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**Meet Astro and Friends!**

As you may have noticed, the style of this e-book is inspired by the great outdoors and U.S. national parks. Why? Because they express a feeling of fun, adventure, and exploration — and Salesforce is all about empowering people to blaze their own trails and be part of something greater. Pretty cool, huh? If you want to know more, check out Trailhead, the fun way to learn about Salesforce. [Get started today!](#)
As consumer buying experiences evolve, so must your digital strategy.

The manufacturing industry is undergoing a digital transformation – driven partially by new technological advances, but largely by a massive change in customer expectations. Today, B2B buyers are reluctant to send countless emails back and forth with a sales rep, wait days for a quote, or deal with a clunky, outdated website. As buyers demand convenient, self-service buying experiences, manufacturers know they must adapt. In fact, companies will spend over $2.4 billion on B2B ecommerce platforms over the next four years.

In manufacturing, launching a winning digital commerce channel is no easy feat. It forces companies to rethink certain business processes, invest in costly IT integrations, and align traditional selling channels with digital. Amazon has been a key influencer in this broad shift to digital, and its enormous influence on the consumer’s buying experience has shaped the B2B commerce revolution in a number of ways.

First, Amazon sells supplies, consumables, and industrial goods via Amazon Business, directly competing with many companies. Second, Amazon’s massive popularity has pressured large enterprise competitors to answer with major commerce investments of their own. Third, the combination of growth in direct sales and commerce has led to price pressure on manufacturers, who in many cases have responded by building their own commerce direct channels. Lastly, Amazon has redefined customer expectations regarding ease of use and simplicity in a commerce environment.

All of these factors combined have created an environment where manufacturing companies have no choice but to move quickly on digital transformation. Customers now expect the ability to conduct meaningful business transactions online – making purchases on their own time, without having to interact with a sales rep, in conjunction with other, more traditional sales channels.
Fortunately, the IT costs associated with commerce have steadily decreased. The arrival of SaaS-based B2B commerce systems helped reduce the risk of overspending on technology, since that technology is more flexible, extensible, and easily configurable — meaning that introducing new or upgraded products and services avoids the need for heavy coding and implementation headaches. SaaS-based commerce platforms also offer greater security measures, come with standard, ready-to-deploy B2B commerce interactions, and generally feature frequent updates based on evolving customer preferences.

But even with the right technology in place, navigating the digital world for the first time can be complicated, and making the wrong move out of the gate can set businesses behind. If you’re looking to help drive more revenue for your manufacturing business, the following guidebook offers five key pieces of advice for a smooth digital commerce implementation.

Companies will spend over $2.4 billion on B2B commerce platforms over the next four years.
CHAPTER 2
FIVE TIPS FOR DIGITAL COMMERCE IMPLEMENTATION
TIP #1

Listen to your customers

If you’re an innovative manufacturer considering digital commerce, you probably already know this. It’s likely you made the decision to go digital because your customers want a convenient channel for self-service purchasing. However, the only way to motivate customers to use your site once it’s up and running is to tailor it to their specific needs.

TALK TO YOUR CUSTOMERS

It’s the easiest way to uncover exactly what they want. The feedback you get provides the information to adjust processes and reallocate resources and manpower to solve specific problems as soon as they are identified. Whether digitally or in person, figure out your customers’ frustrations and how they’d like to interact with you online.

DOCUMENT YOUR LEARNINGS

Documenting your customers’ feedback also minimizes the opportunity for internal pushback. Stakeholders may question the need for a shift toward digital, especially if you’re a more traditional manufacturer that has always operated a certain way. But if your customers voice a specific need, it’s hard to say no.

While listening to your customers is important, don’t fall victim to analysis paralysis. To avoid getting bogged down in the feedback loop, set parameters on your decision timeline. Consider also that you’ll likely have a number of iterations and multiple phases of launching functionality, so getting everything perfect for the first phase of a launch is neither realistic nor necessary.

