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# THE B2B SALES GAP: WHAT DO CORPORATE BUYERS REALLY WANT FROM SUPPLIERS?



## What does the future of B2B buying look like?

Today, there's an expectations gap in the corporate buyer's sales experience. From professional equipment to raw materials to farm products, 68 percent of corporate buyers say that the way they purchase goods today is less than efficient.

While almost all corporate buyers (93 percent) want omnichannel digital customer service options, not even half (47 percent) are currently getting it. What's more, the digitization of B2C customer experiences is heightening B2B expectations.

Suppliers are now competing with digital-first, D2C brands, and B2B buyers in the U.S., the U.K., France, Sweden and Denmark expect the same seamlessness in business transactions that they receive in their personal lives.

*So, what are the biggest pain points for corporate buyers across the globe, and how can companies across sectors prepare for the future of B2B buying?*

Publicis Sapient's B2B Sales Gap Report is designed to help B2B suppliers create a customer-centric, digital purchasing experience based on true corporate buyer needs across regions and sectors. Based on quantitative research with corporate leaders, this study assesses the customer expectations gap across four aspects of the digital B2B sales experience: the website, provider relationships, customer service and mobile apps.



# Explore the findings



## What did we find?

- 4** The website experience  
*What are customers missing from your website?*
- 5** Provider relationships  
*What does the future of B2B relationships look like?*
- 6** Digital customer service  
*What are the biggest customer service pain points?*
- 8** The role of the mobile app  
*What do B2B buyers want from a supplier's mobile app?*

## What does the future of B2B sales look like?

- 9** Four actions B2B retailers and consumer products companies can take to close the gap  
*Chart a path to transformational sales experiences and increased customer lifetime value*

## Accelerate to a digital-first, B2B buyer journey

- 10** Start a conversation with Publicis Sapient
- 11** Methodology

# Today, your website is everything.

*Your online product catalog is driving your buyers' purchasing decisions.*

Gone are the days of print catalogs and Excel spreadsheets. If your website isn't your customers' primary purchasing channel, it will be soon.

**“Self-service, omnichannel options are revolutionizing the B2B industry, for customers and employees. Your customers should be able to seamlessly search and find the products and equipment they need, on the job site or in the office.”**

*- JP Saini, EVP, Chief Digital & Technology Officer at Sunbelt Rentals Inc.*

More than one-half of buyers across all product categories, except household appliances (44 percent) and farm products (36 percent), are using the vendor website to research buying or leasing products.

However, less than half of the surveyed buyers of household appliances and farm products had access to vendor websites for making purchases.

Buyers are using B2B websites to research and identify the best products to buy. The vendor or provider website is the most used way to purchase products across half of the product categories: machinery, professional and commercial equipment, construction materials and grocery products.

Aside from the vendor website, online, website-based systems also account for three out of four of the most used purchasing methods, which include the internal procurement system, mobile apps and the ERP system.

**Which method do you use most to research and identify products to buy or lease?**

	Household appliances, electrical and electronic goods	Machinery, equipment, and supplies	Computer and computer peripheral equipment and software	Professional and commercial equipment and supplies	Construction materials	Grocery and related products	Farm products	Raw materials
<b>CHANNELS</b>	<b>n=105</b>	<b>n=106</b>	<b>n=102</b>	<b>n=100</b>	<b>n=101</b>	<b>n=99</b>	<b>n=33</b>	<b>n=105</b>
Online product catalog on supplier website (via desktop, tablet, smartphone)	44%	56%	57%	60%	60%	54%	36%	60%
Speak with manufacturers or suppliers	50%	49%	61%	57%	53%	40%	48%	63%
Browser search (e.g., Google)	49%	56%	49%	47%	53%	48%	45%	46%
Supplier mobile app: household appliances, electrical and electronic goods	49%	34%	45%	41%	29%	46%	48%	39%
Speak with account manager	48%	42%	40%	42%	40%	40%	48%	39%
Ask colleagues	28%	27%	25%	28%	37%	35%	33%	27%
Paper product catalog	31%	31%	22%	22%	23%	32%	39%	26%

Base = Total sample; n=751

# Digital is critical—but doesn't beat deep relationships.

*B2B buyers want omnichannel experiences just like B2C buyers.*

In a world of complex products and purchasing cycles, your B2B customers aren't ready to abandon sales relationships. Most B2B buyers prefer working with only one supplier rather than multiple. In fact, roughly three out of four (73 percent) work with one provider versus multiple providers.

