

# B2B eCommerce

## OVERCOMING 8 COMMON CHALLENGES

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## OVERCOMING 8 COMMON CHALLENGES

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According to Forrester, B2B eCommerce in the U.S. will hit \$1.8 trillion by 2023\*, seeing a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 10% over the next five years. It is therefore essential that B2B businesses optimize the experience for their customers online. B2B sites have typically been known as less usable, but it is time for them to catch up with B2C and make it really easy for customers to do business. B2B eCommerce has unique complexities, which present unique challenges and therefore require a unique set of best practices.

In this eBook, we will explore these challenges in and offer advice and solutions to ensure that your B2B site delivers a superior experience.

## B2B eCommerce: The Benefits

B2B eCommerce has many benefits for any company looking to streamline their procedures, reduce costs and increase sales. The rise in popularity of purchasing online means that the doors are open for your business to the national or international marketplace.

**Your business needs to be online, where the customers are.**

Your B2B customers are also B2C customers of someone else, and they are used to the B2C experience. They expect functionality and UX that mimics Amazon and the like. Use this to your advantage and take tips from B2C, such as increasing order value by offering cross-sells or up-sells.

B2B commerce traditionally happens through sales reps, catalogs and call centres. These routes to purchase are expensive compared with eCommerce. Providing a great experience to B2B customers online helps your business move away from spending time and money on processes that can be fully automated on an eCommerce site. The product information can still be extensive and accurate, with specification sheets, manuals and diagrams being easy to view and download.

When a B2C customer searches for something on an eCommerce site, they will usually see a combination of what they've searched for and what the business wants them to see. B2B customers, on the other hand, will need to see what they've searched for, but also what they usually buy.

In B2B, customers are buyers, not shoppers; they're much less likely to be browsing. They're likely to be repeat buyers and want the quickest route to the products they're looking for. They may even just want to click a button to reorder last week's purchase. For this reason, personalization is key in the B2B domain.

Using historical buying and browsing data, it is possible to create a personalized buying experience. B2B eCommerce can create a streamlined ordering process for customers who know exactly what they want.

There are huge benefits in putting in place a strategy to drive B2B customers to your eCommerce site.

But is your site capable of maintaining the relationship and even driving more revenue through excellent functionality?

When asked to cite the top features or functions they would most like from suppliers in the selling process, most business buyers chose enhanced search functionality on their website (60%)\*.

## B2B eCommerce: The Challenges

B2B products have a different set of characteristics to B2C products. These differences can present the following challenges:

Challenge 01: Product Findability

Challenge 02: Bad Data

Challenge 03: Complex Part Numbers

Challenge 04: Customer-specific Catalogues

Challenge 05: Dynamic Pricing

Challenge 06: Omni-Channel

Challenge 07: Managing the Relationship

Challenge 08: Customer Acquisition



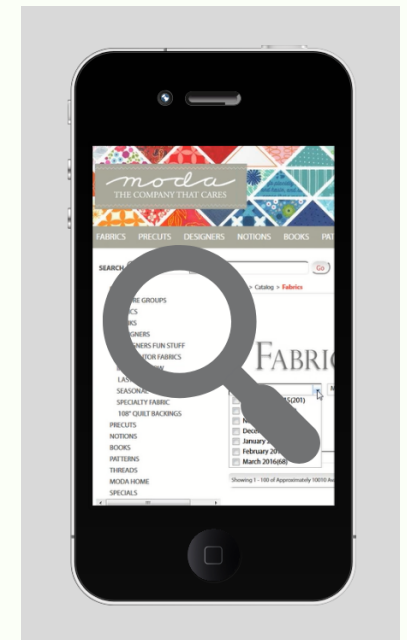
# 01 PRODUCT FINDABILITY

B2B buyers typically know exactly what they want.

Being able to find it quickly and without unnecessary clicks or searches is key.

Your B2B buyers need to search and navigate your site easily so that they can find what they're looking for and get on with their day.

Don't forget that your B2B buyers are also B2C customers of other companies, and it's likely that they are used to experiencing good product findability.

