# Taking Your Business Online: Find Your B2B Ecommerce Platform Match

The B2B landscape is quickly shifting away from the more traditional offline territory, with more and more companies hopping on the ecommerce bandwagon.

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**Case in point, nearly 50% of all US-based B2B companies offer their full product catalog online.**

**Small wonder, then, that Forrester predicts B2B ecommerce sales will top $1.2 *trillion* by 2021.**

While technology has, of course, enabled this transition to take place, the *reason* the shift has become necessary is that the expectations of the average B2B consumer have changed.

As we talked about in our 2018 B2B Ecommerce Recap, the modern B2B consumer expects…well…a lot of the same things the modern B2C consumer does.

This includes:

- Ease of engagement.

- Access to information.

- Seamless customer experience.

…and much, much more.

Needless to say, in order to provide these things to your customers—while at the same time tailoring their experience to your brand—you need to find the ecommerce platform that's right for your B2B company.

Which is exactly what we'll be discussing, here.

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Experience customizable, future-proof technology built to work with your existing tools. Ready to launch your B2B ecommerce site? Get a preview of your site, complexities included.

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# Essential B2B Ecommerce Platform Features

While each of the ecommerce platforms we'll be discussing differ in many ways, they also have a lot in common, as well.

Reason being:

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**These common features are *essential* to the B2B ecommerce experience. They're non-negotiable. Without these features in place, your entire relationship with your customer would fall apart.**

Okay, you get the idea.

Let's take a closer look at some of the most important features of B2B ecommerce platforms.

## 1. Access restriction options.

Let's face it: B2B businesses are a bit more complex than B2C businesses. Due to the nuances and rules often associated with selling to other businesses, you need to be able to manipulate your ecommerce platform to solve for differing buyer experiences, depending on the user.

Because of this, your ecommerce platform of choice should give you the option to allow or restrict access to certain parts of your site on an individual basis.

For example, you may want to:

- Hide your bulk pricing from your B2C customers.

- Hide pricing altogether (for a variety of reasons).

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- Hide your B2B site entirely from non-registered members.

The decision as to *how* to use these options is up to you, and involves taking a look at your buyer experience as well as your variety in customers and products.

You just need to make sure the B2B ecommerce platform you choose allows you to *make* these choices in the first place — otherwise, you'll run into issues while trying to build out these pathways in the future.

**BigCommerce earned 7 medals in The 2020 Paradigm B2B Combine (Mid-Market Edition)**

Download your complimentary copy of the report to explore recommendations for selecting the right ecommerce platform for your business, including:

- Why total cost of ownership is more important than ever

- How SaaS platforms are a key differentiator

- Why B2B buyers expect B2C-like user experiences

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## 2. Pricing, payment, and ordering customization and options.

B2B businesses are often comprised of a *lot* of moving parts.

Between customer management tools, fulfillment centers, and punchout catalogs, there are a lot of different systems that need to work together to create a unified order management and customization system.

You need to ensure your B2B ecommerce platform allows for transactional options in one unified solution.

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Having several tools that don't work together will result in disorganization, confusion, and potential problems with inventory management and order fulfillment.

This is particularly relevant if you are a hybrid business offering both B2C and wholesale channels — as reducing channel conflict and management are pivotal to all aspects of your business.

As we mentioned above, this might mean offering dynamic pricing based on order size or customer relationship.

For example, you may want to offer certain segments of customers different pricing based on membership tier, geographic area, or any negotiated pricing.

It could also mean providing lines of credit to high-value customers. Offering B2B credit is a surefire way to grow your business with responsible purchasers — but this is a feature you should be able to turn on or off.

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Additionally, you might want to provide your best clients different delivery options, again depending on their tier, location, or some other factor.

Again, if your ecommerce platform of choice doesn't *let* you provide these options, your B2B customers' experience will ultimately suffer.

It's best to think through any possible feature you may need to be available *before* you dive into implementing an ecommerce platform into your storefront.

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## 3. Heavy focus on user/customer experience.

Whenever brands look to create an ecommerce website, one thing is the most important (aside from sales), and that's the experience users get when they visit your website.

You want your brand to resonate with customers, and the user experience and user interface (UX/UI) of your site needs to make your customers' experience with your brand more satisfying and enjoyable.

If, on the other hand, your B2B ecommerce site doesn't really offer your clients much value—or, worse, is downright frustrating to use—well, that defeats the purpose of having the site altogether.

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The stakes have never been higher: In 2017, Gartner predicted that by 2018, 70% of B2B ecommerce sites will offer personalized features to their customers and that these will outsell their competitors without the same level of personalization by 30%.

As more and more B2B business move towards an enhanced UX/UI with optimization options, your best bet is to identify a platform that has all the personalization options you need for now AND in the future.

That said, you want to find a platform that enables you to create an ecommerce site that's:

- Easy-to-use and intuitively designed.