But there is a significant difference across industries: Only 9 percent of farming industry purchasers work with multiple providers, compared to roughly 35 percent of machinery equipment and supplies purchasers.

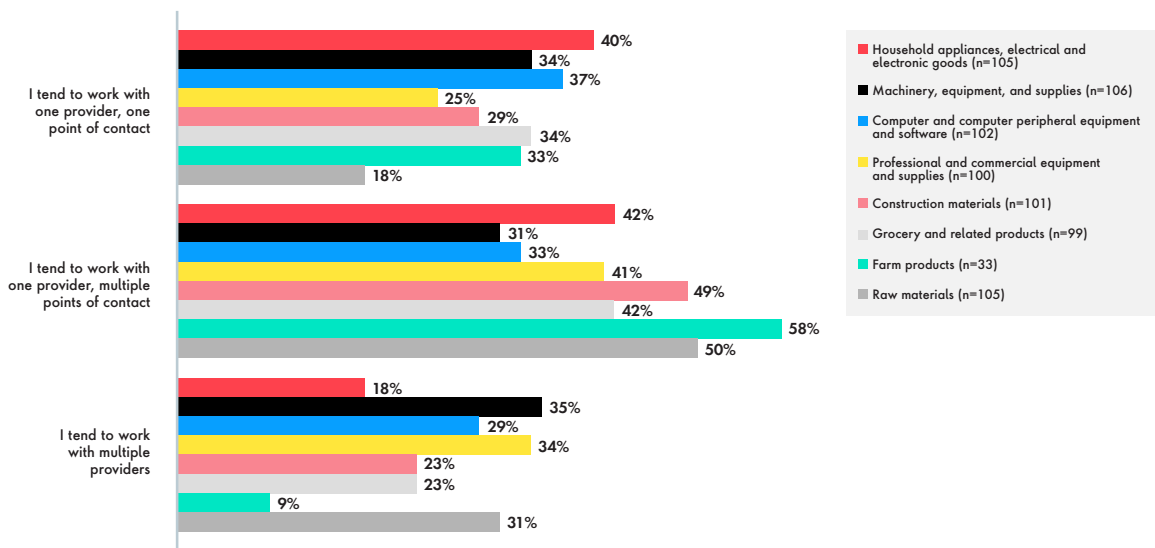
For those purchasers across industries (27 percent) that work with multiple suppliers within singular product categories, it's mainly because no one supplier offers all of the products or services they need.

## The top reasons that purchasers prefer to work with one supplier are:

- 1 A good working relationship
- 2 Trust that the supplier will get them what they need

B2B buyers, especially within the construction and machinery sectors, need both sophisticated digital solutions, and the ability to speak directly to their suppliers. B2B buyers are B2C buyers in their personal lives, and are still accustomed to seamless, omnichannel purchasing experiences.

## Most report working with one provider when purchasing across product categories; respondents purchasing farm products are less likely to work with multiple providers



# Digitalization will revolutionize B2B customer support.

*B2B customer service options aren't meeting the mark.*

While B2B purchasing has typically relied on traditional forms of customer support like in-person interaction and phone calls, today's customers expect both the old standard of service and new digital, self-service options.

In fact, omnichannel customer service was the most important service for B2B buyers out of a comprehensive list of 11 different B2B sales services.

**93 percent of corporate buyers say that omnichannel, digital customer service is extremely important to them, yet less than half (47 percent) are currently receiving it.**

What are the main reasons that B2B buyers don't have access to omnichannel customer service? 43 percent still prefer traditional contact channels, 30 percent report that digital self-service options take too long and 22 percent say that they are too difficult to navigate.

