



# CURRENT CHALLENGES OF THE **B2B ECOMMERCE** LANDSCAPE

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As the world continues circling the sun the creatures on it continue to evolve. As people march down the evolutionary path it seems that we have decided that we prefer to be treated well rather than like faceless entities that are expected to simply hand over money because “that’s the way it’s done”.

Finally, a missing link took exception to this mistreatment and decided that they’re not faceless and that they deserve to be treated the same way as any other consumer. But, the B2B world can be slow to transition, as many people and bureaucracies get in the way. What seems like common sense can often be overanalyzed and misconstrued and not taken seriously because of things like working for the shareholder and the like. Let’s take all that out of the equation though and look at the real challenges that B2B ecommerce marketers truly face.

It is true that the main sales channel in B2B has become ecommerce in recent years with sales estimates ranging from 6 to 20 billion dollars annually. The simple truth is that no matter what you’re buying, it’s easier to shop online than it is to work with a salesperson, at least at the beginning.



E-commerce sales estimates ranging from **6 to 20 billion dollars** annually.



There are between **12 Million to 24 Million** E-commerce Websites worldwide.

Besides just selling to other businesses, B2B companies in certain segments, such as manufacturing have even created a new fun acronym, D2C, which is selling directly to consumers via your own channels. This levels the competition and allows manufacturers to compete directly with retailers, think Harry's Razors or Casper Mattresses as examples. They simply cut out the middle man. Let's forget about the technicality that they are businesses selling to consumers.

### Traditional Supply Chain



### D2C Supply Chain



But acronyms and jargon aside ecommerce has become a vital strategy for every company with products to sell. With a quarter of the world's population identifying as online shoppers, there is no more efficient place to sell a product. Despite the efficiency of selling products online that doesn't mean that every B2B company's products are conducive to selling online. Often the products are difficult to inventory, let alone classify in an ecommerce setting, meant for other businesses, and there's also the fact that many B2B companies, especially those in the manufacturing realm, aren't known for having the best web presence. There's also the complications that come with having contractual and economic obligations to sell to either distributors and/or retailers and the fact that competing against their own products likely wouldn't satisfy those obligations. As the saying goes... "It's Complicated!"



... of the **world's population** are shopping **online**.

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The fact is, that while ecommerce is often the first thing that comes to mind when it comes to selling online, sometimes that's putting the cart before the horse, which only works out when you're on a hill and have a desire to leave your horse behind.

With 90% of B2B researchers online using search specifically to research business purchases, it's not the final product being available for purchase that's often important, it's the ability for your content to be found online.

That being said, the funnel has to lead somewhere, and in the ecommerce world, the funnel leads to a product not a sales rep, which is why your content needs to be closely tied with your products.

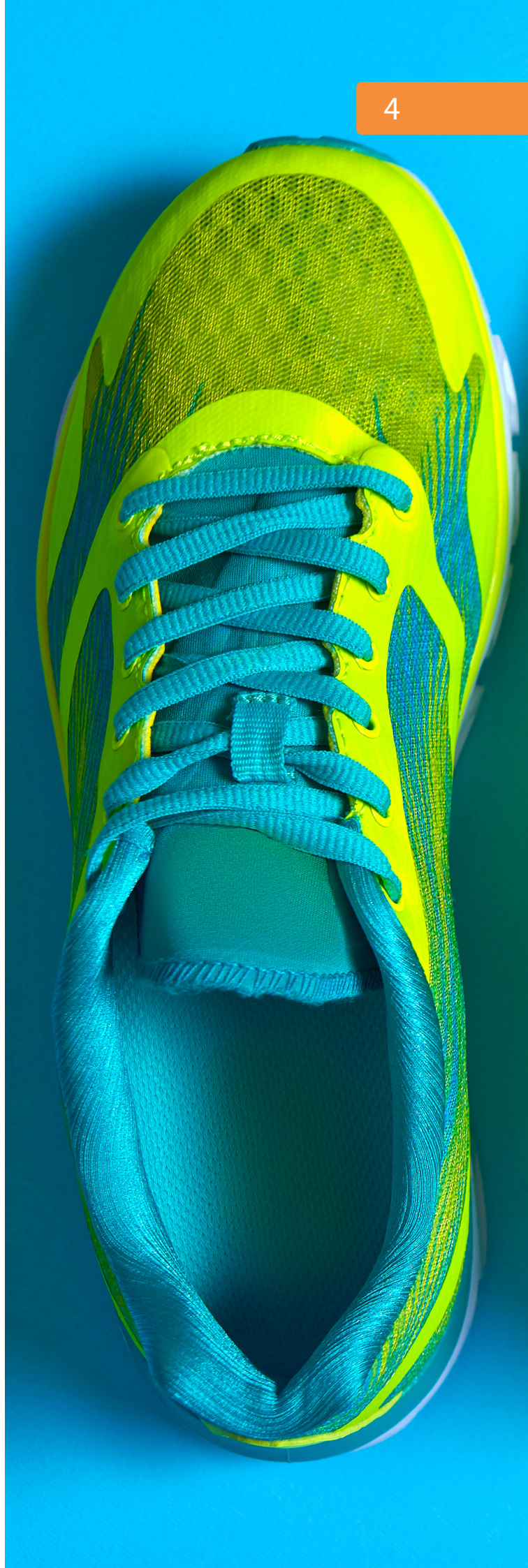
And, the always prevalent, and sometimes annoying to marketers who just want to deliver quickly – brand protection. Brand protection comes in many different shapes and sizes, from simple imagery guidelines surrounding the logo to messaging, but also there's the fact that if you don't know what information is out there regarding your products, you're brand is likely to look foolish when a product doesn't match the description or worse yet, promote a defunct product.

