Heading for the Next Frontier:
The Digitalization of B2B

On their quest to maximize customer reach and deliver a value-added experience, businesses find themselves often in new system landscapes and complex ecosystems. This report maps out the journey towards the new territories, how organizations have started to stake out their claims, and how to invest in order not to lose ground.
Intershop Communications AG (founded in Germany 1992; Prime Standard: ISH2) is the leading independent provider of omni-channel commerce solutions. Intershop offers high-performance packaged software for Internet sales, complemented by all necessary services. Intershop also acts as a business process outsourcing provider, covering all aspects of online retailing up to fulfilment. Around the globe more than 300 enterprise customers, including HP, BMW, and Deutsche Telekom run Intershop solutions. Intershop is headquartered in Jena, Germany, and has offices in the United States, Europe, Australia, and China. See www.intershop.com.
In June 2015, Intershop commissioned independent research consultancy Vanson Bourne to survey 400 B2B decision makers with responsibility for e-commerce in the UK, US, France, Germany, the Nordics, and Benelux.

The research, designed to evaluate the current state-of-play of digital B2B commerce today, was focused on exploring four key areas:

- What is the state of the digital B2B commerce and what are the hassles to get there?
- What B2B e-commerce benefits are being generated as a result of implementing and growing a digital B2B channel – and what challenges are organizations encountering in the process?
- How far has the digitalization of the value chain proceeded?
- What’s next when it comes to evolving the digital B2B commerce model – and how will this impact the enterprise?
As the survey findings reveal, many organizations acknowledge they’re already reaping significant benefits as a result of embarking on a digital B2B commerce strategy. As a consequence they’re experiencing rapid changes within their B2B sales channels – and predict that their digital platforms will grow significantly in the near future.

That’s great news. But for some, fast-paced success has come at a price – many of the e-commerce decision makers said they’re daunted by the challenges they need to surmount as they tackle building out the next phase of a world-class B2B e-commerce business. And that’s especially true when it comes to enabling an interconnected digital enterprise infrastructure that’s engineered for true customer-centricity.

Clearly, there’s a major shift taking place in B2B commerce in two ways. As we’ll see, an online-driven, omni-channel transformation is changing the way B2B brands connect with, engage and retain customers. On the other hand, digitalization demands the ongoing integration of supply chain and demand chain leading to more cross-linked processes, companies and businesses. All of which has ramifications for the wider digital enterprise.

So while some businesses admit to having little time to spare when it comes to developing the B2B commerce experience they deliver to their customers, others are already planning significant investment in re-engineering core business processes in a bid to deliver highly relevant and contextual experiences to their buyers.

Doing this requires a radical rethink and new dimensions of automation – especially with respect to the seamless integration of channels and back-end infrastructures to deliver a seamless customer experience across multiple touch points.

A number of survey participants are already on a mission to nail the value-add B2B e-commerce experience – and become B2B e-commerce rock stars within the markets they serve. To do this, they’re looking to embark on ‘synaptic commerce’ – connecting systems, combining worlds and fully embracing digitalization.
Here’s just a flavor of the key insights from the 2015 research findings:

- 97% of respondents’ organizations have felt impact due to changes of their B2B channels – and that’s driving a greater need for more integrated business processes and greater collaboration between functional teams.

- In the next two years, respondents expect their organization’s digital platforms to grow by 13% - and that’s driving a parallel evolution of the e-commerce ecosystem from today’s web shop to a more complex and comprehensive customer engagement platform.

- Almost all (99%) of those surveyed state their organization measures their digital B2B commerce success – principally customer satisfaction (65%), revenue growth (64%), average order value (48%) and spend-per-customer (47%). This demonstrates the expectation for business results.

- Most respondents (91%) report their organization will encounter challenges when growing their digital platform – and that the integration of IT systems into the digital B2B commerce landscape is viewed as a primary goal for the next three years.

