agreements?

These are all questions that need to be answered and a plan designed and implemented successfully. Not only should your B2B customers have contractual pricing, but also service agreements that make sense to the level of loyalty they have demonstrated as a customer.

5. Setting it and forgetting it

B2B ecommerce projects are living things that need to be grown and maintained. If you just close the project and leave the site to run without a plan and execution it will be doomed to fail. That's why it's important to not just "set it and forget it". Consider mega-ecommerce retailers like Amazon. Do you think they just created a website, started selling products, and went on to other projects? No, they continually nurture their site. Constant reporting, behavioral analysis, marketing,

B2B Commerce Life Cycle

- Constant Reporting
- Marketing
- Metrics
- KPI's
- Behavioral Analysis
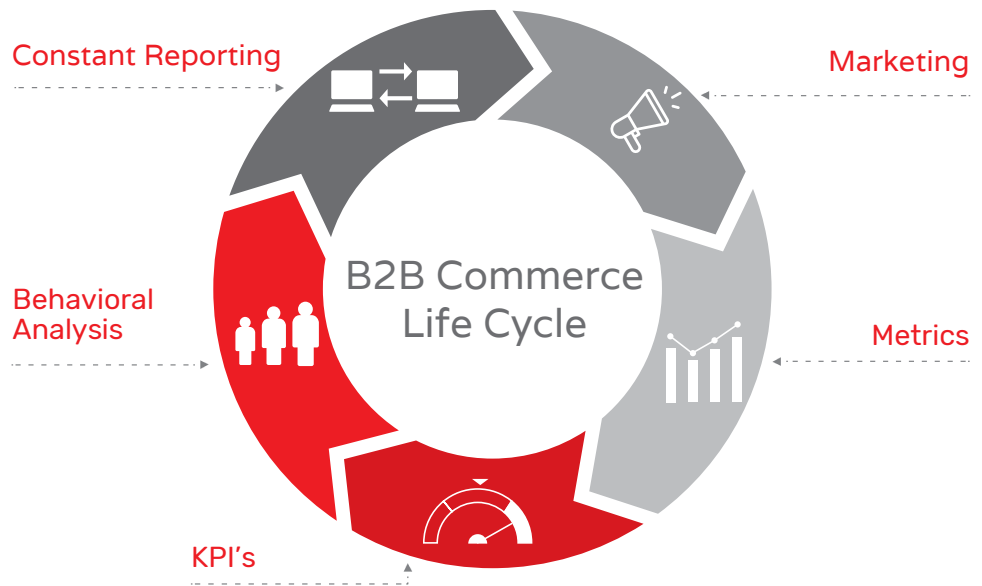
as well as tracking metrics and key performance indicators are all important for optimizing the return on investment for your B2B ecommerce strategy.

As soon as a B2B company launches an ecommerce site, it should start monitoring what users are doing, what's working and what's not, and most importantly what's driving sales. The marketing department should map out customer journeys, the IT department should look into page load times and integration issues, and the sales team should monitor which customers are buying more and why. Then, once some analysis is done, the next phase of the ecommerce site should be started. Do you need to run promotions? Should there be different levels of tiered pricing? Do customers value the implementation? How can it be improved? These are all questions that must be answered. So when it comes to rolling out your B2B ecommerce site, don't just set it and forget it.

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Looking to build a successful B2B ecommerce site that avoids these common pitfalls? 6 Street Technologies can help. We're the leading Salesforce B2B Commerce partner, having implemented the most Salesforce B2B Commerce projects of any systems integrator. Contact 6 Street Technologies today to learn more about how we can put our proven track record of successful B2B ecommerce implementations to work for your company to develop, nurture, and grow your B2B ecommerce site.