B2B Digital Experiences Report 2019: How Companies Are Meeting Rising Expectations

A global survey highlighting B2B preferences and plans, tactics and technologies for digital experience among service providers, manufacturers, distributors and retailers.

Fellow B2Bs,

Digital experience expectations are now universal, and there's no way for the business-to-business [B2B] organizations you're employed by to escape them – you know this to be true from your own interactions with partners and providers. Driven by our everyday experiences with consumer brands, business customers have increasing demands for how they want to work yet know firsthand how difficult it can be to pull it all off.

Across job titles, these increasing digital expectations are rated higher than any other external business threat.

Eighty-four percent of your B2B peers agree increasing digital expectations of customers and partners is the top threat to their business, according to our survey of 700 global respondents employed full-time at an enterprise B2B organization in a decision-making role.

Like consumers, business buyers expect interactions with companies to be effortless and do not care why something doesn't work the way it should – only that it does not work – even if they struggle with the same challenges at their own companies.

The web affords all of us the opportunity to quickly click away and sign up with an organization that makes accomplishing our goals easier whether it is through personalized pricing or peer reviews.

This quick churn often results in organizations never getting the chance to save relationships or potential revenue – and it's not just local competition. Your business competes globally whether it has an international strategy or not.

A quarter of B2B decision-makers [28 percent] believe expanding into new geographic markets is a top opportunity for their company.

New government-imposed restrictions in top markets, however, will make it more challenging for everyone. General Data Protection Regulation [GDPR] imposes large fines on

companies not complying with strict rules on how European Union citizens' data can be used. Then there's the trade dispute between the world's biggest economies, the United States and China, which is also peaking with import taxes set to impact all American businesses receiving Chinese goods.

External pressures like these can make it seem like there is never a good time to invest in digital experience (DX) technologies regardless of how much you tell your colleagues otherwise. Indecision can, however, make matters worse for B2B leaders. As you know, competitors will always seem to outspend you, expectations will always accelerate and industry disruptors will always arrive at an alarming rate.

Even with all these requirements, companies like yours are optimistic about their future – and they should be. They have folks like you wanting to make it better, faster, more intuitive to do business with them. Driven by the desire to offer a digital experience they would expect themselves, respondents have plans for how to overcome challenges through strategic investments in digital experience–if they can successfully get budget to do so. They also provide you, their peer, with exclusive insights on how to best earn and keep their business as business buyers themselves.

Please don't hesitate to reach out to any one of us with questions about what to do next! If you're interested in the consumer side of things, download Episerver's third annual Reimagining Commerce report, which surveyed 4,500 online shoppers from around the world.

Happy decision-making from the Episerver team!

Sincerely,

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Key Findings

- **Rising digital expectations threaten B2Bs.**
  Nearly nine in ten (84 percent) of B2B decision-makers say increasing digital expectations from their customers or partners is their top external threat.

- **Business buyers want to self-serve.**
  Pricing on website, self-service functionality and easy scheduling with a salesperson are the top three ways B2Bs can make it easier for business users to work with them online.

- **Analytics top wish list.**
  Over half (51 percent) of those in marketing, IT, operations, merchandising and retail roles say web analytics/business intelligence is their most-likely digital experience investment.

- **Websites run the world (still).**
  Eighty-two percent of B2Bs agree their website is an indispensable asset to their partners and salesforce.

- **Commerce is coming for all B2Bs.**
  By 2025, the majority of B2B revenue will be derived from the ecommerce websites they own and operate according to 72 percent of respondents.

- **Legacy software stalls B2Bs.**
  The top internal weakness holding back B2Bs from digital agility goals is legacy, in-house software according to 59 percent of B2B decision-makers.

- **Email still rules business comms.**
  Forty-three percent of respondents prefer to hear about B2B companies via email while phone calls were the least-wanted communication option.

- **AI may replace B2B marketing jobs.**
  Confusion surrounds the use of artificial intelligence (AI) at work as 60 percent of B2Bs say they are likely to use AI to replace human workers for marketing functions by 2022.

- **B2Bs lack digital transformation funds.**
  Fifty percent of decision-makers say they lack funding to execute digital transformation programs in their organizations.

- **Personalization, please.**
  Ninety-one percent of respondents say B2Bs care about their experience or are providing a better experience when a site is personalized to them.

Know thyself, know the buyer.

Business leaders know what they want as customers, but struggle to pay it forward

From the processes to the people, decision-making at businesses has changed forever. The highest paid person's opinion (HiPPO) matters less when data can prove someone else right. More deals are finalized digitally than over dinner. In any case, sales are likely to start with intensive, independent online research on the part of the purchaser rather than a cold call from sales.

Those in decision-making roles – think directors or above in most cases – know how they want to do business and have little patience for vendors who do not seem to recognize those preferences or them for that matter. Still, their own companies struggle to deliver what customers (their B2B peers) want and, in many cases, need to effectively and easily do their jobs. So where is the discrepancy?

Business-to-business (B2B) companies are often bogged down by outdated platforms, oversaturated markets and old processes.

In fact, **the majority of B2B leaders (54 percent) agree their disparate/disjointed technology systems are holding them back from their digital agility goals** – having the right people, processes and platforms in place to continuously improve customer experience.