- Technical faults (47%), low initial digital B2B sales (44%) and issues integrating digital and offline channels (44%) were the challenges most likely to be expected when setting up digital B2B channels.

- Almost all (98%) respondents expect that their sector will benefit from the digitalization of business, and the same proportion (98%) see opportunities from the digitalization of business – clearly, slipping behind represents a significant risk for those organizations that lack the vision or capability to evolve.

As the research shows, B2B e-commerce decision makers recognize that this race is on already. Those organizations able to evolve their digital B2B commerce offering fast and effectively will successfully deliver against today’s B2B buyer expectations. Those that lag behind, however, risk being consigned to the history books.

Consequently, many forward thinking B2B brands are looking to evolve into mobile-enhanced, omni-channel, digital B2B commerce opportunities that rival the best the B2C space has to offer. Achieving this vision means tackling core business processes, enabling new touch points, and facilitating synaptic scaling capabilities that allow B2B organizations to act within milliseconds - and evolve fast.
The economy as a whole is in transition to a new state. The fourth industrial revolution (Internet of Things, Digital Transformation, and Cyber Physical Production Systems) is driving the need to digitalize one’s business. The first part of the study throws light on the state of digitalization in B2B commerce.
How integrated is the current e-commerce landscape?

In terms of IT system integration, most respondents confirm their organizations are most likely to have integrated product information (54%), web content (43%) and digital asset (42%) management systems. Only 2% have not yet integrated any existing IT systems into their digital B2B commerce landscape (Figure 1).

However, this level of integration is still not enough for most organizations, with the vast majority of respondents (94%) saying their organization needs to integrate at least one – or more – IT system into their B2B e-commerce landscape within the next three years.

Clearly, integration is happening, and most business processes are now expected to be part and parcel of the B2B e-commerce platform. All of which enables organizations to offer a flexible B2B e-commerce solution.

Integration of e-commerce landscape will remain on the to do list

- **Product information management system**: 54% at present, 37% in 3 years’ time
- **Web content management system**: 43%, 35%
- **Digital asset management system**: 42%, 41%
- **Order management system**: 41%, 29%
- **Customer relationship management system**: 40%, 32%
- **Content delivery network**: 39%, 36%
- **Image server**: 31%, 30%
- **Enterprise resource planning system**: 30%, 33%
- **Procurement**: 22%, 19%
- **Organization has not/does not need to integrate any IT system**: 2%, 6%

Figure 1: Analysis of what IT systems organizations have now and plan to integrate in 3 years’ time, into their B2B commerce landscape, asked to all respondents (400 respondents)
Focusing on business processes, the survey clearly shows that most organizations are looking to incorporate an increasing number of business processes within the B2B e-commerce platform as organizations and technologies evolve.

Indeed, almost all (99%) of respondents expect at least one business process to be part of a B2B e-commerce solution. Over half confirmed that marketing (56%), customer management and service (52%) are prime candidates for inclusion, with slightly fewer claiming that order management (48%) and content management (47%) are also important (Figure 2).

**What does B2B e-commerce look like today?**

The research shows that organizations are adopting a variety of business models. Around three-in-five (58%) of the survey respondents say that their organization runs a B2B business model, while a similar proportion (57%) say that their organization is operating a B2B2C business model. Fewer are using a B2B2B (30%), business to government (B2G) (14%), or business to employee (B2E) (13%) business model.
Which B2B buyers are being served – and how?
Around six-in-ten (62%) of respondents’ organizations B2B buyers are project engineers. More than half (54%) are service engineers, and less than half (45%) are from the procurement or finance department (Figure 3). Clearly, the variety of B2B buyers and departments served means that organizations have to provide an individualized buying experience when approaching different customer segments in order to satisfy their expectations.