- Customizable and brandable.

- Responsive on various devices.

- Easy to add tools to — like lead capture forms, personalization plug-ins, and rewards programs.

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# Other Factors to Consider

In addition to the customer-facing aspects we mentioned above, you also need to consider how your choice of B2B ecommerce platform will impact your company.

And we mean that in *two* different ways.

## 1. Use of platform.

First of all, your team's ability to *use* your chosen platform hinges on a few things:

- The platform's user interface.

- The level of knowledge required to fully utilize the platform.

- Your team's knowledge, abilities, and bandwidth.

As we'll see in a moment, each platform is tailored to users with a specific level of coding and developer knowledge.

And, of course, each platform's interface differs in a variety of ways.

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## The point is, most platforms aren't meant for everyone; they're not supposed to be.

That's why it's important to pick not "the best" platform, but the platform that *your* team will be able to utilize best.

## 2. Business implications.

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Of course, we can't overlook the fact that your choice of B2B ecommerce platform will have a major impact on your overall business.

Your first order of business, here, should be to answer the following question:

> *Why do you need an ecommerce site?*

Are you looking to acquire new customers? Trying to strengthen your relationship with your current clients? Do both? Do more?

Whatever the case may be, keep your goals in the front of your mind, and find the platform that will best allow you to accomplish them. In addition, look two, five, and ten years into the future.

What tools do you anticipate needing as you continue to grow?

You want an ecommerce platform that will cover the goals of your business now and your business as it evolves.

You'll then want to consider the cost of your platform of choice.

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**By "cost," here, we not only mean the monetary cost (although that is, of course, pretty important), but also the internal cost of getting the site up and running, maintaining it, etc.**

One large differentiator here is SaaS (software-as-a-service) platforms like BigCommerce compared to on-premise platforms.

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While on-premise platforms allow for an extraordinary amount of customization, they also require full-time developers to work through the complex nuances of the buildout.

In addition, an on-premise solution carries the weight of security and compliance, which can get expensive as well.

While putting together "just any" ecommerce site isn't all that difficult, managing a fully-functional one requires a *ton* of dedication from your team, especially if you select a platform that requires a large amount of custom development.

This goes back to ease of use. The easier it is for you to make improvements to your site, the better the platform is for business.

# B2B Ecommerce Platform Comparison

Okay, now that you know what to look for from the B2B ecommerce platform that will fit *your* needs, let's take a look at some of the best in the industry.

## 1. BigCommerce

BigCommerce is considered to be the "world's leading cloud ecommerce platform" by most software review sites out there.

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**Known for its low total cost of ownership and highly flexible APIs, BigCommerce offers a variety of features and options not found in competing softwares.**

The BigCommerce platform makes it easy for hybrid businesses with both B2B and B2C customers to offer different price lists or catalogs to customer groups.

In other words, you can provide for both B2B and B2C in one unified solution.

BigCommerce's initial learning curve is higher than some other SaaS platforms due to the complexity of built-in features.

However, BigCommerce's support team and in-depth documentation allows even brand new users to get up to speed quickly and efficiently.

## 2. NetSuite SuiteCommerce

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SuiteCommerce is *heavily* focused on optimizing the B2B experience for both suppliers and consumers.

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## SuiteCommerce is ideal for companies that operate on a variety of channels—especially those with brick-and-mortar locations.

By providing the ability to engage with customers on multiple channels, SuiteCommerce makes it easy to provide personalized service across the board.

The platform's onboarding process is optimal for teams with little-to-no background knowledge of ecommerce, coupled with an intuitive UI to get you up and running quickly.

SuiteCommerce also allows for scalability. Once your ecommerce site starts to gain traction, you can start getting even *more* out of it.

On the downside, some users say parts of the platform are a bit complex for complexity's sake and make things harder than they need to be.

## 3. IBM Digital Commerce

IBM Digital Commerce is another ecommerce platform that's tailored to the needs of the B2B supplier.

Digital Commerce makes it easy for companies to provide personalized service to individual customers through the use of contracts, payment agreements, and other such documentation.

The platform also allows for streamlined processing and filing of said documents, ensuring all agreements are automatically squared away.

With Digital Commerce, your team can also create a knowledge base of company- and industry-related information.This enables both your organization *and* your customers to easily find the information they need at any time.

As robust as Digital Commerce is, the learning curve may be too much for those without a technical background.

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The same can be said for the UI: if your team isn't familiar with ecommerce platforms in the first place, it might be a bit overwhelming for them.

## 4. NuOrder

NuOrder is an ecommerce order-entry platform focused on simplifying processes and enhancing customer engagement.

NuOrder's B2B ecommerce platform is pretty versatile and is considered a useful B2B sales and marketing tool for vendors, retailers, and manufacturers.