The foundation of their technology stack, however, may be the root cause. **Fifty-nine percent of B2Bs point to legacy or in-house software as the primary reason for not being more digitally agile.**
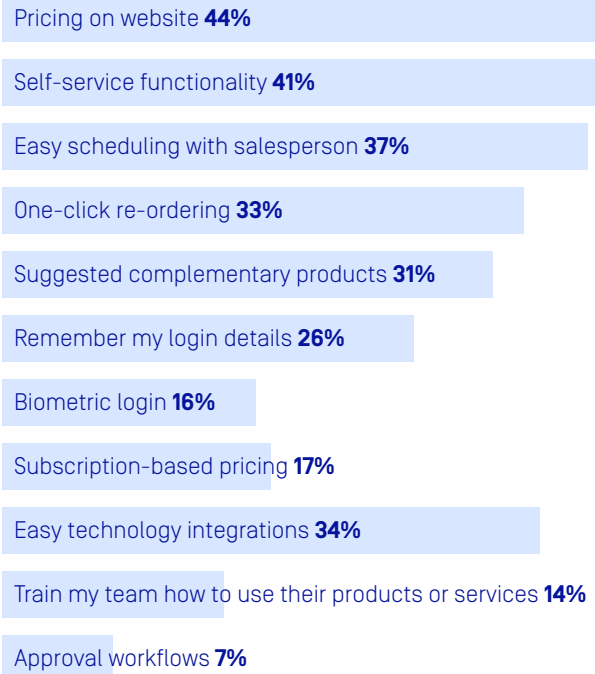
Regardless of blame, customers do not care. It not only remains true that today's customers do not think in channels – requiring a consistent multichannel experience – but they also do not think in industries or business type. They want what they want and are judging every business by their last-best experience in all B2B, B2C, B2B2C, B2G, B2E and C2C scenarios.

One way to deliver the digital experience customers expect is through self-service options. While this type of hands-on interaction takes significant investments from B2Bs, it shows how internal digital agility impacts external agility. The more agile a B2B becomes, the more agile their B2B customers become. At the end of the day, business leaders want the companies they work with to get out of their way and make their jobs as easy and effective as possible.

When asked what are the top-three ways B2B companies can make it easier to do business with them online, the ability to help themselves topped the list. Overwhelmingly, **B2Bs want pricing on a website, self-service functionality and easy scheduling with a salesperson**.

What are the top three ways B2B companies can make it easier for you to do business with them online?

Pricing on website **44%**

Self-service functionality **41%**

Easy scheduling with salesperson **37%**

One-click re-ordering **33%**

Suggested complementary products **31%**

Remember my login details **26%**

Biometric login **16%**

Subscription-based pricing **17%**

Easy technology integrations **34%**

Train my team how to use their products or services **14%**

Approval workflows **7%**

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"The companies and organizations successfully navigating this complex and ever-changing set of B2B expectations often have one similar and very obvious trait; they move fast."
Joey Moore, Head of Evangelism, EMEA & APAC at Episerver

Grab for cash, grab for change.
Despite growing budgets for digital projects, leaders still resist digital transformation

Software is a significant piece of the digital experience companies provide, but other elements greatly impact a company's actions (or in action). There's more than disparate systems and legacy software holding back B2Bs from becoming more customer centric in their digital experiences. In many cases, there's also a support problem. Whether it is support to carve out time to see projects through or support to fund projects in the first place, time and money dedicated to improving digital experiences does not magically appear without the support from leaders and peers. Time and money get allocated from people up top who believe in a project and the people who manage them.

The good news is **89 percent of B2B decision-makers expect their budgets for digital projects to increase in 2020**. It does not appear, however, an increase in funds will lead to more digital transformation projects – a cause for concern if B2Bs are using budget for more business-as-usual tactics.

The problem is **the majority of B2B decision-makers (50 percent) say they lack funding from senior management to execute digital transformation programs.**

To modernize B2B operations, marketing, commerce and IT leaders must consider how they can change the company culture preventing them from providing an end experience customers want to use and return to use. Afterall, **57 percent of B2Bs agree they have a culture resistant to change and adoption of digital technologies.**

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"Decision-makers are often hesitant because of the sheer scope of the transformation. These projects are holistic – you need to evaluate the entire marketing stack, from strategy to technology to staffing to training. It's not called 'digital adjustment.' Transformative change requires vision and perseverance."

Deane Barker, Senior Director of Content Management Strategy at Episerver

Part of the problem is brands think of their investments in siloes when digital experience platforms (DXPs) exist to check off many of these investment wishes. They do so, it seems, in order to avoid bigger, cross-company conversations and, instead, get easier departmental buy-in. In other words, they control what they can and put off for tomorrow what they can't.
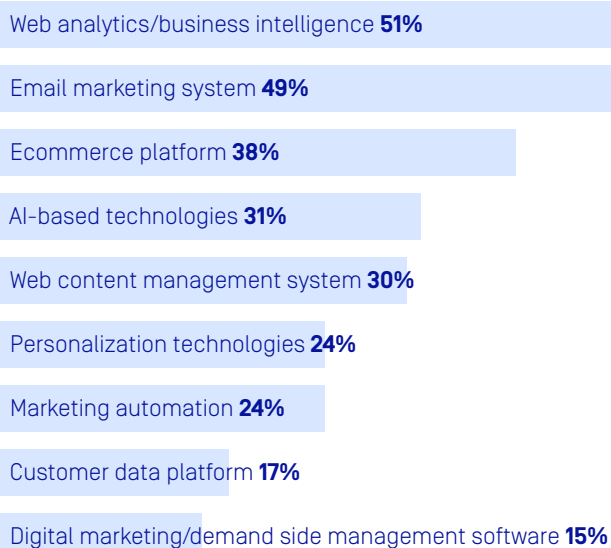
When investments are thought of as one-off, siloed purchases, the end-user experience becomes this way too.

The top digital experience technologies B2Bs are most likely to make new investments in (see chart) can certainly move companies in the right direction but need to be thought of as a holistic part of their digital experience or organizations risk further fragmentation. This impacts the end customer in myriad ways.

An analytics/business intelligence solution, for example, must be introduced in every part of the technology stack to truly help employees make better decisions and analyze and adapt to customer intent. An analytics solution is only as good as the data it has access to and the people and platforms learning from it.

While an email marketing system may seem like a surprising investment in the next three years – as "email is dead" has been touted for the last decade – email is a highly preferred communication method for B2B decision-makers. **When researching a B2B company to do business with, 43 percent of B2B decision-makers say they like to learn more via email**.