But this begs a critical question. How are organizations collaborating internally to deliver fully integrated business processes? Almost all (98%) respondents confirmed they saw a need to collaborate internally – and are working towards enabling a more integrated overall process. And that’s especially the case when it comes to enabling greater internal collaboration with sales executives (55%), e-commerce (52%) and key account management (48%) (Figure 4).
The investment priorities for a head start into the future

B2B e-commerce professionals confirm that in terms of investment priorities, cloud based services (62%), e-commerce platforms (48%) and mobile applications (47%) have topped the list for their organizations (Figure 5, left).

These areas are also seen as mature enough for future investment in the next 12 months. (Figure 5, right).

What’s impressive is the universal recognition across B2B organizations in all sectors that all are prepared to invest aggressively in the B2B customer experience. That indicates that many B2B organizations realize that the digital B2B commerce journey is evolving. It’s the reason why almost all (99%) have already invested in tools and technologies – and why 98% say they plan to invest in more in the near future.

Cloud services and mobile apps are the top investment priorities

![Cloud-based services: 62% Invested, 44% Plan to Invest](chart)

![e-commerce platform: 48% Invested, 35% Plan to Invest](chart)

![Mobile applications: 47% Invested, 40% Plan to Invest](chart)

![Data mining and analysis: 36% Invested, 33% Plan to Invest](chart)

![The Internet of Things: 36% Invested, 30% Plan to Invest](chart)

![Search engine optimization: 35% Invested, 31% Plan to Invest](chart)

![Wearable technology: 30% Invested, 31% Plan to Invest](chart)

![Use social media platforms: 29% Invested, 26% Plan to Invest](chart)

![Quick ordering: 23% Invested, 25% Plan to Invest](chart)

![Multi-channel integration: 20% Invested, 24% Plan to Invest](chart)

![Conversion rate: 19% Invested, 20% Plan to Invest](chart)

![Supplier portal: 18% Invested, 19% Plan to Invest](chart)

![Manning product content: 16% Invested, 20% Plan to Invest](chart)

Not invested/No plan to invest: 1% Invested, 2% Plan to Invest

Figure 5: “Which of the following tools or capabilities has your company invested in the last 12 months?”, asked to all respondents (400 respondents)

“Which of the following tools or capabilities does your company plan to invest in the next 12 months?”, asked to all respondents (400 respondents)
How is digital B2B commerce impacting the enterprise?

The vast majority (97%) of respondents say that changes to their B2B sales channel had an impact to their organization. The business areas most likely to be impacted are sales (50%), marketing (45%), order entry (39%) and customer relationship management (35%). What’s more, 96% of respondents confirmed they expect all these areas to be impacted yet further in the future (Figure 6).

The impact of changes to the B2B sales channel is rippling out and are widely perceptible throughout the whole organization – especially for customer facing units. To keep up with this change, most organizations confirmed they will be looking to invest in new tools.

Digital B2B commerce impacts organizations as a whole

Sales 50% | 42%
Marketing 45% | 38%
Order entry 39% | 37%
CRM 35% | 34%
After sales 30% | 35%
Delivery 28% | 31%
Production 27% | 34%
Finance 24% | 25%
ERP 17% | 22%
Product management 14% | 19%
Has not been impacted/will not be impacted 3% | 4%

Figure 6: “Which business areas have already been impacted as a result of changes to your organization’s B2B sales channel?”, asked to all respondents (400 respondents)

“Which business areas will be impacted in the future as a result of changes to your organization’s B2B sales channel?”, asked to all respondents (400 respondents)
**B2B success metrics**

It’s true to say that B2B e-commerce teams are under intense scrutiny, with 99% of those surveyed saying that their organization measures digital B2B commerce success. A variety of metrics are being utilized by organizations, with customer satisfaction (65%), revenue growth (64%), average order value (48%) and spend-per-customer (47%) being the most frequently used (Figure 7).

B2B success metrics are the litmus test for future success. Those organizations planning to invest in tools and technologies need a reliable set of metrics to measure the impact of these changes on their B2B strategy in order to invest effectively, to evolve, and to meet future customer expectations.