Whether digitally or in person, figure out your customers’ current pain points and determine the features that will best alleviate them.
TIP #2

Make commerce complementary and optional

Launching a digital channel for sales should be complementary to your traditional processes.

An omni-channel approach to commerce offers customers more options to purchase when and how they want – whether that means a high-touch sales process with a rep or a low- or no-touch sales process via digital commerce.

Initially, commerce should enhance the ways your customers can order and receive service from you.

With customers making ecommerce orders via a self-service platform, sales reps can provide greater value through consulting, upselling, and cross-selling customers, serving as trusted advisors instead of order takers. While it’s tempting to think that online and offline commerce are mutually exclusive, digital should not be used as a substitute for your sales team. Instead, it should help reinforce the sales and customer relationship.

GET MORE OUT OF YOUR SALES STAFF

A recent Salesforce survey of more than 400 B2B decision makers found that digital has enabled many businesses to retrain their sales staff to serve in higher value-add roles. Nearly one-third of survey respondents reported their sales teams’ roles have shifted in response to the growth of digital. In addition, 42% report sales reps have become more of a trusted advisor for customers rather than an order taker. Today, sales reps have the opportunity to leverage more holistic customer insights and recommend more relevant products or services. Meanwhile, customers gain access to specific pricing and product catalogs online and offline.

According to a recent Forrester study, 82% of business buyers say that providing personalized customer care influences their loyalty. Clearly, customers still value human interaction, so your self-service channel should never completely replace the relationship your sales team has built. But buyers also care about flexibility, so an omni-channel approach helps unify the customer experience across all touchpoints.

82% of business buyers say that providing personalized customer care has a major or moderate influence on their loyalty.
TIP #3

Understand how you’ll live with digital commerce

To effectively launch a new digital channel, you need to set your business up to embrace change and take a digital-first mindset. That means implementing roles that support and advocate for digital commerce at all levels of the company and are focused on constantly improving your offerings, from the C-suite to the front line.

Developing a digital-first culture starts with getting your sales and service teams on board. Your sales teams may have a false belief that digital will threaten their relationships with customers or their jobs. Digital rarely eliminates current sales and service headcount; in contrast, it will help employees reduce time spent on manual tasks and free up more time for higher-value activities.

Ecommerce amplifies the amount of data at sales reps’ fingertips exponentially, improving their ability to cross-sell and upsell, and ultimately drive more revenue. Make it clear to your sales teams that a shift toward digital will only help their ability to close deals and service customers, rather than hinder.

Additionally, most manufacturers that are new to digital find that it can be overwhelming to fully support this channel with internal resources. For manufacturing companies seeking to grow revenue with digital, there are several marketing and digital business skills that are necessary to make digital a successful channel, such as search engine optimization, content marketing, and digital merchandising.

These are critical to commerce success, as keywords and SEO content will make your company more visible when customers search. Once they reach your site, digital merchandising will drive visitors to buy and will enable you to cross-sell and upsell based on their browsing and purchase patterns.
There are still some challenges for organizations trying to dramatically change their business model alongside a commerce launch. For example, a manufacturer may seek to launch a direct-to-consumer channel or launch a new set of online-only products in tandem with deploying a new commerce site. Digital marketing skills gaps internally may also provide a reason to focus commerce initially on supporting existing channels, such as augmenting field sales and customer support functions.

**THE CLOUD HAS YOU COVERED**

As for overcoming your company’s gap in IT skills? That’s where cloud-based technology systems come into play. These systems come with access to the required support for keeping your site bug-free and updated. And most require little-to-no coding knowledge to maintain. With traditional on-premises systems, you might experience years-long development initiatives with complex IT requirements. But with cloud-based technology, current site administrators with little coding experience can often modify and support systems with ease.

The ability to easily update cloud-based systems through configuration instead of heavy coding sets you up to more easily embrace change as market dynamics and customer expectations evolve. With the rapid pace of innovation in B2B technology today, a digital-first mindset will empower you to easily adapt and scale over time.