What three digital experience technologies is your company most likely to make new investments in by 2022?

Web analytics/business intelligence **51%**

Email marketing system **49%**

Ecommerce platform **38%**

AI-based technologies **31%**

Web content management system **30%**

Personalization technologies **24%**

Marketing automation **24%**

Customer data platform **17%**

Digital marketing/demand side management software **15%**

*Note: Figures do not add up to 100 percent because respondents chose three options. These percentages reflect how often those technologies were selected as "most likely investment."

In fact, B2B decision-makers wish B2B vendors communicated with them via email more frequently over any other channel. **Fifty-four percent of B2B leaders want B2Bs to communicate with them more frequently via email** while phone was the most-often selected choice for the communication channel B2B decision-makers wished to be communicated less frequently on. Not all phone communication is treated equal, however, as **35 percent would welcome more Text/SMS from B2B companies**. Buyers want exchanges to mimic human contact and service but aren't willing to shed boundaries in favor of face-to-face or phone communication.
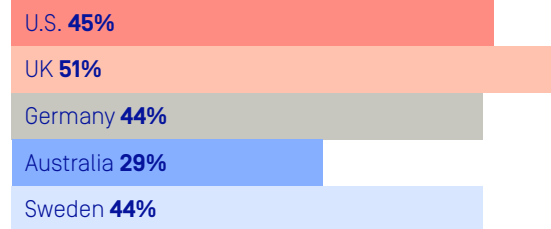
Other top ways B2B decision-makers prefer to learn about another company is through collaboration software, peer review sites, industry analysts (e.g., Gartner, Forrester) and peers/word of mouth. Whitepapers, case studies, direct mail, in-person meetings and tradeshows were very low on their list of preferred research methods.

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"These findings all indicate a very high preference for independent validation of offerings and are yet another example of buyers self-serving. Customers want to ask questions but would rather hear the answers from anyone other than a brand – making third-party content a key part of B2B strategy."
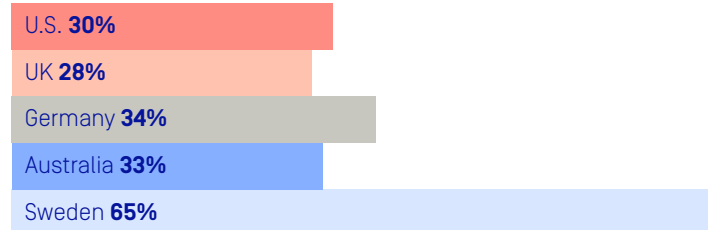
Rachel Teitt Gill, Director of Brand Communications at Episerver

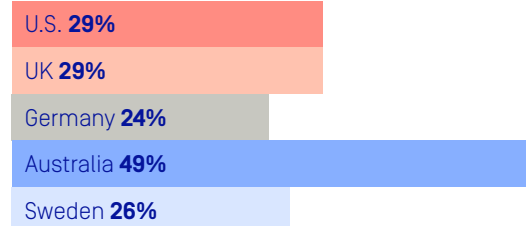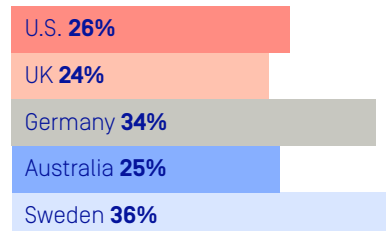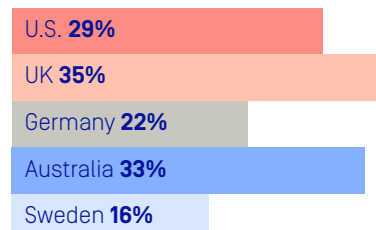### Preference for B2B Research by Country
% of respondents

Email

U.S. **45%**	
UK **51%**	
Germany **44%**	
Australia **29%**	
Sweden **44%**	

Collaboration Software

U.S. **30%**	
UK **28%**	
Germany **34%**	
Australia **33%**	
Sweden **65%**	

Peer Review Sites

U.S. **29%**	
UK **29%**	
Germany **24%**	
Australia **49%**	
Sweden **26%**	

Peers/Word of Mouth

U.S. **26%**	
UK **24%**	
Germany **34%**	
Australia **25%**	
Sweden **36%**	

Industry Analysts

U.S. **29%**	
UK **35%**	
Germany **22%**	
Australia **33%**	
Sweden **16%**	

Overall survey data from 700 individuals (U.S. =300; Sweden=100; UK= 100; Germany=100; Australia=100) employed full-time by an enterprise B2B service provider, manufacturer, distributor or retailer in a decision-making role.

Speaking to the masses, catering to no one.
Why B2Bs want content for them and only them

People are out of patience for businesses not catering to their in-the-moment needs whether it is logging into a website without remembering a password, using a self-service portal or receiving personalized content without reminding a company what they have bought before or what information they have already provided. They want convenience.