With all the challenges that B2B marketers face, how do you even manage to get out of bed in the morning?

## Jargon Alert!

What's the Difference between **B2C** and **D2C**?

B2C requires an extra step in the supply chain - the retailer. D2C eliminates the middleman and sells directly to the consumer.



## Change Is In the Air

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As you begin to wonder what did propel you out of bed and into your desk for another day of hand-wringing and tears, know that there is light at the end of the tunnel, that your B2C brethren are not the only people that technology is made for. In fact, some would argue that the B2C world is overwhelmed with fly by night SaaS companies coming at them at every angle all day long, how can they know who would be a long term partner for their solutions when half their email inbox are sales pitches. As a B2B ecommerce professional, you can think stack instead of SaaS, foundation instead of solution. But, before we even to that, let's dial it back a hair and look at why.

Imagine you are a solo entrepreneur that sells furniture that you make, you market, you sell, and you ship. Your time would be spent doing so many things that your furniture inventory would never get out of control. Therefore, your product information, which is still necessary for an online description, isn't something that you need to worry about expiring or

Now imagine that you're the same person but you've hired two people, one to sell and market your products and another to help you build legs for your chairs so that you can speed the process up. Now, a few things will happen. Your salesperson would find a series of distributors to sell to and they would expect a lot of inventory to supply to their wholesalers. Your marketer would be tasked with marketing to distributors but also create materials that allow them to market for you as well, as they need to convince the wholesaler to buy from him or her. Not to be forgotten, the retailer will also need material to push the product to the consumer once it gets to that point. Along the way, though, a leg is bound to get lost or dinged, a tabletop is surely going to not arrive with its matching hardware, and any other variation of possibilities is bound to arise that makes having a grasp on not only your products but each part vital.

Of course, all that hard work has its merits. You sell to a distributor or wholesaler for the security, not the margins. The retailer can make the margins down the line, but the supply chain is set up so that the B2B portion of it has a safety net.

That safety net might as well have a hole in it if you don't have the proper technology to get your product not only from you to your customer but also to put your product content in front of the right person during the sales process.

## Let's take a look at the typical tech stack

### PIM

Product Information Management (PIM) systems are designed to help users create and manage their websites. A PIM helps webmasters manage the many different resources, content types and various data that make up modern web sites.

### CMS

Content Management Systems are designed to help users create and manage their websites. A CMS helps webmasters manage the many different resources, content types and various data that make up modern web sites.

### DAM

Digital asset management (DAM) is a business process for organizing, storing and retrieving rich media and managing digital rights and permissions. Rich media assets include photos, music, videos, animations, podcasts and other multimedia content.

### Marketing automation

Marketing automation is technology that manages marketing processes and multi-functional campaigns, across multiple channels, automatically.