The established use of metrics with the familiar indicators also reflect the fact, that the transformation follows strict business requirements contrasting the time of the early days of B2C, when businesses used the additional channel often more for nurturing their brand rather than pursuing increase of efficiency and ambitious sales goals.

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**Figure 7: “What metrics does your organization use to measure success in B2B commerce?”, asked to all respondents (400 respondents, 1% do not measure)**
Along with the Internet of Things and the omni-channel concept, which are strong drivers of the digital transformation, come promises to deliver better services, higher quality of life, and to offer the value-adding services customers expect? The second part of this survey examines on the real benefits B2B decision makers presently see in digitalization.

2 What is Calling?
Mining the digitalization opportunities
The majority of respondents (98%) believe their sector will benefit from the digitalization of business.

Over half (53%) of respondents cited greater business efficiency as an opportunity, but the ability to deliver value-adding offerings for customers scored second with 42% while a further 39% identified enabling customer-centricity in business. (Figure 8).

But the benefits envisioned don’t end there. Over one-third of respondents (38%) also consider the digitalization of B2B commerce – and the wider enterprise – as generating the delivery of faster and improved customer services through information back channels.

Similarly, 38% were looking forward to leveraging digitalization to enable new business models and revenue streams and achieve faster, and improved product development cycles.

Figure 8: “What opportunities do you see in the digitalization of business (smart production or digital commerce)?”, asked to all respondents (400 respondents)
Digitalization is clearly rewriting the rules of competition

Today’s B2B buyers increasingly prefer digital channels, while organizations are clearly looking to enhance interactions among customers, suppliers and employees – enabling new business or operating models and delivering consistency of global prices and the availability of parts or components. But, as we’ll see, digitalization isn’t a one-stop journey.

As the opportunities and challenges proliferate, organizations are facing greater pressure to integrate their digital operations and business processes directly into the business infrastructure.

But that’s not the only thing keeping B2B e-commerce decision makers awake at night.

The effort to become a digital enterprise means evolving into a future of uncertain requirements – not knowing what developments the IT department has to have up its sleeve or who might want to partner with your organization. No matter what, the primary goal of every B2B business remains efficiency and reliability.

This, together with adding value to customers, eventually leads to a B2B commerce integration strategy that must incorporate a digital supply chain. Indeed, respondents report that on average 43% of their organization’s supply chain is already digitalized – a figure that’s set to rise dramatically in the next three years as B2B organizations extend the digitalization of supply and demand chains yet further (Figure 9).

As B2B e-commerce decision makers attest, mastering omni-channel commerce will demand all these capabilities – and more.
Integration plans are on the agenda

What’s staggering is how many organizations are already looking to realign their operations. With sites like Amazonsupply.com in the US eyeing up the B2B market, many businesses are already looking to enable seamless digital B2B commerce platforms that enable buyers to browse and shop a range of products quickly and easily – and enable seamless multi-channel distribution via supply chain partners.

Seven-in-ten (70%) respondents state their organization plans to coordinate and integrate digital company processes with suppliers in the supply chain (Figure 10, top); a similar proportion (68%) also confirm pursuing digital integration plans with customers and partners within the demand chain itself (Figure 10, down).

Remarkably, about a quarter of respondents (28%) say that their organization has already coordinated and integrated with suppliers in the supply chain - and a further 27% have done so with customers and partners in the demand chain.

According to these respondents, this integration is being viewed as a commercial necessity that’s vital to keep pace with other organizations operating in their sector. And those who’ve already taken integration steps confirm they’ve garnered competitive advantage as a result.
The benefits of digital B2B

Almost all (99%) of the survey’s respondents reported that their organization has seen at least one benefit as a result of implementing a digital B2B channel.

In terms of prioritizing the benefits experienced, most cited the ability to sell to new customers (54%), generating more sales and sales-per-rep (46%), and providing customers with quick access to relevant information (41%).