Despite B2B buyers trending toward self-service, this functionality is not a short-term tech priority.
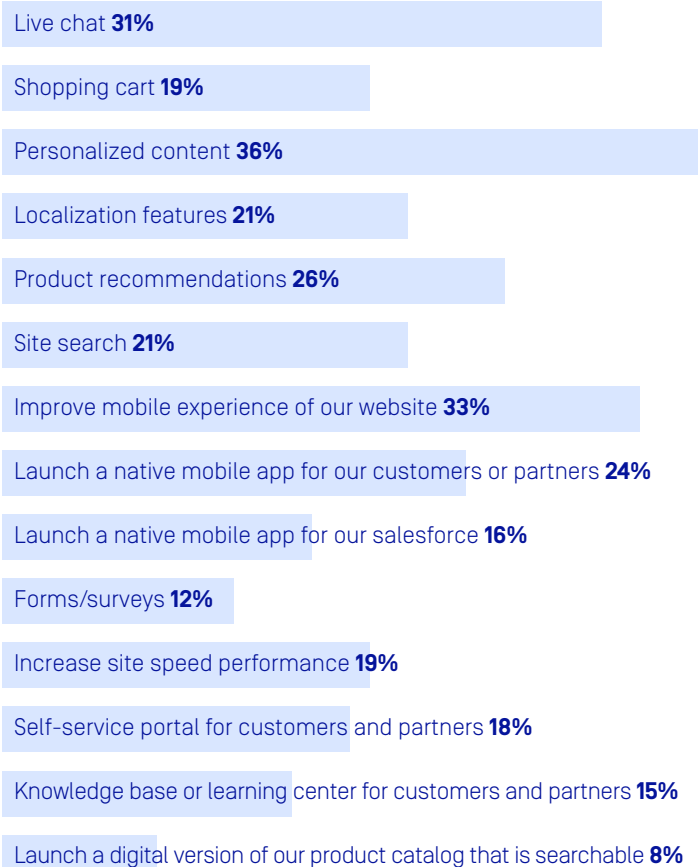
Only 18 percent of B2Bs plan to adapt a self-service portal for their customers and partners in the next 12 months.

Live chat, a specific self-serve function, is planned to be adapted by 31 percent of B2Bs.

This may show more strategic thinking on behalf of respondents though. **The number one website feature/ functionality to be adopted in the next 12 months is personalized content (36 percent) followed by improvements to the mobile experience (33 percent).** These two tactics demonstrate care for what content is delivered, how it is delivered and who it is delivered to. Live chat without personalization, for instance, can be more of a headache than what it is worth.

Select the top three NEW website features/functionality your company is most likely to adapt in the next 12 months.

Live chat **31%**

Shopping cart **19%**

Personalized content **36%**

Localization features **21%**

Product recommendations **26%**

Site search **21%**

Improve mobile experience of our website **33%**

Launch a native mobile app for our customers or partners **24%**

Launch a native mobile app for our salesforce **16%**

Forms/surveys **12%**

Increase site speed performance **19%**

Self-service portal for customers and partners **18%**

Knowledge base or learning center for customers and partners **15%**

Launch a digital version of our product catalog that is searchable **8%**

Businesses are on notice to provide more personalized experiences, and they may be getting some help via artificial intelligence (AI).

Eighty-two percent of B2Bs agree they'll use AI to personalize customer experiences online in the next three years, making for more intelligent experiences for all.

Twenty-one percent of B2B decision-makers believe delivering personalized customer experiences through their digital channels is a significant opportunity for their company. Businesses seem to be on the fast track to personalization, as only **six percent of respondents said their company does not deliver any sort of personalized digital experience today.**

As it stands, the **majority (51 percent) of B2Bs currently use basic web personalization such as displaying name on login**. Personalized product recommendations, personalized content on their website and personalized content in email marketing are all used by at least 48 percent of surveyed B2Bs.

The planned use of AI-based personalization should help these companies offer more sophisticated personalization such as a web page specifically catered to each individual – not just a page that remembers their name or the item they last clicked.

When done right, **91 percent of respondents say a B2B company cares about their experience or they think they are getting a better experience when a B2B company personalizes content on its website based on their online behavior**.

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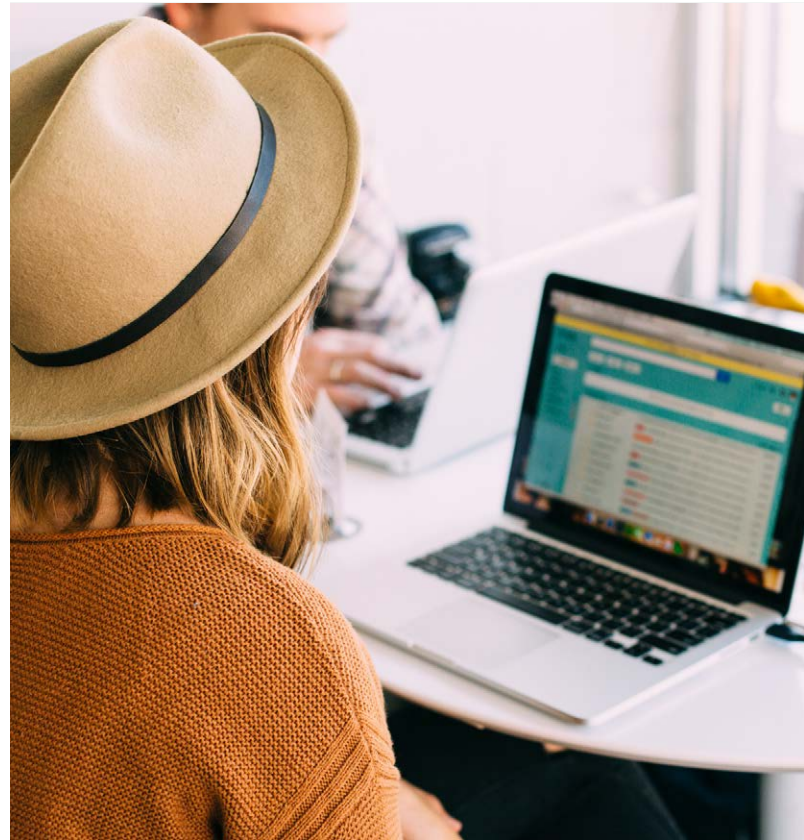
"The best personalization helps individuals at any point their journey. Personalization is finally something we are all leveraging, and now have the capacity to deliver specific individualized experiences that are helpful and relevant. With more channels to engage on and more information we learn from customers, we can now focus on personalizing different steps of the customer journey and consider more context such as timing, location and individual preferences."

Nate Barad, Senior Director of Product Marketing at Episerver

Direct, digital selling paths lead to significant profits.

More and more business-to-business organizations will operate ecommerce sites

Just last year, the majority of purchases made with B2B companies was done manually – not by a marketplace or ecommerce website – as far away from digital experience as a buyer can get. With business buyers' strong desire to self-serve, manual orders will continue to decline in favor of digital commerce functionality.