*With cloud-based systems, current site administrators with little coding experience can often modify and support systems with ease.*
The old adage “Perfect is the enemy of good” holds true for commerce and digital transformation. Unlike ERP systems or other investments that tend to happen once and see minimal ongoing change, successful commerce programs are constantly evolving to meet customer expectations and seize new opportunities.

For manufacturing companies competing with existing ecommerce giants, there is no time to wait in getting a digital storefront to market and starting to earn immediate revenue. You should first focus on launching a minimal viable product (MVP) that incorporates your customers’ highest priorities, or at least provides a solid foundation on which to build. This approach is beneficial for two reasons. First, it enables you to start driving sales through your new channel in just a few months, rather than years.

Additionally, an MVP approach enables you to collect immediate feedback so you can stay ahead of changing market demands. If you wait too long to launch, your customers’ needs will have already changed. But by collecting immediate feedback you can quickly update your site in response to your customers’ needs. If you continue making frequent releases on a shorter cycle schedule, you’ll never fall behind. Longer release cycles, on the other hand, will leave you playing catch up to your customers’ rapidly evolving expectations.

**TIP #4**

Take a minimum viable product approach

*Be realistic about the features you include in your first launch. Don’t try to launch a polished end product that contains every desired feature with your first release.*
The flexibility of cloud-based commerce systems makes this possible. Configuration for cloud solutions can be done with clicks, not code – meaning that most changes can be handled by business employees with little development experience. When it comes time for more complex enhancements, cloud platforms allow you to leverage built-in core capabilities and launch within a matter of days. On-premises systems, by contrast, are simply not agile enough to rapidly implement change.
DIGITAL COMMERCE CAN SOLVE THE CURRENT CHALLENGES YOUR ORGANIZATION IS FACING

Common pain points for manufacturing companies include high overhead costs, inability to quickly adapt to market changes, and declining customer acquisition and retention. These challenges are felt most severely for manufacturers that still operate with a traditional mindset, in which in-person meetings, phone, or fax drive all transactions.

Providing proof points on how digital commerce can address your specific challenges or business goals will help generate internal buy-in.

TIP #5
Build and evolve your business case

A digitally inclined company culture is critical to a successful digital commerce implementation. Internal buy-in and widespread adoption throughout your organization start by building a strong business case for digital.
GENERATE INTERNAL BUY-IN
When asked about the value digital commerce brings to B2B, decision makers reported the top three benefits as providing personalized product recommendations, cross-selling and upselling more effectively, and offering more relevant promotions. These capabilities will improve customer loyalty and boost your bottom line.

INDUSTRY LEADERS ADOPTING CUSTOMER-FIRST DIGITAL CHANNELS GAIN AN EDGE
Salesforce found that 89% of businesses attribute expected business growth to the success of their digital commerce systems. Most stated this anticipated growth is due to their commerce system’s ability to meet customer needs, retain current customers, acquire new customers, and increase average order size.

DIGITAL ISN’T A FAR-AWAY IDEA – IT’S HERE RIGHT NOW
Additionally, Salesforce found that 88% of businesses anticipate offering products in the next five years that will primarily be sold online. Market growth can be difficult to achieve without adapting to new customer and market needs – and unless everyone in the organization embraces a digital mindset, it’s impossible to evolve with your customers.
A leading distributor of lighting products and accessories wanted to open an ecommerce channel to sell its catalog of lamps, ballasts, and sockets to electrical distribution companies, specialty lighting and original equipment manufacturer (OEM) industries. As a privately owned company, it needed a commerce platform that could easily scale and meet evolving customer demands without significant developer and IT support.

**LISTEN TO YOUR CUSTOMERS**

Salesforce’s B2B Commerce solution provides a holistic view of the customer and a centralized repository for customer communication. This means feedback is easy to access and allows the company to develop new features and adjust products and services strategically based on customer needs.