Around a quarter of respondents (27%) also expected to leverage their B2B channel investment to expand globally with lower risk, persuade customers to purchase more (26%) and complement sales staff’s services (25%) in the future (Figure 11).

The respondent companies who have embraced digital enablement already confirm that the ability to undertake more customer engagements equates to more sales. They also attest that this capability is helping to enhance the good old fashioned face-to-face conversations that take place between key account managers, buyers, and influencers.

What’s more, they’re leveraging their e-commerce platform to deliver sets of useful self-service-tools that offer convenient access to key product information supporting the buying and decision-making process of their customers.

Reached milestones and attractive outlook: digitalization pays off

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Currently seeing</th>
<th>Expect to see</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sell to customers who currently would not buy from you before</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>18%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Generate more total sales and more sales per rep</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>24%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide quick access to relevant information</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>24%</td>
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<td>Expand globally at lower risk</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuade customers to purchase more items across more product categories</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complement sales staff’s service</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help business customers doing their jobs better</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not experienced/expect benefits</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 11: Analysis of the benefits that have been seen and are expected to be seen as a result of implementing a digital B2B channel, asked to all respondents (400 respondents)
3 Surmounting the Challenges of Digitalization

Integrating disparate systems, realigning organizations and business processes, serving multiple channels and partner models – while dealing with fast-paced growth - all represent major pain points that today’s B2B e-commerce leaders need to surmount.
Set for growth – preparing for the future

On average, respondents state that their organization’s digital platform has grown by 9% in the last year – with further projected growth on the cards. Indeed, survey participants anticipate an additional 11% growth in the next year, with 13% growth expected in the next two years. Most organizations say they’re already embarked on growing their digital platforms - and that this activity is likely to be continued over the next two years (Figure 12).

![Growth:](image)

*Figure 12: “When considering your organization’s digital platform, how much growth has your organization experienced/expect to experience?”*, asked to all respondents (400 respondents)

These expectations will have an impact down to the core of how organizations run their business. For example, around six-in-ten respondents (59%) state that their company prefers to run their digital B2B business with an on-premise license and hosting model (Figure 13, left), and a similar proportion (56%) say that this would be their personal preference (Figure 13, right). This perhaps could be a result of perceived security benefits of staying on-site. However, around a third of respondents report it would be their own, and their organization’s preference, to make the move to a managed software-as-a-service (SaaS) model (37% and 33% respectively).

![On-premise is still dominating](image)

*Figure 13: “What is your company’s preferred license and hosting model to run your digital B2B business?”*, asked to all respondents (400 respondents)

*“If you could choose, what would be your preferred license and hosting model to run your company’s digital B2B business?”*, asked to all respondents (400 respondents)
Dealing with growing pains
The vast majority (91%) of respondents report that their organization expects challenges when growing their digital platform in the future. Time (44%), cost of growth (40%), resource (39%) and board support (28%) were all identified as representing the most likely challenges (Figure 14).

Analysis of those who agreed with these statements in relation to their organization say that they need more time to grow their digital platform (59%) and would benefit from increased board support (55%). Around four-in-ten (43%) also agree that the cost of growing their digital platform is too high (Figure 15).
Experience translated into good preparation assures success

- Technical faults and issues: 47% (expected) vs. 38% (actual)
- Low initial digital B2B sales: 44% (expected) vs. 35% (actual)
- Issues integrating digital and offline channels: 44% (expected) vs. 37% (actual)
- Lack of investment/budget: 33% (expected) vs. 25% (actual)
- Lack of technical knowledge: 23% (expected) vs. 22% (actual)
- Did not experience any business challenges: 7% (expected) vs. 10% (actual)

Figure 16, blue: “What challenges did your company expect to experience when setting up their digital B2B channel?”, asked to all respondents (400 respondents)

Pursuing future digitalization ambitions

As respondents demonstrate, transformation starts with culture and strategy, but plays out through technology, skills, and data working in harmony to successfully change and improve customer experience.