**When it comes to day-to-day services, 42 percent of buyers report using a digital self-service option two to six times per week.**

However, when it comes to triaging urgent issues, there's a regional breakdown between digital and analog technology.

## How do B2B buyers from different global regions prefer to triage urgent issues?

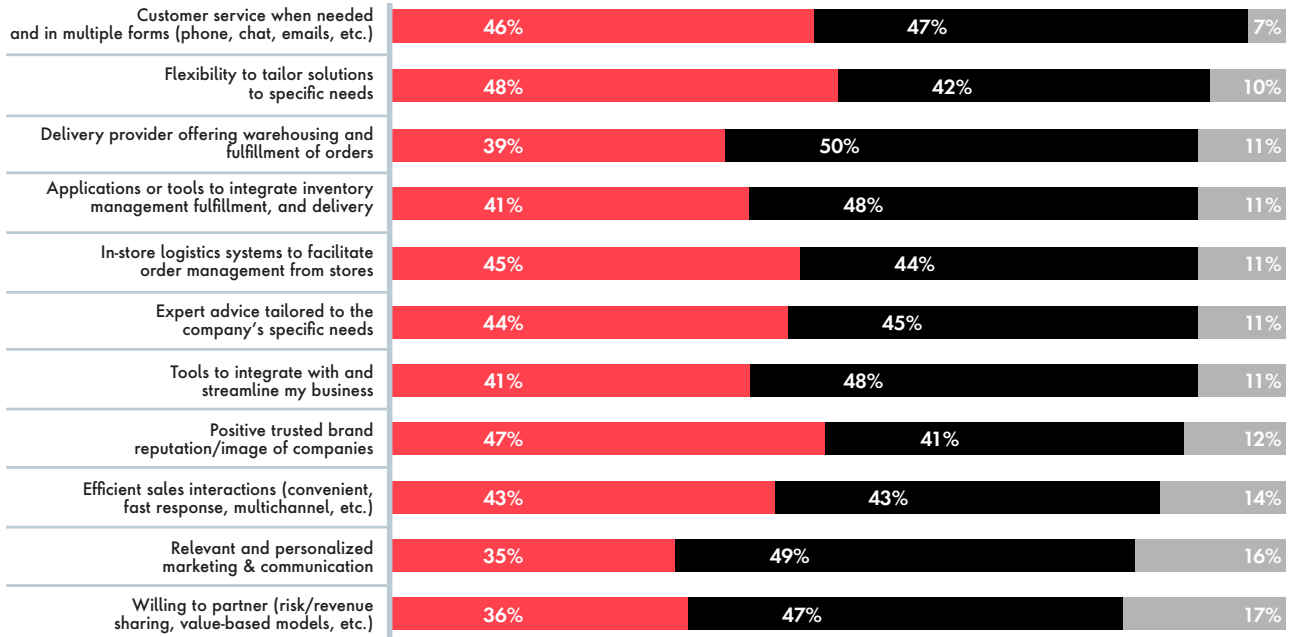
USED & PREFERRED CHANNELS FOR TRIAGING ISSUES	FRANCE			NORDICS			U.K.			U.S.		
	Current	Preferred	GAP	Current	Preferred	GAP	Current	Preferred	GAP	Current	Preferred	GAP
<b>DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY</b>												
Email	31%	32%	1%	31%	43%	12%	34%	42%	8%	29%	40%	11%
Vendor/provider website (online)	18%	24%	6%	21%	23%	2%	39%	39%	0%	38%	40%	2%
ERP system—hosted by supplier or your company (e.g., Oracle, SAP)	38%	44%	6%	17%	24%	7%	30%	43%	13%	24%	35%	11%
Mobile apps	23%	21%	-2%	24%	44%	20%	30%	32%	2%	30%	40%	10%
Internal procurement system connected to supplier via system-to-system integration, such as Punch Out	19%	30%	11%	26%	36%	10%	22%	27%	5%	32%	34%	2%
Secure messaging	22%	25%	3%	24%	27%	3%	21%	29%	8%	20%	31%	11%
Live chat (online)	8%	25%	17%	18%	22%	4%	21%	29%	8%	24%	41%	17%
Portal hosted by supplier	19%	20%	1%	20%	23%	3%	10%	19%	9%	19%	28%	9%
Virtual assistant	13%	25%	12%	6%	18%	12%	15%	23%	8%	16%	23%	7%
<b>ANALOG TECHNOLOGY</b>												
Phone: account manager/salesperson/live agent	27%	38%	11%	27%	33%	6%	34%	49%	15%	44%	44%	0%
In-person consultations	24%	35%	11%	34%	33%	-1%	27%	36%	9%	25%	35%	10%
Mail	11%	15%	4%	12%	18%	6%	7%	17%	10%	9%	12%	3%
Fax	17%	33%	16%	4%	9%	5%	6%	8%	2%	1%	9%	8%

