



B2B Is More Than Ecommerce

It's the Entire Customer Experience

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Beyond the Cart: The Complexity of B2B Commerce

Sarah, a procurement manager at an Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) in the Midwest, logs into her company's portal, hoping to finalize a multimillion-dollar contract for specialized assemblies. Despite the company's recent digital investments, she's still navigating disconnected systems, slow approvals, and manual data re-entry.



This is a reality that exposes a critical question for manufacturers:

Is their digital strategy truly transformative or just an optimization of old processes?

Nothing about Sarah's experience resembles the quick, one-click checkout of retail ecommerce, yet that's still what most people will call it.

In truth, manufacturers contend with complex workflows and deep integrations: they manage custom BOMs, multi-stage approvals, regulatory compliance, and bulk ordering across multiple warehouse locations. A simple online cart doesn't capture that depth.

Manufacturers need digitization.

Digitization happens when ERP, CRM, PLM, and online portals stop working in silos and start functioning as a unified ecosystem.

Why 'Ecommerce' Falls Short in Manufacturing

According to Deloitte's 2023 Manufacturing Outlook ¹, over 80 percent of manufacturers see digital technologies as critical for staying competitive, yet only 45 percent feel confident about their execution strategies.

Meanwhile, Forrester projects that the US B2B ecommerce market will exceed \$2 trillion by 2027 ², suggesting that the volume is there, but the complexity of these deals goes far beyond a simple cart.

- > **Engineer-to-order (ETO) complexity** – Many manufacturers tailor products on the fly, requiring real-time design updates and BOM changes.
- > **Regulatory and quality compliance** – From ISO standards to safety certifications, each step must be tracked and documented digitally.
- > **Global supply chain** – Multiple currencies, languages, and shipping regulations add complexity far beyond typical B2C cross-border sales.
- > **Data silos** – Legacy ERP systems, stand-alone CRMs, and manual spreadsheets create disjointed processes.



A cart-and-checkout approach can't handle these intricacies. True digitization goes far deeper — tying every operational thread into a unified digital backbone.

Digital Transformation vs. Digital Optimization

Digital transformation and digital optimization are often used interchangeably, but they represent two distinct approaches to digitization.



> **Digital Transformation:**

A fundamental shift in how a business operates. It involves overhauling core processes, integrating entirely new technologies, and sometimes even changing the business model.

Example:

A manufacturer launching a direct-to-customer (D2C) channel for the first time would undergo a digital transformation.

> **Digital Optimization:**

This focuses on improving efficiency within existing systems. Instead of a complete overhaul, it refines and enhances current workflows and tools.

Example:

A manufacturer integrating real-time inventory updates into their ERP to reduce stockouts is optimizing, not transforming.

The distinction matters because businesses need to determine whether they need a full transformation or if optimization will deliver the best return on investment.

Case in Point: How a U.S. Steel Framing Leader Revamped Disconnected Systems with a Unified Digital Ecosystem

A North American leader in steel framing and construction materials turned to [Acro Commerce](#) for help modernizing its digital infrastructure. Initially, the company set out to improve its ecommerce platform. However, after deeper discovery, it became clear that a simple storefront upgrade wouldn't solve their underlying challenges:

- **System fragmentation** – Multiple portals requiring duplicate data entry slowed teams and introduced errors.
- **Scalability issues** – Their next growth phase required more flexible technology that could integrate with emerging solutions.
- **Manual bottlenecks** – Pricing updates, order approvals, and compliance checks were still handled through email, leading to delays. The distinction matters because businesses need to determine whether they need a full transformation or if optimization will deliver the best return on investment.

How Acro Commerce Delivered

- Migrated from .NET to Drupal, creating a **centralized portal** for customers and internal teams.
- **Integrated ERP systems** so pricing, inventory, and order status are automatically updated in real time.
- **Adopted a decoupled architecture**, allowing marketing teams to update content without back-end dependencies.
- **Enabled SSO (Single Sign-On)** so employees and customers could use one secure portal for all interactions.

By replacing fragmented tools and manual processes with a single source of truth, the company reduced duplicate work, improved content updates, and ensured compliance checks happened in real time.

With a **scalable, unified system** in place, they are now positioned to streamline quoting, approvals, and production workflows – delivering faster turnaround times and fewer errors.

Additional Industry Challenges and Trends

In a McKinsey survey ³, over 75 percent of B2B buyers in manufacturing said they would switch suppliers for a more seamless digital experience. Gartner also predicts that by 2025, 80 percent of B2B interactions will be digital ⁴.