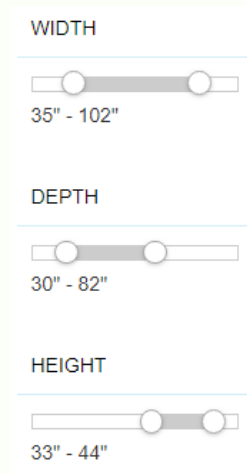


We can break product findability down into two main areas: Navigation and Search.

# 01 PRODUCT FINDABILITY

## Navigation

B2B products can be complex, with a huge number of attributes, products and ways to buy. The manageability of navigation filters is important so that your business can quickly create new filters as products are changed or added. Make these filters visually attractive and easy to use, for example by creating sliders for numeric options.



Remember to adjust the number of attributes that are displayed according to how far down the navigation tree the buyer is. At a broad level of products, it would slow down the buyer to show the attributes for every single product. Limit this to broader attributes, such as brand and color. Depending on the user interface, we suggest showing 5 to 6 attributes. As the buyer progresses in their navigation, it becomes more important to show the detailed attributes.

## *Product Finders*

Product Finders are a type of Navigation especially important to many B2B companies.

EasyAsk technology enables key product types to have finders defined within the system so that the user is prompted to specify key product type-related attributes. This functionality allows the user to zoom in using key facts about products.

For example, a car parts site might use a product finder that requests the make, model and year of the car in order to show the appropriate brake pads.



# 01 PRODUCT FINDABILITY

## Navigation

EasyAsk's search solution allows complete business user control over navigation, including:

Category Management – The ability to restructure categories to better suit the needs of the buyer.

Dynamic Attributes – The ability to create attribute groupings based on numeric data. For example, dynamic price groupings.

Multi-Select Attributes – EasyAsk allows attributes to be multi-selectable or single select.

All of this functionality is under the control of the business user, not the IT department, which could take days or even weeks to implement. EasyAsk keeps your B2B site agile and current.



# 01 PRODUCT FINDABILITY

## Search

Your B2B site search needs to be accurate and to understand the terms that your business uses. It should also allow any non-standard terms to be defined. The higher the number of products in your catalogue, the greater the importance of Natural Language Processing (NLP).

NLP is the ability to understand the different ways that people might describe the same product.

Understanding the terminology of your users and the ability of your search engine to intuitively and instantly map that to the correct products is extremely important in B2B.

Analytics are invaluable in showing how your users are interacting with your site, but are you able to implement any resulting changes rapidly and easily?

Does your site search implicitly understand prices, sizes, lengths and other weights and measures, allowing customers to search using alternative forms of input? Your site should enable your customers to buy how they want to, not how your search system dictates they should.





# 01 PRODUCT FINDABILITY

## Search

### *Search As You Type (SAYT)*

Search As You Type (SAYT), aka autocomplete/instant search, is a really useful tool for B2B buyers on your site. As a user is typing, the pop up can show the products that are most likely to be sought, for example recently searched or purchased products.

This functionality is increasingly important with part numbers that often have a complex combination of characters.

A tool called a 'Begins Expander' means that if a user is searching for a specific part, as they start to type the part number, all matching part numbers will automatically be displayed to the user.

For example, if there are 5 parts that have part numbers beginning '361', all 5 parts will be shown as suggestions and the user can click to go straight to the required product.

We will discuss tools for dealing with complex part numbers in a later section of this eBook.

It's also a good idea to display the last searches that the user made even before SAYT kicks in. B2B buyers are often buying the same products repeatedly.

With all search results pages, it is important that your search engine only displays products that your customer is entitled to buy.

We will explore customer-specific catalogues later in this eBook.

# THE POWER TO PERFORM

**Although B2B buyers interact with your search and navigation in differing ways to B2C shoppers, it's equally, if not more important that your search system performs well when faced with the unique demands of B2B eCommerce.**

**You need a powerful system to cope with that.**



# 02

## BAD DATA

### Bad Data

### Bad Data is a Common Problem

It's highly unlikely that you have perfect data.

Companies who are selling online are often using multiple vendors and could be using multiple systems, that together provide the product information. These disparate sources of information can often cause issues:



**Missing Data**



**Inconsistent Data**



**Bad Data**

A successful eCommerce experience is reliant upon good data and an intelligent structure with a hierarchy of categories and attributes.