### Regional channel preferences for triaging issues

- **France:** 44% prefer an ERP system hosted by supplier
- **Nordics:** 44% prefer mobile apps
- **U.K.:** 49% prefer phone support
- **U.S.:** 44% prefer phone support



## Which customer services are most important to B2B buyers?



Base = Total; n=400

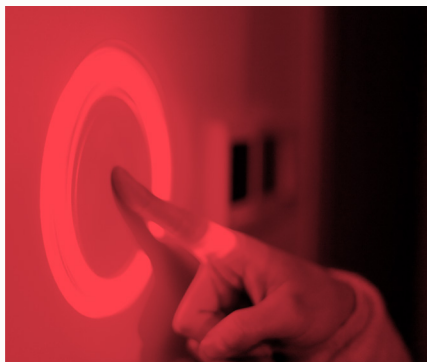
Extremely important

Important

Neither important nor unimportant /Unimportant/Extremely unimportant

### Top three customer service priorities for B2B buyers:

- 1 Accessible and available to reach in multiple formats
- 2 Flexible to tailor solutions to specific needs
- 3 Offer warehousing and delivery of orders



# The future of B2B sales is mobile apps.

*This underutilized channel is quickly gaining traction in all regions.*

While mobile apps are still maturing as a B2B service channel, more and more B2B customers are using them across the purchasing cycle. Regardless of regional differences, the majority of buyers use their smart phones for work-related activities for an average of six or more hours per day.

More than one-third (34 percent) would actually prefer to use a supplier's mobile app to triage an urgent issue, and 22 percent prefer using a mobile app over a supplier's website.

Purchasers in the grocery industry are most likely to use a mobile app for procurement (33 percent), while purchasers in the farming industry are least likely to use one (18 percent).

**“ Our growth on our e-commerce mobile app is extremely encouraging. It's a huge leap in the rental industry, but also in the B2B industry as a whole. It's revolutionized how our customers want to interact with the Sunbelt brand. ”**

