

# IBM i

## Kicking COVID-19 through eCommerce

The impact of COVID-19 on B2B purchasing decisions and how best to improve business through an eCommerce platform appropriate for your IBM i enterprise



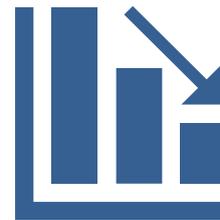
## Kicking COVID-19 through eCommerce

The pandemic has altered the way we work. The modern IBM i Enterprise must be ready to adopt new ways of conducting business



**24%**

increase in B2B shopping  
within the last year



**16%**

The percentage buying  
directly from sales reps  
(down from 44%)

In a survey of over 200 B2B professionals, the B2B Future Shopper 2020 report found that many businesses are following a trend of moving from traditional sales representative to online transactions.

The report (conducted between 17<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> April 2020) disclosed that before the pandemic 44% of the businesses surveyed bought direct through salespeople. Four months later, this number has dropped to 16%.

With 84% now conducting business without direct sales, there is a major gap to fill to adequately complete the sales process. While much of this could be completed via telephone, many would like to turn to online.

Indeed, of those surveyed, 43% claimed they had changed suppliers due to a lack of online ordering capability.



## A surge in demand for B2B purchases

Neil Stewart, CEO of Wunderman Thompson Commerce explains that the COVID-19 pandemic has put pressure on businesses to deliver a robust eCommerce strategy...



"We've seen Covid-19 dramatically shake up consumer retail, so it is unsurprising to see a similar pattern in the B2B landscape.

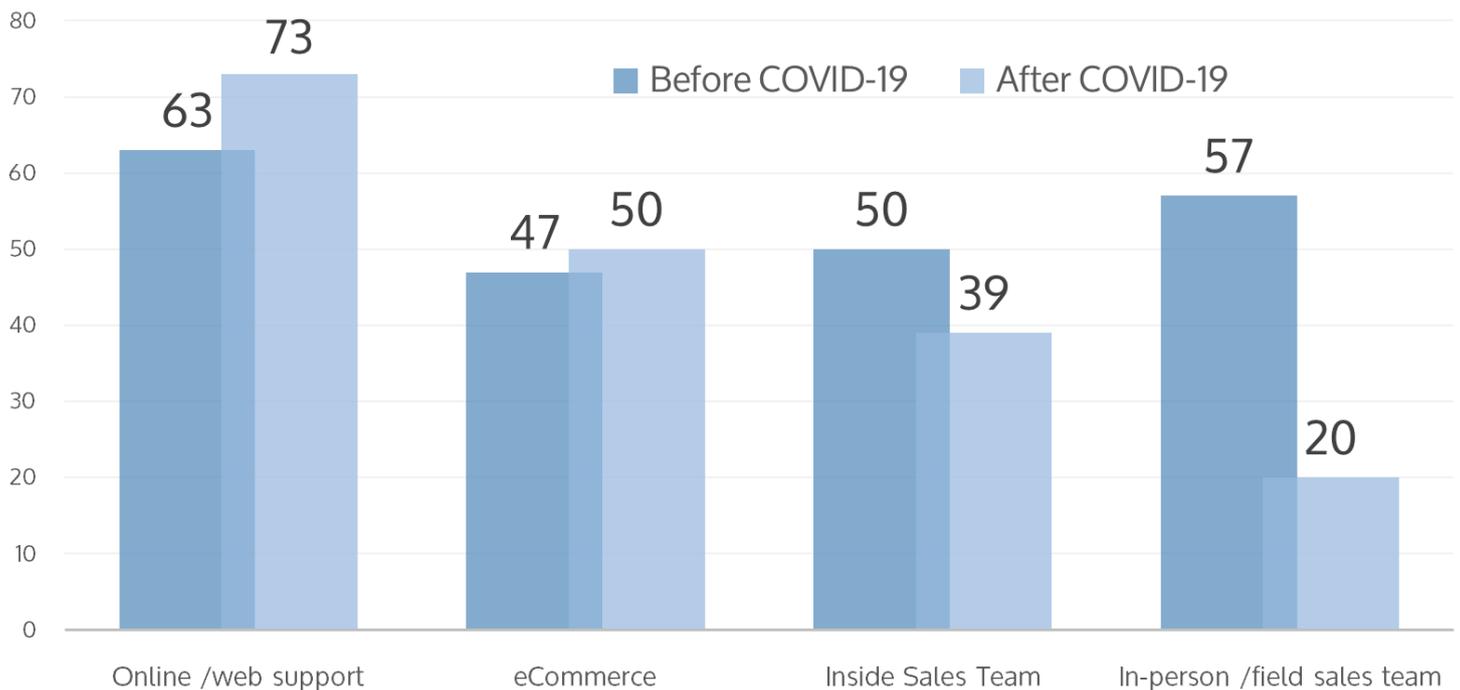
"However, with supply chains heavily impacted by the pandemic, businesses are struggling to match this demand and need to have the infrastructure in place to cope with surging online sales. Many buyers may not be comfortable, or even able, to purchase items in person and will therefore look to the plethora of other options available online."

He added: "The number one priority for B2B retailers over the coming months will be to ensure they can provide the same services online as they do via physical channels."



## COVID-19's impact on B2B Sales

The trend in moving from traditional sales methods to B2B ecommerce sales has escalated due to COVID-19.