If you find your data creates a barrier to the success of your business online, you're not alone. This is a very common challenge among B2B companies.

Let's look at the 3 common issues.

## 02

## BAD DATA



## Missing Data

Products may arrive in your system with little or no attribution.

For example, if you were selling paint, the volume of the product is an important attribute to allow the user to search and/or filter product lists.

One of EasyAsk's customers had this exact problem.

There was no volume attribute in the data, it was simply specified as part of the product name, e.g. 'Acrylic paint – Yellow – 16oz'. For most search systems, having this information in the product name makes it very difficult to list volume and/or color as attribute filters on a search listing page.

To solve this issue, some companies may decide to create scripts or software to fix the problem as the data arrives into the Product Information Management System (PIM). This is obviously costly and time-consuming.

EasyAsk provides an alternative that doesn't involve changing the source data. Our 'derived attribute' functionality allows the business to create attributes within the EasyAsk system based on natural language rules that define which products should be classified with each attribute value. For example, for the volume attribute, the business could define it as follows:

Volume Name	Rule
1/2 pint	Product name contains "1/2 pint" or "1/2 pt" or "8 oz" or "8oz"
1 pint	Product name contains "1 pint" or "1 pt" or "16 oz" or "16oz"
Quart	Product name contains "2 pint" or "2 pints" or "2pt" or "32 oz" or "32oz"
Gallon	Product name contains "1 gal" or "1 gallon"

These rules are processed by EasyAsk as part of the data indexing procedure and will create the attributes which will appear to the website as if they existed in the source data. In this case, the volume will appear as an attribute filter.



# 02

## BAD DATA



### Inconsistent Data

The same information can be expressed differently by different suppliers.

In our paint example, you will notice for example, that the volume '1 pint' could be expressed in 4 different ways. This is also the case for other data, such as color names, materials etc.

The EasyAsk derived attribute facility effectively allows the business to consolidate all variations to the same value. This facility has the added advantage that if the user types the volume name in a search, EasyAsk will automatically include all the products that match the associated rule.

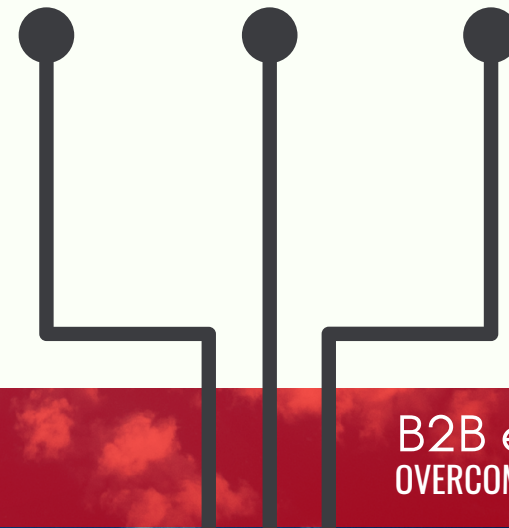
For example, if the user searches for a quart of yellow paint, EasyAsk will include those products that include '2 pint', '2 pt', '32oz' etc.

This technique can be used in many ways, for example, grouping several color names together under a single name:

red = "red" or "pink" or "cerise" or "burgundy"

or grouping material names:

wood = "beech" or "oak" or "mahogany" or "pine"



# 02

## BAD DATA



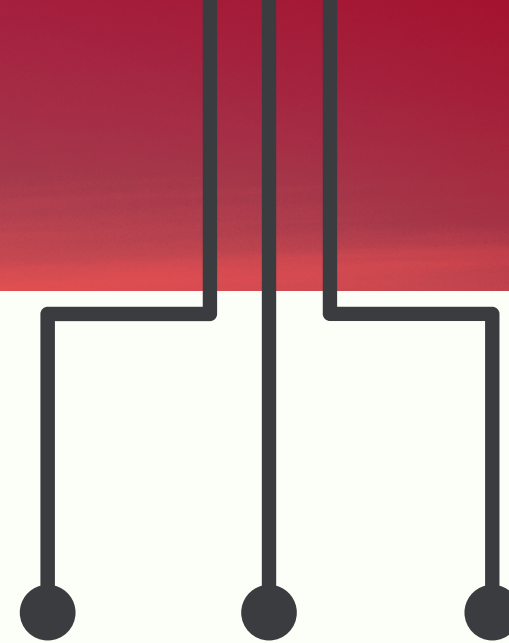
### Bad Data

Occasionally, data is just plain wrong.