B2Bs resisting an easy way for buyers to transact will see declining sales. Direct, digital commerce revenue will quickly become a significant source of profit for savvier service providers, manufacturers, distributors and retailers.

With an ecommerce platform being the third most-likely investment by 2022, it seems B2Bs are already planning to open up direct online selling paths to uncover new revenue sources while satisfying customers' need to self-serve – and they expect their ecommerce investments to pay off.

By 2025, 72 percent of B2Bs expect 41 percent or more of their revenue to be derived from ecommerce websites they own or operate.

How much of your 2025 revenue do you expect to be derived from ecommerce websites you own and operate?

0%	**0%**
1% to 20%	**6%**
21% to 40%	**22%**
41% to 60%	**31%**
61% to 80%	**34%**
81% to 100%	**7%**

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"While some B2B organizations are wondering how to get a buy button on their sites, others are offering exceptional digital commerce experiences – making it easier for the business buyer to research, build their order and ultimately, complete the transaction."

Joey Moore, Head of Evangelism, EMEA & APAC at Episerver

Respondents remain concerned, however, about channel conflict. B2Bs can create new revenue sources by selling directly to customers – circumventing distributors and retailers – but risk alienating partners who contribute to a large portion of their profits.

The majority (54 percent) of B2B organizations say channel conflict prevents them from selling online, a significant threat to their business.

Since an organization's website is the single source of truth for products, buyers expect them to be shoppable. When B2Bs provide an easy way to purchase and re-order, they can sometimes drive the majority of revenue from their ecommerce platform.

An added bonus is direct access to customer data to discover trends in buying habits, prevent churn and personalize experiences in a way not possible before.

It is not enough, however, to simply open online ordering or add shopping cart functionality to a B2B site – buyers will bring Amazon-like expectations to whatever ordering system a company offers.

A third of respondents (33 percent) say one-click re-ordering would make it easier to do business with B2Bs online.

On a scale of strongly disagree to strongly agree, to what extent does channel conflict prevent you from selling online?

Strongly disagree **9%**

Disagree **19**%

Neutral **18%**

Agree **29%**

Strongly Agree **25%**

"B2Bs can't let channel conflict get in the way of serving customers. Organizations can use serving customers as a good cover for investing in digital commerce, even if it is peripheral at first."

Ed Kennedy, Senior Director of Commerce Strategy at Episerver

The multichannel marketing mix is crowded and cloudy.

The website remains the clear foundation for all digital experience

In a world where everyday items are connected to the web, mobile applications monopolize screen time and people can get plenty of information from Google without ever clicking through a result, it may seem a company's website is less critical than it used to be – but this is far from reality.

A business website is the ultimate owned media channel where a company can provide accurate and complete information, direct marketing campaigns and have the best chance to get discoverable on the web. It is their best foot forward – at least it should be.

Eighty-one percent of B2Bs agree their website is seen as a single source of truth and expertise for their target customer.

It is not just external stakeholders getting information from the website, employees and partners rely on it too.
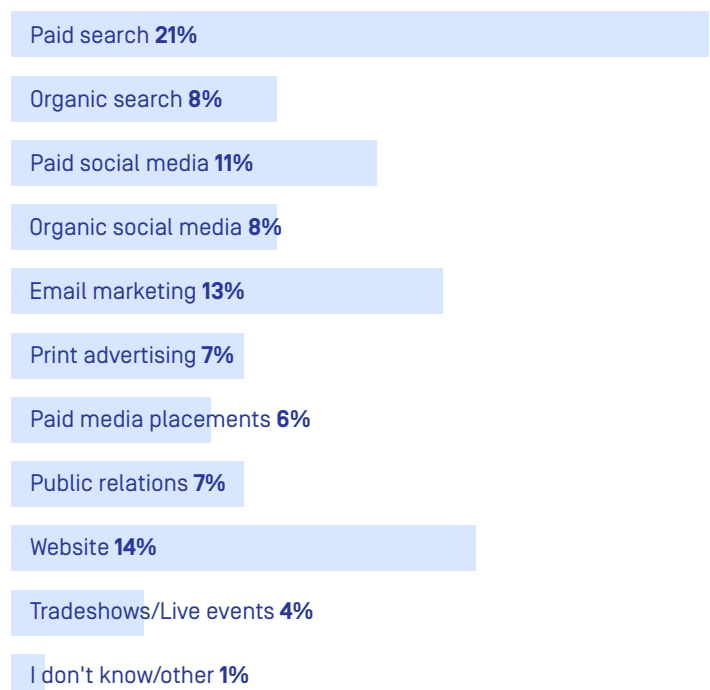
In fact, **82 percent of B2Bs agree their website is an indispensable asset to their business partners and salesforce**.

The challenge is there is little agreement on B2B's most effective marketing channel.

Nearly **a quarter (21 percent) of B2Bs consider paid search as the one marketing channel helping their organization reach customers most effectively** whereas "website" was second at 14 percent – indicating B2Bs know the importance of a website but understand the "if you build it, they will come" approach doesn't work.

Results for this question were incredibly scattered, so it is no wonder over half (51 percent) of those in marketing, IT, operations, merchandising and retail say web analytics/business intelligence is their next most-likely digital experience investment.

Which one marketing channel helps your organization reach customers most effectively?

Paid search **21%**

Organic search **8%**

Paid social media **11%**

Organic social media **8%**

Email marketing **13%**

Print advertising **7%**

Paid media placements **6%**

Public relations **7%**

Website **14%**

Tradeshows/Live events **4%**

I don't know/other **1%**

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"Businesses are overwhelmed by the dozens of marketing channels to reach customers on but are struggling to know which is the most effective and where to prioritize. It is a positive sign so many respondents realize how critical their website is as marketing campaigns have little chance of succeeding without a stellar click-through experience."