This is due to its simplicity, as well as its focus on B2B-related processes, such as reorders, bulk shipping, and more.

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## For those seeking a WYSIWYG solution, this may be your best option.

However, it is worth noting that NuOrder's processes can be a bit confusing at first.

While it's a simple tool, it may not be the most intuitive software out there.

In addition, some users report a number of glitches while syncing information and data, making for a rather frustrating experience.

## 5. TradeGecko

TradeGecko's B2B ecommerce offering is *laser*-focused on streamlining processes involving inventory, orders, and shipping.

Like with NuOrder, simplicity is at the heart of TradeGecko's value.

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By simplifying and automating your various transactional processes with TradeGecko, you'll have even more time to improve processes elsewhere.

TradeGecko also provides in-depth reporting and forecasting, allowing you to make adjustments to your processes as necessary.

However, being a popular cloud-based platform, TradeGecko sometimes faces slowdowns during moments of high traffic.

Additionally, some users report inefficiencies when inputting and syncing data, as well.

## 6. Magento

Magento is typically an on-premise platform tailored to organizations with a dedicated IT or development team.

That is to say, Magento is incredibly robust—and incredibly complex. If your team is brand new to ecommerce and isn't all that tech-savvy, this definitely isn't the platform for you.

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**However, if you *are* able to use Magento to its fullest extent, you'll have the ability to build a B2B ecommerce store over which you have *complete* control.**

This means you'll be able to include all those B2B-focused features we mentioned earlier (and more) into your site and tailor it all to your customers' needs.

Even if you don't currently have the need to go "all-in," Magento is scalable, as well. As long as you have the capacity to get up and running with the platform, you'll then be able to use it more and more as you grow.

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## 7. Shopify Plus

Shopify Plus is focused on catering to the needs of enterprise ecommerce companies—more specifically, on those that do $1M or more in revenues.

For companies that do business on multiple channels, Shopify Plus is yet another option. Featuring an incredibly simple and intuitive user interface, even the most novice user will be able to get moving with the platform in no time.

Additionally, Shopify focuses on simplifying transactional processes while still allowing customers with a variety of options. Going along with this, Shopify easily handles fluctuations in purchases and order amount—perfect for companies that operate in both B2B and B2C realms.

However, while you have the *ability* to provide different transactional options to your customers, you may run into some issues as they get more specific. It's also worth mentioning that Shopify's simplicity may actually *hinder* your ability to grow up to a certain point.

## 8. Contalog

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**Contalog is an omni-channel ecommerce platform for companies aiming to centralize data regarding inventory, orders, and product specs, and to reduce the need for manual touchpoints throughout transactional processes.**

As complicated as that sounds, Contalog is a beginner-friendly B2B ecommerce platform that gives you complete control over your company's transactional processes. Many users say the platform is ideal for companies with multiple warehouses and locations.

The main downside reported by a number of users is that Contalog isn't often updated by its development team. If you're looking to continue modernizing your use of ecommerce, you might want to look elsewhere.

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## 9. GoECart

GoECart is hailed as an all-in-one, omnichannel solution for B2B companies looking to dive into the world of ecommerce.

GoECart, which is technically a suite of different "mini-solutions," aims to help you streamline every aspect of your B2B ecommerce site, from customer relationship management to backend transactional processes.

GoECart also stores important data and information in a centralized base, ensuring everyone remains "in the know" at all times.

GoECart's main shortcoming, however, in that it is often seen as a jack of all trades, master of none. While the suite of tools *does* provide solutions in a variety of areas, they each lack in the robustness you might need as your company continues to grow.

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# FAQs About B2B Ecommerce Platforms

## What is the advantage of using a SaaS solution rather than open source software?

With a SaaS solution, all of the technical aspects of running a B2B ecommerce website (hosting, security, maintenance, etc.) are taken care of by the service provider.

This means you don't have to worry about breaches or bugs causing downtime for your site—and it *also* means you can spend more time focused on improving your website and your business.

Also, most SaaS ecommerce platforms are continually being improved by the developers, with new versions being released quite often.

With Open Source platforms, the user is responsible for the installation, management, and hosting of a store.

While you gain complete control and flexibility of the platform, the costs associated with hosting, security, and development can rack up quickly.

## Are there free B2B ecommerce solutions?

No, there are no free ecommerce platforms.

Most open source platforms are technically free in that you aren't paying a licensing fee, but there is a high cost in terms of hosting and development.

SaaS platforms charge a monthly recurring fee. Costs range from $7 a month to $50,000+ a month.

## Are there benefits of selling on a B2B platform?

With a B2B ecommerce platform you are able to achieve the following items:

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- New business opportunities

- Improve B2B ecommerce sales

- Lower your overall costs

- Reach new markets

## Do wholesalers and distributors need different functionality?

There is a lot of overlap here, but because distributors are the connection between manufacturers and wholesalers, almost all of their sales tend to be on account and are repeat purchases.