A study published by McKinsey in May 2020 saw a growing trend for online B2B purchasing with a jump of 10% in the online sales processes (supported purchase such as video calls, interaction via website or mobile apps), and 3% jump in eCommerce

Most noticeably however was the decrease in traditional models of sales. Inside sales (or sale by telephone or email campaign) have fallen by 11%. But perhaps most alarming of these figures are those of the in-person, field sales representatives. These numbers have dropping by a considerable 37% in the space between May 2019 and 2020.

## Making it easy for them to buy

The speed of growth in the B2B eCommerce market has accelerated during the COVID-19 crisis, there remain concerns that organisations may not have the infrastructure in place to operate efficiently online.



**36%**

Start their purchases via a supplier/vendor portal and/or online catalogues



**46%**

of B2B purchases are made online

While a business may have a wonderful website that is easy to navigate, deploying as equally valued user experience to their webstore proves difficult. A user-centric approach must be delivered that provides an intuitive user experience that encourages the buyer to move through the purchasing funnel with ease.

Where possible, complexity should be removed with workflow for previously complex scenarios such as budgeting, multi-variant pricing and simply search and buy, be built into the platform.

Within the B2B Future Shopper 2020 report, four of the most requested features to help make the purchasing process easier were:

- 1) Real-time inventory availability
- 2) Transparent fulfilment and shipping information
- 3) Predictive ordering
- 4) Purchase automation



## Technology for you and your customer

The B2B purchaser is also a B2C consumer out of office time. Their experience with buying through online stores such as Amazon influence their expectations when using a B2B solution.



**43%**

of B2B shoppers change supplier because the existing supplier was not able to offer online ordering



**18%**

have switched suppliers for all purchases because of COVID-19

For your customer to adopt your proposition, your technology partner should not just align with your IBM i platform but should also be able to provide a robust and reliable digital offering that your customers would find value in using.

Consider technologies that will allow your customer to aggregate information and provide details and suggestions based upon past and predicted orders.

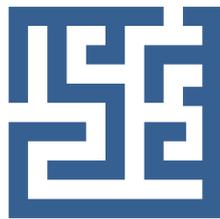
Depending upon industry, further technologies that may provide a better B2B experience may include budgetary options, rich media content and custom branding depending upon login credentials.

To support this, day-to-day management and administration of the eCommerce solution should be easy and not require IT resource.



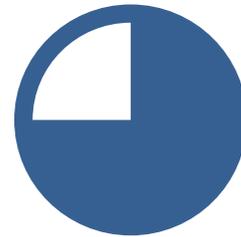
## Keep it simple

It's not enough for a business wishing to retain and grow business to simply deploy a generic B2B webshop. Indeed, the business needs to provide an online experience that is both appropriate and relevant to brand while being simple, intuitive and enjoyable to use.



**43%**

of online B2B shoppers said that buying online is more complex than offline



**72%**

of B2B shoppers expect a similar experience buying on B2B sites as on B2C

The offering must provide comparable opportunity to that of the interaction with a person. For example, if your business is selling chemicals and you need a specific or variable mix of materials, then a UI that not only allows this, but makes the process easy to complete should be applied.

The business should apply the mindset crafted between the salesperson and the customer into the workflow of the B2B solution while simultaneously offering more by the ways of opportunity to sell complementary offering and analytics.



## B2B eCommerce and the IBM i

The IBM i is perhaps one of the most capable transactional platforms available to business. However, when it comes to outward facing, it can also be one of the most difficult to leverage as part of an eCommerce strategy.

While there are many eCommerce suits available, finding a solution that can take advantage of the intrinsic benefits of IBM i and enjoy benefits such as real-time access to stock, OS native workflow and live analytics may be a challenge.

Many suits will offer some form of interfacing and reporting but these may be delivered as a batch or on-demand process and the benefits of the native IBM i infrastructure negated.

It would seem therefore that there would be a trade-off between delivering a user centric experience and providing the real-time information and analytics both the originator and customer require.

But does it have to be this way? Not so, and the top three features that an IBM i enterprise should therefore ask any vendor first should be for:

- ✓ Real-time stock & order transactions
- ✓ Native IBM i integration
- ✓ Process Automation

## Conclusions for IBM i B2B eCommerce

This brief snapshot of the current landscape provides a glimpse into the problems and agency in delivering the right eCommerce for them and their customers.

But what now? Here are some of the takeaways that the modern IBM i enterprise should investigate to help make better decisions.

**If you are not offering online sales now,  
you should quickly scale up your  
eCommerce technology and capabilities  
or risk losing customers**

**Consider how you use B2C and use your  
knowledge of your customers'  
requirements to develop a user  
experience that adds value**



**Add rich product content that provides the opportunity for the customer to enjoy real-time information they need to make the right purchasing decisions**

**Have a robust and resilient online presence that is able to provide consistent performance while maintaining security**

**Consider adopting an open source content management system to provide a UX for both customers and administrators without IT intervention**

**Ensure that the eCommerce platform can integrate securely and effectively with your IBM i enterprise, preferably in real-time**



## Utilities 400 and IBM i eCommerce

Utilities 400 provide powerful but simple to use, end-to-end online store system that seamlessly integrates with your back-end IBM i or can be run as an independent cloud based solution.

Selling B2B products is as every bit simple as selling products to B2C. With ShowMe WebShop you get one unified platform to run your online business with ease:



**Fully integration with most ERP solutions**



**Fulfil orders in a single step**



**Track open order and review history**



**Real-time access to information**



**Fully integrated content management**



**Provide B2B budgeting & branding**



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AUGUST 2020

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