### Ecommerce

Ecommerce, also known as electronic commerce or internet commerce, refers to the buying and selling of goods or services using the internet, and the transfer of money and data to execute these transactions. Ecommerce is often used to refer to the sale of physical products online, but it can also describe any kind of commercial transaction that is facilitated through the internet.

Technically we could provide a dictionary of acronyms that we could share with you. While this list is hardly comprehensive as far as digital foundations go, it's pretty robust as far as how to ensure your products and product content are accounted for. The reality is though, that digital acronyms can get confusing quickly. Kind of like hitting on a 17, it seems like any answer can be right, until it's too late.

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So, on which acronym should you begin your digital infrastructure with...

Rather than guess what you should invest in first, let's take a look at what has prompted others to make the decision to begin with a PIM.

The only way to keep up in the modern world is to modernize. Modernizing goes beyond the sexy offerings today; AI, VR, etc...It also includes not relying on spreadsheets for product data information, it means relying on email for communication and not final storage. A means to making your product content relevant across the entire supply chain, from inception through the sales process and ultimately to the end user, is more modern than most companies currently have.

Even enterprise companies are still lacking in many of these areas. Traffic to your individual products is just as vital as traffic to your site, but trickier to keep track because of different methods of syndicating product content. Is there enough traffic and they're just not converting or is there not enough traffic and the placement needs to be reconsidered?

Companies have been releasing print catalogues for many, many years, but print doesn't translate to digital without the right software in place. The trend has been to marry the two (contrary to what you might have heard, print is still viable in the B2B space) but the product numbers have to match what's available in the parallel ecommerce story.

Putting your product information in front of the right buyer at the right time is an important part of the supply chain, but understanding where your product is internally is just as vital. The logistics portion of the supply chain is tantamount to a great customer experience, just as much so as the product itself.

But, what do all these challenges have in common? Data! Not having data housed correctly, available to the right people, and worse yet, not organized is detrimental to any ecommerce department, let alone B2B where your relationships depend on being able to deliver the right product seamlessly.





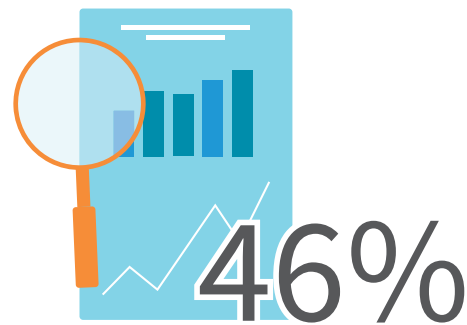
## So, What is PIM and Why Is it Important?

A PIM (Product Information Management) solution helps brands and retailers collect, clean, enrich and distribute product information across multiple sales channels. It serves as the organization's central repository for product information as well as a hub where internal collaboration begins.

Why is this important? The more data you have, the more complex its management becomes. A manual and siloed approach usually results in errors, operational inefficiency and a host of other business critical issues, which eventually leads to higher operational costs, revenue loss and worse, customer dissatisfaction.



... say they had to **recreate documents**, because they could not find them on their corporate network.



... say its **challenging** and **time-consuming** to find **documents** they need.

Implementing a PIM solution not only puts all product data in a central and accessible area, but it streamlines processes needed to go to market faster and improves product experiences. By eliminating the challenges around product information management such as inaccuracy, incompleteness, inconsistency, duplicates, etc., businesses can put the focus on enriching their product content.

How? A PIM solution enables companies to deliver the right information to the right channels, at the right time – and in the right context.