Marc Bohnes, Director of Product Strategy at Episerver

Customer experience begins and ends with employee experience.

As B2Bs invest in making their customers' jobs easier, some are also looking within

Digital experience technologies are only as good as how easy they are for employees to use day in and day out. If employees cannot realize their great digital experience ideas with the tools they have at hand, their customers will ultimately suffer. Employees will also become just as frustrated by a poor digital experience as customers will – and churn from either group is disastrous to a company.

Like business customers, employees want to self-serve. Fortunately, **the number one digital option employers currently offer is having one website and employee login for all employee activities within a portal/Intranet** (63 percent) – something business buyers have expressed they want too.

Which digital options does your employer offer for you as an employee?

Taking training courses over the Intranet **55%**

Buying employer items online **45%**

Having one website and employee login for all employee activities within a portal/Intranet **63%**

Hosting a mobile application for an employee portal/Intranet **52%**

Collaborating via workflow applications **41%**

Communicating via an internal social network **32%**

None of the above **1%**

Beyond digital systems making it easier to interact with their employer, it will be less difficult for B2B employees to get access to actionable data.

Eighty-one percent of B2B enterprises will use AI to make better business decisions in the next three years.

Eighty-one percent will also use AI for product research and development.

All of this focus on artificial intelligence may have some respondents worried about AI's impact on employee positions. One organizational function typically absent from "the robots are taking over" conversations is marketing. Survey data indicates, however, **60 percent of B2B enterprises plan to use AI to replace human workers for marketing functions by 2022**.

What is needed is a drastic shift in the AI storyline. AI can help marketers and their colleagues make better decisions and free up time from mundane tasks to be more proactive and profitable.

It would benefit business-to-business organizations to consider how employees across job functions can learn the skills needed to work with AI-based technology more closely.

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding your likeliness to use artificial intelligence in B2B marketing in the next three years?
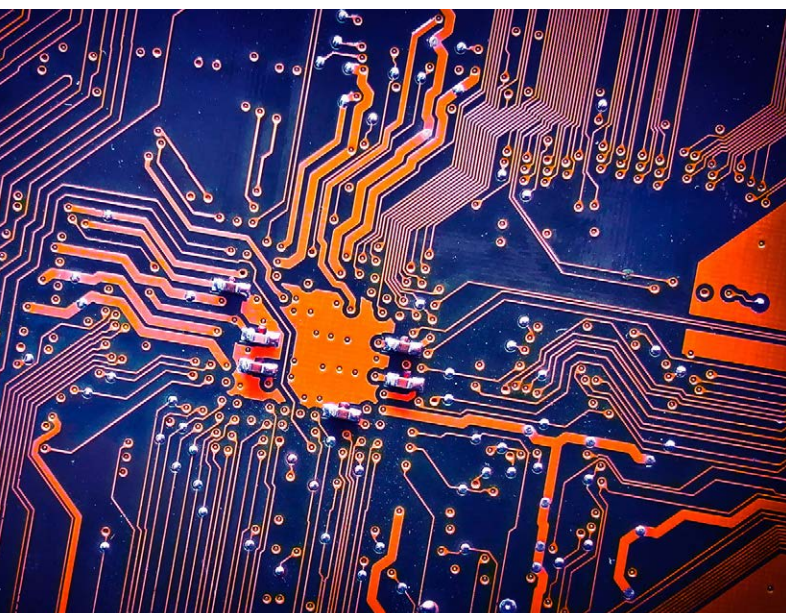
We'll use AI to replace human workers

Strongly disagree **7%**

Disagree **16%**

Neutral **18%**

Agree **29%**

Strongly Agree **31%**

"Fortunately, the robots won't be taking over, but they will make our lives easier. Consider a world where advances in technology, like AI, can help the average person with everyday functions, no matter how sophisticated or ordinary they are. Now envision how the technology can help to solve complex situations in the medical, research, scientific or any other industry. There are so many possibilities AI can deliver, the opportunities for companies are endless. Advancements in technology make all our futures brighter."

Sue Bergamo, Chief Information and Chief Security Officer at Episerver

The digital learning curve is over.
But Marketing and IT are still split

In the same way the online and offline worlds will become indistinguishable, industries will too. B2B companies – like the manufacturers, distributors, retailers and service providers surveyed here – can no longer assume customers will expect less from them because they are not a consumer-facing brand.

Everyone is a consumer wanting an easy and, more or less, enjoyable way to accomplish their goals. The best digital experiences empower customers to do more on their own.

The savviest B2Bs differentiate themselves by guiding individuals to the right pages, products and promotions to offer a one-of-a-kind digital experience for once-hesitant visitors who are now confident customers.

B2Bs know this, as personalization and self-service were overarching themes in this research, but the departments are split.

Marketing is twice as concerned, for example, about their disparate/disjointed technology than IT. **Thirty-three percent of marketers strongly agree disparate/disjointed technology is holding them back from their digital agility goals compared to just 16 percent in the IT department**.

IT is also more confident in their internal resources and talent than marketing. **Forty-six percent of IT leaders disagree they lack the resources to execute digital transformation programs compared to the 28 percent of marketers who disagree**.

Once again, IT and marketing are split about customer experience. **Thirty-one percent of IT agree their business delivers a poor digital experience to their customers compared to 57 percent of marketers who know their digital experience needs improving**.

There was a lot of common ground between marketing and IT, however. **Both marketing (71 percent) and IT (58 percent) agree their competitors could outspend them on digital technologies** although marketing is a bit more worried about the threat.

Digital experience is not how one person is able to interact with one department on one channel. The collective nature of digital experience requires everything to work cohesively internally to avoid clunky experiences externally.

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"B2B digital strategy must be coordinated and communicated often. It is important to be ambitious and at the same time judicious about milestones and communication. All sides of the organization exist for the customer, with digital as the primary means of communication.

Creating collaborative teams and frequently gauging success and areas of improvement is vital for a cohesive communication to your customers."