**MAKE COMMERCE COMPLEMENTARY AND OPTIONAL**

The company sought to enhance customer engagement by providing customers more visibility to products and current inventory, not to replace its existing channels that are driven largely by sales reps and customer service personnel. Through digital commerce, the company offers customers a resource to easily research products and place orders on their own when and where it’s convenient for them. But customers who prefer to access support through traditional channels still have that option. The deep connections Salesforce provides between commerce, sales, service, marketing, and other channels ensures customers get a consistent commerce experience no matter what channel they choose.

The organization chose Salesforce’s B2B Commerce solution for its ability to provide smooth digital commerce implementation.
UNDERSTAND HOW YOU’LL LIVE WITH DIGITAL COMMERCE

While many businesses are eager to make drastic changes to their business model in tandem with the launch of their digital commerce platform, the company understood that spreading itself too thin is risky. Driving results from new business models, such as direct-to-consumer or direct-to-retailer, requires significant resource allocation to content marketing, otherwise potential leads won’t be captured or nurtured. With Salesforce, the company can focus on digital commerce today while leaving the door open to new business models in the future when it can invest the resources necessary to make them successful. Salesforce’s flexible, configurable platform makes it easy for businesses to evolve as customer and market needs change.

TAKE A MINIMUM VIABLE APPROACH

The company focused its initial launch scope on B2B, providing a digital commerce solution for registered users and resellers only, and drove configuration of the store and business readiness activities to support that initial launch. To expedite some business processes, the company leveraged Salesforce workflow rules and out-of-the-box shipping tables to simplify pricing of shipments. With the business requirements set, development of the new site was poised to take only 14 weeks from start to finish.

BUILD AND EVOLVE YOUR BUSINESS CASE

The company was spending significant time and resources on manual quoting processes for wholesale customers. To achieve its goals of driving increased revenue and improving efficiency, it needed to automate the quote-to-cash process, get to market quickly, save costs, easily scale, and enhance customer engagement. Digital commerce through Salesforce B2B Commerce has done just that.
Salesforce B2B Commerce helps manufacturers grow revenue

Over the last decade, digital innovations have transformed the way manufacturers interact with customers. Business buyers now expect seamless self-service buying experiences and will remain loyal to businesses that deliver on this need. As a result, manufacturing companies face a fork in the road: invest in robust digital commerce systems or risk losing customers to competitors who do.

But while this decision seems obvious, manufacturers know that this change isn’t going to be easy. The tips outlined in this guidebook are crucial for businesses looking to drive real revenue from a shift toward digital. Setting your business up for digital success starts by listening to your customers about their needs and expectations, and ends with building a solid business case to ensure that internal stakeholders are wholeheartedly on board.

Manufacturers of all sizes should consider SaaS-based commerce systems like Salesforce B2B Commerce that give them the infrastructure and resources necessary to compete. With a system built in the cloud, businesses can launch quickly, constantly adapt based on customer feedback, and enable self-service. And they can do this all without heavy implementation investments and extended time to market. With a flexible, scalable commerce solution in their arsenal, manufacturers will be equipped to thrive in the digital world.

*With a system built in the cloud, businesses can launch quickly, constantly adapt based on customer feedback, and enable self-service.*
ABOUT SALESFORCE FOR MANUFACTURING

With Salesforce for Manufacturing, the world’s #1 CRM has been reimagined for manufacturers. With our unified platform for intelligent customer engagement, you can create truly connected experiences for your customers, employees, partners, suppliers, and other stakeholders in your ecosystem.

Our Streamline Parts Distribution for Manufacturing solution helps you deliver B2C-inspired e-commerce experiences with features that meet the complex needs of B2B buyers. Stay connected to your customers through simple but powerful business buying – growing revenue and creating happier customers.

And because Streamline Parts Distribution is built right on the Salesforce Platform, you can easily connect your commerce and CRM data for a single view of the customer.

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