*- JP Saini, EVP, Chief Digital & Technology Officer at Sunbelt Rentals Inc.*

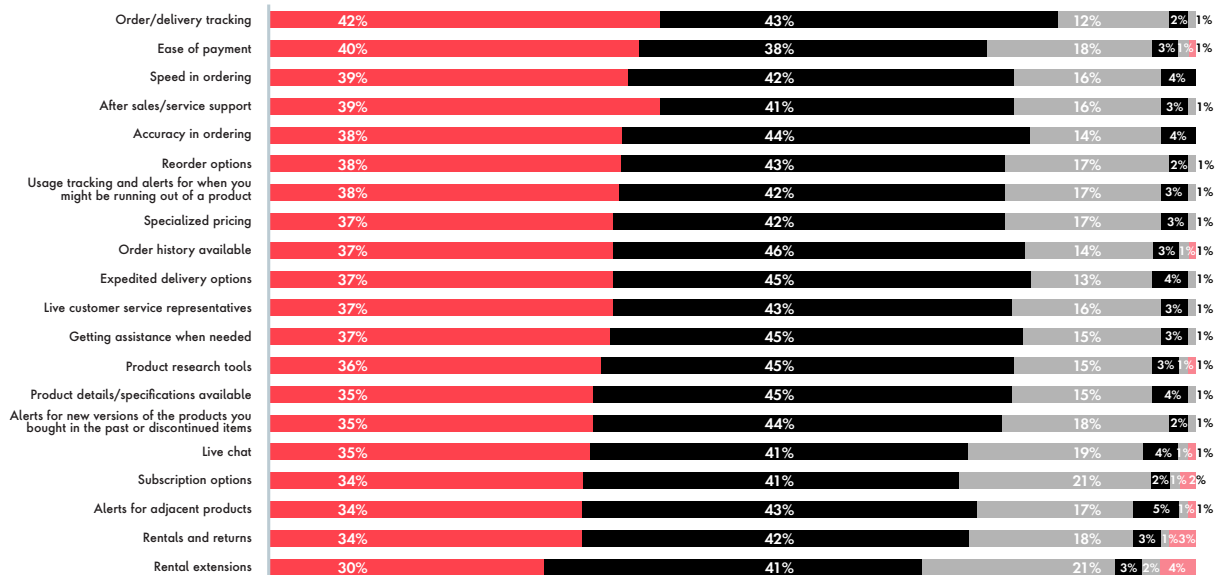
## But what are B2B buyers missing from their mobile apps?

As only 35 percent of B2B buyers say they have an application or tool to integrate inventory management, fulfillment and delivery, B2B suppliers have a clear opportunity for investment in the development of such applications.

## Where specifically should B2B suppliers invest in their mobile apps?

More than half of buyers would use a mobile app for procurement if it provided incentives like increased ordering speed and accuracy, ease of payment, delivery tracking, specialized pricing or ordering assistance.

Which mobile app features would improve B2B buyer efficiency the most?



Base = Total; n = 400

Significant efficiencies Noticeable efficiencies Neutral Noticeable inefficiencies Significant inefficiencies Not applicable



# Four actions to close the B2B sales gap

The future of B2B sales will rely more heavily on complex digital solutions through seamless website purchasing and integrated mobile apps, while still providing traditional support to maintain deep customer relationships.

How can B2B suppliers close the sales gap and prepare for the future through digital business transformation?

## 1 Redesign your online product catalog

Your B2B product website is your number one tool to influence purchase decisions for B2B buyers. To retain loyal customers and increase market share through new acquisitions, invest in advanced user experience (UX) on your website that B2B buyers are accustomed to in their personal lives.

## 2 Map out a digital-first customer journey

Three-fourths of B2B buyers (73 percent) work with only one supplier, in many cases because they trust that supplier and have a good working relationship with them. Your digital sales tools need to enhance this relationship, not get in the way. It's time to map out your holistic, B2B customer journey to determine which touchpoints are digital, which are in-person and which are hybrid.

## 3 Invest in omnichannel customer support

Omnichannel support is becoming table stakes. Less than half (47 percent) of B2B buyers have omnichannel customer support options, like phone, email and a mobile app. Your customers expect you to meet them where they are—providing live agent support for urgent issues, and 24/7 self-service tools for day-to-day help.

## 4 Make your mobile app an all-in-one experience

Mobile apps aren't just for D2C retail anymore—B2B buyers are gaining interest in this digital channel for product procurement and customer service issue triage across industries. To keep B2B buyers coming back to your mobile app, start with investing in seamless ordering, payment options and delivery tracking and ensure that the end-to-end purchasing process is accessible.

# Get started with B2B digital business transformation

Publicis Sapient works with the top B2B retailers and consumer products firms to help them transform their customer journey and sales platforms for the digital era through digital business transformation.

Explore our B2B services today.