Nate Barad, Senior Director of Product Marketing at Episerver

Methodology

"B2B Digital Experiences Report 2019: How Companies Are Meeting Rising Expectations" from Episerver explores the priorities and plans, tactics and technologies of 700 decision-makers from the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Sweden and Australia. Respondents are employed full-time by enterprise manufacturing, distributing, retail and service providers organizations. The survey was conducted between July 3, 2019 and Aug. 1, 2019.

Respondents from "B2B Digital Experiences Report 2019: How Companies Are Meeting Rising Expectations", referenced herein, are broken down as follows:

Geography

United States: **42.9%**

Sweden: **14.3%**

United Kingdom: **14.3%**

Germany: **14.3%**

Australia: **14.3%**

Other: **0%**

Employed at a B2B as a Decision-Maker

Yes, full time: **100%**

Yes, part time: **0%**

Yes, self-employed: **0%**

No: **0%**

Job Title

Marketer: **43.0%**

IT: **36.9%**

Operations: **16.7%**

Merchandiser: **1.0%**

Retailer: **2.4%**

Other: **0%**

Annual Revenue

$5M-$9.99M: **.6%**

$10M-24.99M: **.6%**

$25M-$49.99M: **.1%**

$50M-$99.99M: **.4%**

$100M-$249.99M: **9.3%**

$250M-$499.99M: **18.1%**

$500M-$999.99M: **38.4%**

$1B+: **32.4%**

Company Size (By Employees)

51-100: **.1%**

101-500: **5.7%**

501-1000: **29.7%**

1001-5000: **35.9%**

Greater than 5000: **28.6%**

Company Type

Service Provider: **42.1%**

Manufacturer: **35.1**%

Distributor: **6.6%**

Retailer: **16.1%**

Other: **0%**

Graphs included throughout this report may not add up to 100 percent as exact percentages were rounded to whole numbers and, in some cases, respondents were able to choose multiple answers.

United States
Commerce dreamers

U.S. business leaders are more concerned than any other country about how they will obtain spend to fund all the digital projects they want. They realize their own expectations for how they want businesses to help them do their jobs and are among the most eager regions in terms of securing spend to see projects through – specifically when it comes to digital commerce initiatives.

- Despite an impending 2020 presidential election and international trade disputes, American businesses are confident in the strength of their argument for additional technology funds. Ninety-three percent of U.S. respondents expect to have bigger technology budgets for digital projects in 2020, the highest percentage of all the countries surveyed.

- One reason for larger budgets is American businesses are trying to keep up with the digital joneses. Sixty-six percent of U.S. respondents agree or strongly agree being outspent by competitors is an external threat. It may seem other organizations in their industries have the technology they need to provide the digital experience they want.

- Under the hood, however, many B2Bs struggle with the same challenges. Fifty-eight percent of respondents in the U.S. say their B2B enterprise's legacy software is holding them back from digital agility goals.

- While additional budget does not always equal better digital experience, American businesses are on the right track in terms of where to prioritize resources. B2Bs in the U.S. (40 percent) are more likely to say selling directly to customers online is the most significant opportunity for their organizations than other countries. An integrated ecommerce platform could help with the online ordering, self-service functionality and personalization American B2Bs desire.

- B2Bs don't have to think of their investments as one-off purchases though.

  With the most-likely investment of web analytics/business intelligence technologies (55 percent) by U.S. businesses, purchasers need to think of how a single system may check off all those boxes to simplify their lives and the lives of their customers who benefit from seamless commerce experiences.

"B2Bs need to start tackling digital commerce immediately. If this means starting with compensating sales reps for online sales, paying partners higher commissions or starting small with long-tail obscure products in their catalog, they need to start somewhere. There are plenty of strategic options to get B2Bs off the ground and selling directly online fast."

Ed Kennedy, Senior Director of Commerce Strategy at Episerver

United Kingdom
Cost-conscious decisionmakers

UK-based business leaders are less optimistic about their 2020 technology budget, but their focus on customer experience may keep their organizations top of mind despite spending less than their global competitors.

- While the world is watching Brexit headlines, UK citizens are prepping themselves for an unpredictable market. Retail sales, for example, vary drastically depending on news out of Parliament in order to spend less if the economy takes a turn.

  Business-to-business organizations are feeling the impact too with 69 percent of UK respondents being most concerned about getting outspent by competitors on digital technologies.

- Concern about competitor advancements make sense as the UK was one of the more conservative regions in terms of expected budget increases next year. Thirty percent of UK respondents expect their budget related to marketing, operations, ecommerce and their website to significantly increase compared to 51 percent of their American peers.

- What's more, 75 percent of UK B2B leaders are concerned about the rising costs to acquire customers as an external threat.

- It seems UK businesses are hoping to compete on experience. Prioritizing online customer experience was cited as the most significant opportunity for UK businesses in the next three years.

  The second most significant opportunity: expanding into new geographic markets.

"B2B organizations in a digitally mature market like the UK already feel the pressure to elevate their online experience to one their customers have become accustomed. The concerns about digital-first competitors stealing market share are very real and business leaders should pay close attention to what has been happening in retail and financial services over the last few years."

Joey Moore, Head of Evangelism, EMEA & APAC at Episerver

Sweden
Advanced thinkers

No other country was as decisive in their thoughts about B2B preferences and plans than Sweden, but they were the first to say they don't have it all figured out. Where other regions showed some indecision in the form of scattered responses, Swedish B2B decision-makers displayed the strongest collective conviction about trends and technologies impacting digital experience – for better or worse.

- While egos may have taken over in how business leaders from other countries answered questions about their teams and their current capabilities, Swedish respondents humbled their companies.

  Swedish respondents, for example, were the most likely to agree they deliver a poor digital experience to their customers (75 percent) compared to British (30 percent), Australian (33 percent), American (48 percent) and German (36 percent) peers.