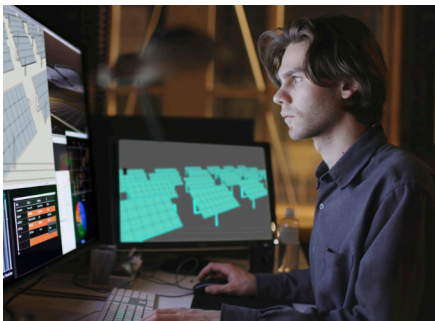
These shifts, alongside other factors, highlight the need for deeper digitization:



- > **Compliance and documentation** – In regulated sectors like aerospace or medical devices, traceability is nonnegotiable. Digital systems must log every material and step to pass audits.



- > **ETO and CTO** – Fifty-three percent of manufacturers say customizing orders is their top driver for digitization, as reported by MHI's Annual Industry Report (2023) ⁵. Linking engineering data to the sales process can reduce design errors and speed up the time to market.



- > **Workforce skills gap** – Fifty-two percent of manufacturers cite “lack of digital skills” as a key barrier, according to Deloitte ¹. A unified portal can automate repetitive tasks and free skilled workers for higher-value activities.



- > **IoT and machine connectivity** – Smart sensors on production lines feed real-time data into ERP. A robust digitized platform can harness that data, predicting machine downtime and optimizing throughput.

B2B vs. B2C: A Deeper Look

	B2C	B2B
Product structure	> Standard SKUs	> Complex BOMs, custom configs, ETO or CTO
Checkout process	> One-click, credit card	> Multi-approval workflows, POs, negotiated discounts
Regulations	> Minimal compliance needs	> ISO certifications, industry standards, safety regulations
Supply chain	> Simple shipping and tracking	> Multi-warehouse, global logistics, import/export compliance
Relationship	> Transactional, short-term	> Long-term contracts, service agreements, engineering collab

How to Embrace Full Digitization

> Identify high-impact pain points

Are engineering sign-offs or compliance tasks bottlenecking production?

> Form a long-term roadmap

Digitization spans multiple years. Align it with product lifecycle management and future R&D goals.

> Pilot and iterate

Launch a minimal viable product — perhaps a simplified quoting portal tied to real-time inventory — and refine it with sales, engineering, and customer feedback.

> Integrate cross-functional systems

Ensure ERP, CRM, PLM, and your portal communicate seamlessly. This step typically delivers the biggest ROI by eliminating redundant data entry.

> Train and upskill staff

A digital ecosystem only works if people know how to operate and maximize it.

> Focus on customer adoption

Even the best system falls flat if the end users don't adopt it. Develop an adoption strategy from day one, embedding structured frameworks (like Nicole Donnelly's approach) into the rollout plan. This ensures not only a smooth launch but actual long-term usage that delivers ROI.

Beyond Selling: Elevating the Entire Operation

Modern manufacturers want frictionless, integrated solutions that handle the full complexity of their operations.

If you frame your digital journey as an “ecommerce project,” you risk overlooking the deeper changes that drive real growth:

- Integrated workflows
- Automated approvals
- Real-time reporting
- Data-driven decisions across departments

Manufacturers who build a cohesive, integrated ecosystem gain faster sales cycles, fewer mistakes, and a more resilient supply chain. These advantages position them ahead in an industry that demands and rewards agility and innovation.

The real question isn't whether to digitize but how.

Some manufacturers need a full overhaul. Others see significant gains by refining what already works. The key isn't just going digital. It's making the digital move that will deliver the most significant impact.

So, how about you? Does your business need a complete transformation, or is optimization the better path?



Next Steps

Is your digital strategy truly transformative or just an optimization of old processes?

Every business is different. Some need a complete digital overhaul, while others thrive with targeted optimization.

Get personalized advice during a free consultation and learn how to make the most significant digital impact. We'll help you determine the right path for your business transformation.

Book a free consult

No pressure,
no obligation,
just straight advice.

[Book a discovery meeting >](#)

About Acro Commerce

We specialize in digital solutions for manufacturing and B2B, reducing time-to-market, complexity, and costs. Our Agile framework drives faster market entry, improved profits, and increased market share.



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Acronym Glossary


B2B	>	Business-to-business
B2C	>	Business-to-consumer
BOM	>	Bills of materials
ETO	>	Engineer-to-order
CTO	>	Configure-to-order
ERP	>	Enterprise resource planning
CRM	>	Customer relationship management
PLM	>	Product lifecycle management
.NET	>	A software development framework
SSO	>	Single sign-on
IoT	>	Internet of Things
ISO	>	International Organization for Standardization
R&D	>	Research and development
SKUs	>	Stock-keeping units
POs	>	Purchase orders

References

[1] [Deloitte's 2023 Manufacturing Industry Outlook](#) 

[2] [Forrester: The US B2B eCommerce Forecast, 2022 to 2027](#) 

[3] [McKinsey: How B2B Sales Have Changed](#) 

[4] [Gartner: What's Ahead for B2B Sales in 2025](#) 

[5] [MHI Annual Industry Report 2023](#) 