## PIM... What Is It Good For

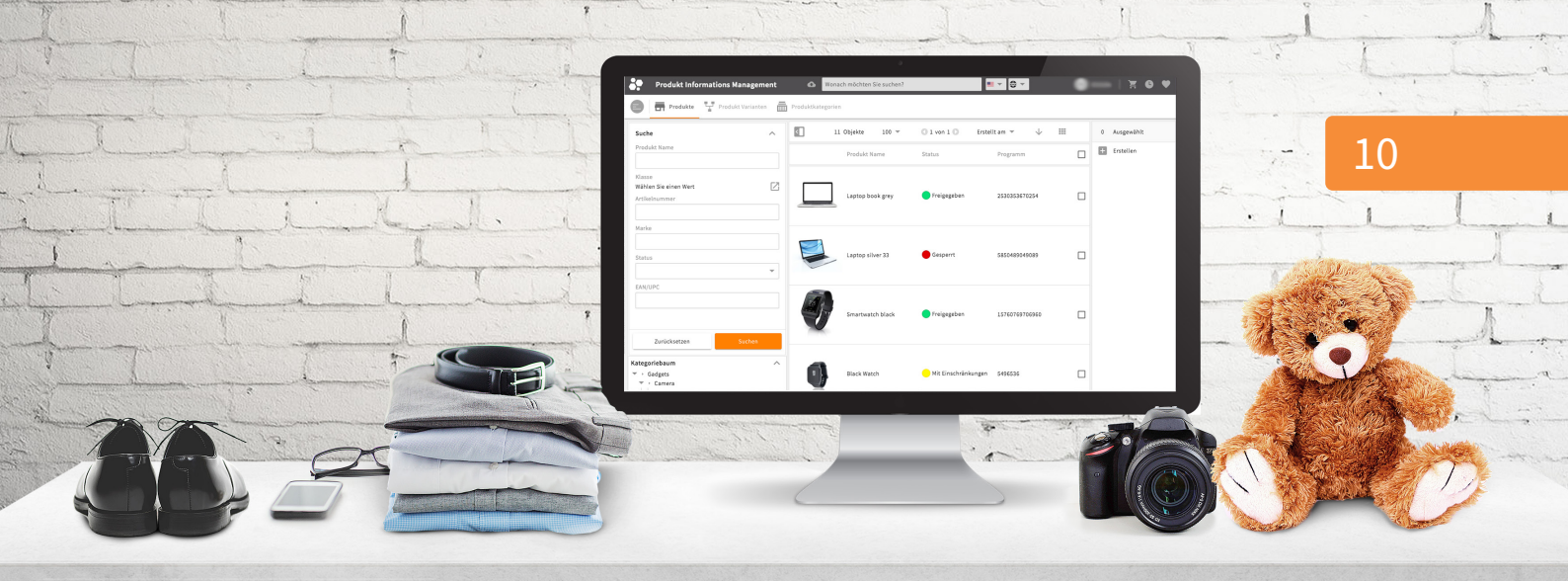
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Any organization that has products can benefit from a PIM, but it's the organizations that are customer-centric and understand that their product content is an intricate part of the modern supply chain that will make the most of it.

While global organizations have the most to lose by not modernizing their product information strategy, and who could benefit the most from the structure to more easily translate content and streamline e-commerce marketing efforts, companies of every size needs to be able to put the right product in front of the right person and doing so on a very noisy internet is easier said than done. Therefore, the right technical solution that will allow you to parse your content to the channels where you know your audience is and collect data to ensure ROI, should be compulsory.

Unlike a lot of foundational software a PIM has a relatively low cost of ownership and is more easier to implement, meaning you can get to market faster and find value quicker than you would with most infrastructural solutions.

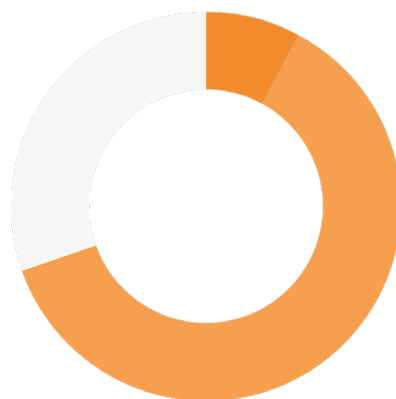




## The Ecommerce Connection

As we continue to march down the digital evolutionary path ecommerce has become more and more of a B2B strategy.

In fact, according to a DHL study, 38% of B2B companies have implemented ecommerce technology compared to only 31% of B2C companies. Both sectors have a long ways to go but the business cases are out there and the necessity is real.



Want to speak with a sales rep


Trust the sales rep they are working with

Buyers no longer trust sales reps the way they used to, 70% of buyers want to speak with a rep but only 8% trust the rep they are working with. If buyers can't trust their sales reps they need to be able to trust your ecommerce shop, which they can only do if there is rich, relevant content available to them.

The B2B space is evolving into a D2C-centric model quickly, with the middle part of the supply chain being not a sales rep that the buyer has come to trust over the years, but the product content itself.



 [www.4allportal.net](http://www.4allportal.net)

 [info@4allportal.net](mailto:info@4allportal.net)

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