- Swedish B2B leaders were also concerned with the ability to take the next step in their digital initiatives. They were the most likely to think they don't have the in-house resources to carry out digital transformation projects (77 percent).

- One thing is for certain, Sweden is not afraid to use new technology to improve business operations and marketing. Collectively, the country has a positive attitude toward digitization and automation.

  By a commanding lead, Sweden is the country most likely to replace marketing jobs with artificial intelligence. Eighty-one percent of Swedish B2B leaders agree they will use artificial intelligence (AI) to replace human workers in B2B marketing roles. The United States was the second most likely at 62 percent.

- Since Sweden is keen to simplify lives through automation, it checks out as the country also wanting self-service options the most.

- Fifty-two percent of B2B decision-makers say self-serve functionality is the number-one way B2Bs could make it easier for them to do business with them online.

- Even with all the data pointing toward extensive automation in Sweden, the country overwhelmingly prefers to learn from their peers. Sixty-five percent of Swedish respondents prefer to learn about a company via collaboration software (e.g., Yammer, Teams, Slack) than all other channels.

- Swedish respondents simply want to give peers the most effective way of doing their jobs. It was the only country where the majority of respondents said "providing our salesforce with digital selling tools" was the most significant opportunity for their business in the next three years (61 percent) compared to just 34 percent of Americans, 26 percent of Germans, 29 percent of Australians and 28 percent of British B2B decision-makers saying the same.

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"The Swedish results are commendable for their realism. Most organizations have an inflated opinion of what they're doing, and unrealistic expectations for the amount of work it's going to take to drive change. The first step to delivering value – which these results also showed a firm grasp on – is to understand what the road ahead looks like."

Deane Barker, Senior Director of Content Management Strategy at Episerver

Germany
Compliance-driven leaders

With some of the strictest privacy laws in the world, Germany-based business-to-business organizations do not shy away from using data to better the digital experience – they are more aware of the need to use the information to help customers, not hurt them.

- Across each country, increasing digital expectations of customers and partners was seen as a top external threat but German respondents showed the most apprehension. Ninety percent of B2B leaders in Germany ranked it as their top external threat ahead of other threats like being outspent by their competitors on digital technologies and startups disrupting their industry.

- One way to meet rising digital expectations is through delivering an experience made for individuals, not the masses.

  Despite privacy laws, German respondents want companies to use their data to better their experiences. Ninety-one percent of total respondents from Germany think personalization by a B2B company means they care about them (42 percent) or that they are getting a better experience for it (49 percent).

- Decision-makers in Germany ranked their most-likely investments as: (1) an email marketing system, (2) personalization technologies and (3) a customer data platform.

- As German B2B decision-makers look to bring unique, individualized experiences to their audiences with planned investments in personalization technologies, they are also prioritizing how customer data is handled in the process.

  As the third most-likely investment, customer data platforms (CDP) can help enterprise B2B organizations make data actionable to optimize their personalization investments and, with the right CDP, help them stay compliant with local data regulations.

- These three strategic investments demonstrate solutions that can work together – email, personalization, customer data platform – to improve digital experience. With the most conservative budget projections of all countries, German B2Bs are focused on the compliance picture and how it relates to the digital experience they offer.

"German B2B companies will have to gauge whether they are willing to invest in their company's digital future. Without a doubt, in order to be successful, long-term relationships with their customers must be established.

Thus, it is unavoidable to invest in an individualized customer experience to saturate increasing digital expectations, which will only rise in the next couple of years. This must be possible even in light of compliance laws."

Marc Bohnes, Director of Product Strategy at Episerver

Australia
Supportive bosses

Of any country surveyed, Australian B2B leaders seem the most pleased with the digital experience they provide. With B2B organizations inherently less digitally agile than their B2C counterparts, it may be cause for concern that bosses are so blissful about their current state – as there is always room for improvement. Perhaps, however, B2B leaders are simply the most supported of all other countries surveyed.

- The majority (60 percent) of respondents in Australia say they disagree they lack funding from senior management to execute digital transformation programs.

  Perhaps they are as well funded as they seem, because Australian B2B leaders are most likely to disagree or strongly disagree they deliver a poor customer experience to their customers and partners (59 percent). Eighty-four percent agree their B2B company delivers exceptional customer experiences online.

- The confidence in their digital ability continues. B2B decision-makers in Australia rated their website the highest of any regions.

  Eighty-nine percent of respondents say their website is industry leading and follows best practices. The second most confident region was the U.S. (84 percent).

- With company decision-makers content in what they currently offer, they want to drive more traffic to their site. An email marketing system is the most-likely investment by Australian B2Bs (61 percent).

- While their least-perceived threat is digitally native startups disrupting their industry (40 percent disagree this is a threat), Australian B2B leaders do worry about customer demands outpacing their innovation.

  Eighty-eight percent of B2Bs in Australia agree increasing digital expectations of their customers or partners is an external threat.

  Fittingly, the most significant opportunity (according to 45 percent of B2B decision-makers in Australia) for their business is improving customer experience.

- When it's time to research tech vendors to work with to improve customer experience, Australian B2B leaders overwhelmingly prefer to use peer review sites to get more information (49 percent).

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"Business leaders cannot rest on their customer experience laurels, regardless of how confident they are. While B2Bs may think startups will come and go, it only takes one company solving a problem more efficiently and effectively, probably via a unique digital experience, to cause a mass exodus from traditional B2Bs."

Joey Moore, Head of Evangelism, EMEA & APAC at Episerver

About Episerver

Celebrating its 25th year, Episerver empowers digital leaders to easily create standout experiences for customers – everywhere they engage, and always with measurable business results. The Episerver Digital Experience Cloud™ unifies digital content, commerce and marketing in one platform, including omnichannel solutions for smart personalization and intelligent campaigns. Episerver has offices in the US, UK, Sweden, Australia, Germany, Denmark, Finland, Norway, the Netherlands, South Africa, Singapore and Vietnam.

For more information, visit Episerver.com.