Most B2B e-commerce decision makers participating in the survey clearly understood that without a long-term view that’s shared by executive leadership, real change is difficult and slow in coming. Many confirm, however, that they’re now on the brink of enabling a new era of cross-team working that puts the customer at the heart of all initiatives, using data to create compelling, personalized – and real-time – experiences.

But that depends on making the transformational move to the next era of B2B digital commerce – paving the way to a new interconnected synaptic B2B commerce landscape in which enterprise and commerce platforms work as one.
4 The Vision –

Why the Future is Synaptic

As today’s respondents have found, we’re living in the age of the consumer – and today’s digitalized B2B companies are discovering that success is dictated by their customer’s expectations for a stimulating shopping experience on one hand, and the need to increase efficiency on the other. This triggers a number of additional technical challenges – because digitalization isn’t easy.

This means companies need to go way beyond the web shop to enable an entire customer engagement platform where different best-of-breed systems interact efficiently. It also means integrating heterogeneous processes and IT systems within and between companies. That’s where Synaptic Commerce comes in.
So, what does Synaptic Commerce stand for?

As survey respondents identified, leveraging the systems and integrations you already have in place requires the successful synthesis of a wide range of systems, platforms and services. Because rip and replace can be both expensive and time consuming.

As a matter of fact, by the time a commerce platform has been combined with an enterprise resource planning (ERP) system, content management tools, custom applications – and external partners and providers – it can prove difficult to engineer the system landscape to function as efficiently as a brain, due to the usual architecture of hard wiring all data streams. Adapting and learning while basic processes keep on running smoothly remains a distant vision for many organizations when dreaming of delivering a seamless customer experience across multiple touch points.

What’s needed is the ability to manage customer-specific modifications or new touch points with ease. And that’s what Synaptic Commerce offers – a way of integrating a diverse systems landscape with minimal workload or cost. This gives the power back to the business user, enabling him to control inter-system data streams, facilitating for example new ways of customer service. This could be achieved simply via pre-configured managed micro services, such as adding payment or shipping options, or by building customized data streams and processes via REST API with a Jersey based framework.

Digitalization needs Synaptic Commerce because it makes things easier – and faster:

- Synaptic Commerce enables smooth integration, regardless of complexity – making it simple to link processes between organizations.

- Today’s B2B organizations want and need flexibility and adaptability – making it easy to build new capabilities on top of existing IT system landscapes. Interconnected synaptic scalability delivers just that.

- With the digitalization of the supply and demand-chain, the complexities are set to multiply. Consider just what’s involved integrating multiple organizations – each with its own IT landscapes and business processes – so they can act in concert.

- Cloud enablement was – and will continue to be – a key topic for many B2B organizations that look to bring together a broader ecosystem of players and deliver new alternatives to traditional sales channels that are based on customer wants and needs. Synaptic Commerce can help integrate these ecosystems, maximizing connectivity and accelerating growth without the requirement for a dedicated system developer.
5 Examining the Findings:

How to Tackle the Challenges

Almost all (98%) of respondents participating in the survey believe that their sector will benefit from the digitalization of business. Indeed, around one third (35%) say their sector will benefit hugely from this process. But with most respondents thinking that the benefits will be seen sector-wide, it’s crucial that B2B organizations acknowledge that the world of B2B commerce is changing – and take action to prevent themselves from slipping behind competitors.

“How much will your sector benefit from the digitalization of business (smart production and Internet of Things) in the future?”, asked to all respondents (400 respondents)
The benefits of embarking on digitalized B2B e-commerce identified by survey respondents are many and varied. More efficiency in business (53%) and value-added offering for customers (42%) are the opportunities most likely to be seen.

But many B2B organizations are already looking to go beyond these gains. Plus they are looking to build out their B2B e-commerce ecosystems fast to capitalize on a range of gains they believe will emerge if they’re able to conduct business within tightly aligned and interconnected enterprise ecosystems:

- Around four-in-ten respondents (39%) are looking to rethink the engagement process around customer-centricity – utilizing pricing, data management and integration to drive personalization and customization to the next level.