## B2B Retail Services

- [B2B Retail Marketplaces](#)
- [B2B Customer Journey Reinvention](#)
- [Composable Commerce Accelerator](#)
- [B2B Customer Experience and Employee Experience Platform Design](#)

## B2B Consumer Products Services

- [Digital-First Operations](#)
- [Data-Driven Enablement](#)
- [Hybrid Field and Direct Sales](#)
- [Digital Commerce Enablement](#)

## LET'S CONNECT

Get in touch with Publicis Sapient's global B2B center of excellence to reimagine a sales model that puts digital for customers and employees at the center, using both data and empathy to drive an integrated sales experience.



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Or learn more about connecting our capabilities:

[www.publicissapient.com/industries/retail/b2b-industrial-wholesale-distribution/](http://www.publicissapient.com/industries/retail/b2b-industrial-wholesale-distribution/)

# Methodology

We conducted a global survey in July 2023 of 400 B2B buyers in collaboration with McGuire Research Services, Inc. Respondents from five countries and nine industries were surveyed.

Survey questions were designed to evaluate buyers' satisfaction with B2B sales processes and interest in digital sales tools.

LOCATION/HEADQUARTERS n=400	
Denmark	50
France	100
Sweden	50
United Kingdom	100
United States	100

INDUSTRY n=400	
Aerospace and Defense	30
Airline, Travel, Transport	45
Automotive	45
Construction	45
Consumer Goods and Services	55
High Technology (e.g., semiconductors, enterprise IT)	45
Industrial Goods and Equipment	45
Retail	45
Transportation	45

GLOBAL REVENUE n=400	
\$250 to \$499 million	11
\$500 to \$999 million	11
\$1 to \$4.9 billion	265
\$5 to \$9.9 billion	51
\$10 to \$29.9 billion	43
\$30 to \$49.9 billion	14
\$50 billion or more	5

ROLE IN PURCHASING DECISIONS MULTIPLE RESPONSES n=400	
I am one of the senior decision-makers involved in purchasing/buying decisions	255
I oversee or supervise a team of buyers (or equivalent)	190
I make buying decisions only for the products/services I am responsible for purchasing	96

JOB TITLE n=400	
Buyer	36
Category Manager	36
Contract Manager	34
E-Manager	30
Logistics Director	33
Logistics Manager	33
Order Management/ Fulfillment Director	30
Order Management/ Fulfillment Manager	25
Procurement Specialist	35
Purchasing Manager	43
Supply Chain Manager	35
Supply Relationship Manager	30

ROLE IN PROCUREMENT PROCESSES n=400	
Decision-maker	270
Influencer	94
Provide input for decisions	36
Observer	0
No involvement	0

LEVEL OF KNOWLEDGE REGARDING ORGANIZATION'S B2B GOODS PURCHASING n=400	
Very knowledgeable	255
Knowledgeable	134
Somewhat knowledgeable	11

GENERATION n=400	
Gen Z [18 to 24]	0
Early millennial [25 to 31]	72
Late millennial [32 to 39]	84
Gen X [40 to 56]	151
Baby boomer [57 to 65]	93

ANNUAL PROCUREMENT BUDGET n=400	
Less than \$50,000	5
\$50,000 to \$199,999	19
\$200,000 to \$499,999	35
\$500,000 to \$999,999	55
\$1 to \$4.9 million	84
\$5 to \$9.9 million	68
\$10 to \$49 million	70
\$50 to \$99 million	46
\$100 million or more	18

## WHY PUBLICIS SAPIENT

Publicis Sapient is a digital business transformation company. We partner with global organizations to help them create and sustain competitive advantage in a world that is increasingly digital. Our clients and their customers derive value and impact from our combination of expert SPEED capabilities—Strategy and Consulting, Product, Experience, Engineering and Data, and a culture of curiosity and deep industry knowledge. This holistic, agile and data-driven approach empowers our clients to reimagine their products and experiences and embrace change by putting digital at the core of how they think, organize and work. As the digital business transformation hub of Publicis Groupe, with 20,000 people and over 50 offices worldwide, we connect our clients to an extensive network of customer data, media and advertising services, and more. For more information, visit [publicissapient.com](https://publicissapient.com).