Therefore, they need customized pricing, account login, and net terms for basically all of their customers.

Wholesalers buy from distributors and resell – they can sell directly to retailers, where they would need the features above, but they will also need to prepare themselves for one-off purchases.

Here volume pricing and guest checkout would be prevalent.

## What ecommerce functionality is important for manufacturers?

Depending on the industry, this may vary heavily.

If you are a contract manufacturer, you may need a way for businesses to submit precise dimensions and upload files to get the right product.

This typically leads to offering a lot of options per product instead of a SKU which is more common for a business like a clothing manufacturer.

These manufacturers (unless B2C) will need net terms and account pricing.

If a manufacturer makes a consumer product, but only sells B2B, they will need to hide this pricing to only be viewed by logged-in accounts.

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## Should retail companies consider selling wholesale?

To answer this question, we'd have to unpack it *much* further than we have room to do here.

That said, the short answer is:

It depends.

On the one hand, selling your products wholesale can lead to a massive spread in brand awareness.

The case may well be that your wholesale customers end up exposing your brand to an audience you would have never thought to market to.

Additionally, selling wholesale also opens the door for other business opportunities, such as dropshipping.

What's more, your wholesale customers will almost certainly end up becoming long-time customers in a short period of time (that is, as long as you're able to provide for their needs).

On the other hand, though, there are a couple downsides to going wholesale as a retailer.

The main thing to consider, here, is that you stand to lose part of your brand's identity throughout the process.

While your products are still *your* products, your individual customers may come to associate your products (and your brand) with the retailers you do business with. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, but it is something to think about.

Going along with this, selling wholesale puts a wedge between you and your individual customers.

Since your retail customers are the ones engaging with the actual consumer, you might not get as much direct feedback as you'd like regarding your products.

## How easy is it to integrate an ERP system with a B2B platform?

This varies drastically.

Outdated software will always be tough to integrate.

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To make things easy, it is best to be cloud to cloud or on-premise to on-premise.

## What type of Industries can B2B ecommerce be applied to?

B2B ecommerce isn't exclusive anymore. Anything can be sold online, so long as there's a demand for it and there's a suitable platform to support it.

## How can you secure a B2B ecommerce platform?

You can secure your B2B ecommerce platform by doing three things:

- Firewalls, IP Restriction and DMZ
- SSL/TLS
- Data Redundancy

## How do I select the right ecommerce platform for my business?

The complexity and size of your business will influence what ecommerce platform is the best fit. You need to make sure your ecommerce platform provider can integrate all digital and physical customer touch-points.

## How long does it take to set up a B2B ecommerce platform?

The timeline varies on what your business is trying to achieve and how your data is organized. In most cases, it can take several months before a B2B ecommerce store is launched.

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# Examples of B2B Ecommerce Sites

Here are a few examples of sites features in our post on [15 B2B ecommerce websites boosting sales in 2020](#):

## 1.Clarion Safety Systems
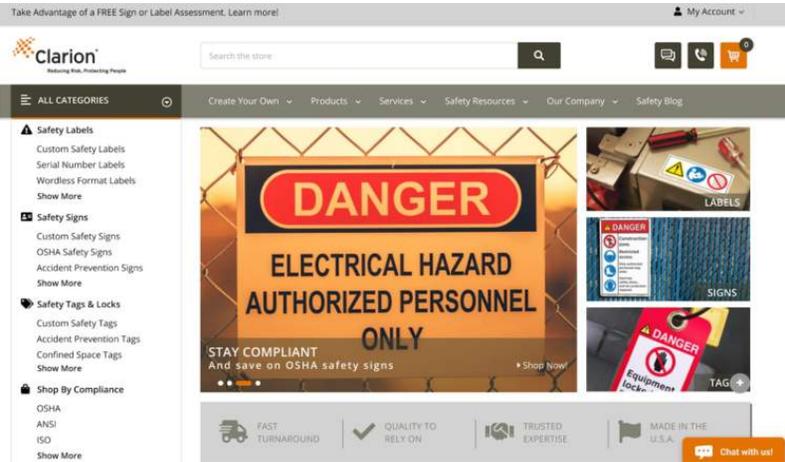


## 2. Rain Harvesting Supplies

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## 3. Good Start Packaging



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# Conclusion

Now that you know what you should be looking for in a B2B ecommerce platform, and you know what your best options are, it's time to narrow your choices.

If you have a bit of analysis paralysis, that's okay. Remember, this isn't a decision to be taken lightly.

That said, we'll leave you with three questions to ponder that should help guide you toward the platform that's right for your company:

1. What do we have the capacity to do with an ecommerce platform?

2. What are our current goals for using an ecommerce platform?

3. What will these goals be three years from now?

If you can answer these questions, you should be able to find the right solution with no problem.

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