- A further 38% are looking to go beyond B2C best practices to deliver faster and improved customer services, introduce new business models that generate new revenue services, and enable faster and improved product development cycles.

- Most respondents confirm the digitalization of supply and demand chains is already underway – in this era of the connected buyer, they are looking to rework their B2B e-commerce processes to deliver flexibility, convenience and value accessibility.

And that’s the next major hurdle B2B organizations need to overcome. These companies are already addressing the challenge of delivering the full digital B2B experience – at every point the buyer interacts with the organization.

This means mastering connectivity challenge to address three primary concerns – speed and productivity, and the integration of the commerce platform into the existing enterprise software system.

### Increasing customer satisfaction – and driving revenue growth

- Almost all (98%) respondents report that their organization has integrated at least one IT system into their digital B2B commerce landscape – and 94% say that more integration is needed in the next three years.

- Benefits have been seen by 99% of all respondents’ organizations as a result of implementing a digital B2B channel – and 98% expect to see further benefits in the future.

- Respondents are embracing collaborative demand planning and evolve their supply chain competencies in order to deliver against customer demand for more complex and customized services – respondents say they expect their organization’s supply chain (43% increasing to 60%) and demand chains (41% increasing to 57%) to become more digitalized in the future.
Key takeaway recommendations
The B2B e-commerce landscape is evolving – fast. The rules of competition are changing and success in the marketplace today depends on more than just innovative products and a strong brand identity.

The shift in power to the customer means there's growing recognition that in order to remain competitive, companies have to adopt a much more customer-centric approach. Enhancing customer value through collaborative working across the supply chain will matter too.

The message from the survey respondents is clear. There's a pressing need for better and more integration. Because more collaboration means seamless, fluid communications and faster response to changing customer demands – which in turn means organizations should navigate towards:

- Transforming the business to deliver more customized information
- Enabling the rapid introduction of new products
- A greater focus on the customers' end-to-end journey
- Supporting multiple processes and technologies in order to service the preferences and policies of different customers

What's also clear is that the time to move is now. The digital B2B commerce growth curve is rapid and organizations which fail to evolve risk losing market traction to the new players on the block – traditional B2C web giants like Amazon, for example, are entering the market with an eye to winning over the $7.2 trillion B2B sector.

While the challenges can be significant, perseverance wins the day - and, as survey respondents can attest, the conquered shore's rewards are many and significant. When it comes to countering complexity and customization:

1. Evaluate the flexibility of your commerce platform – it can help overcome the cost and complexity barriers that many B2B organizations encounter.

2. Successful B2B commerce ecosystems are built on a strong e-commerce platform that delivers real-time information flows to transactional systems and the wider supply and demand chain – professional advice and support from potential vendor partners can support decision makers in developing return on investment (ROI) business cases that can help win over executive leaders.

3. Measure and evaluate success – keeping your e-commerce offering adaptable depends on putting in place the right platform that can change with market dynamics. This means working with a platform that offers extensive “Synaptic Commerce” integration capabilities.
Appendix: Study Methodology

The research was conducted on behalf of Intershop by Vanson Bourne, an independent specialist in market research for the technology sector.

In June 2015, 400 business decision makers were interviewed of B2B organizations that had over €5 million online revenue and included a B2B element to their business. Participants were selected from organizations located in six geographic regions around the world: the UK (60), the US (120), Germany (60), France (60), the Nordics (60) and Benelux (40).

The survey participants were drawn from a range of sectors: Wholesale Trade (75), High Tech Manufacturing (75), Telecommunications (70), Pharmaceuticals/Chemicals (51), Automotive (30), Retail (20), Manufacturing -non High Tech (18), Utilities (16), Transportation and Warehousing (15) and Public Administration (13).

Figure 18: Demographics