For example, the word 'gallon' is spelt 'galon' in certain product names.

Fixing this in your data is the obvious solution, but what happens when you receive the next product data feed from your supplier?

This could still contain the error and overwrite your corrected data.





Again, the EasyAsk derived attribute facility allows you to cater for these mistakes, and to fix the issue within a derived attribute.

For example, the definition for the volume 'Gallon' is extended to include the incorrect spellings as well as the alternative spellings.

# THE QUICKEST ROUTE TO GOOD DATA

**EasyAsk's search and merchandizing solution can very easily allow a merchandizer to get around data problems :**

-  **EasyAsk's derived attribute facility allows the business to easily consolidate variants, errors and missing data to provide a consistent set of data for searching and navigation.**
-  **EasyAsk's AI-based Natural Language Processing allows the engine to take care of linguistic complexities, such as pluralities and tenses, e.g. women's, lady, ladies, girls.**



# 03 COMPLEX PRODUCT NUMBERS

B2B shoppers are much more likely to search using specific product numbers.

B2B product numbers can inherently be more complex and therefore be easily mis-typed or forgotten. The numbers often take the following forms:

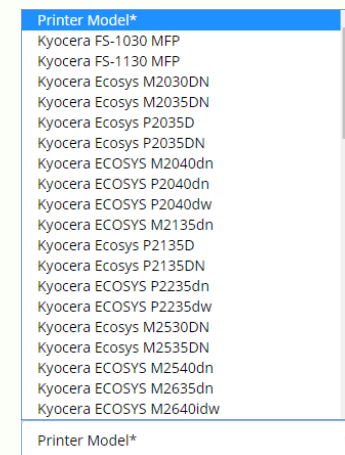
*Groups of numbers, letters and other characters, such as hyphens and slashes*

*Long numbers with some kind of structure, e.g. 123 4567 89*

If your customers can't find parts or part numbers on your eCommerce site, they will be calling your customer services, which is expensive to you and inconvenient for them. Worse still, they may take their business to your competitors.

A mechanic who needs a car part for a job the next day is probably not going to be the person typing the part number into a search box. Someone in the office will be asked to order the part, and when they can't find the part due a slight error in the part number, they have to get on the phone to the supplier. This means it costs the car parts vendor more to service the customer.

The challenge for B2B eCommerce sites is clear, but what can be implemented to avoid the need for calls to a customer service line or using a competitor's site?



# 03 COMPLEX PRODUCT NUMBERS

## EasyAsk's 'Begins Expander'

A 'Begins Expander' is a functionality, unique to EasyAsk, that will show all matching part numbers based on what the user has typed so far. It indexes every root possibility for the part number.

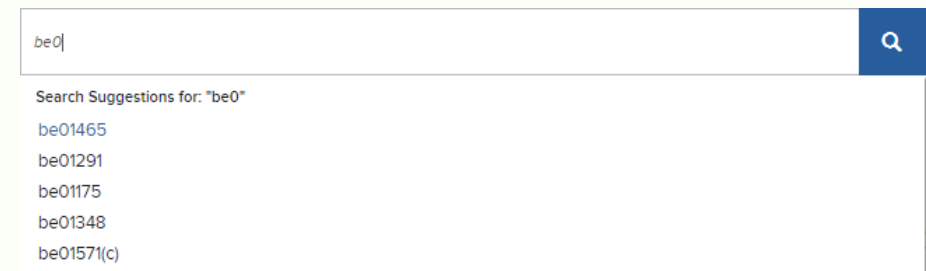
A Begins Expander can be set up for any field but is most relevant for a part or product number field.

It can be configured to start or finish on any number of characters and it will index the part number as the start parameter, then plus 1 character, then plus 2 characters, and so on until the end parameter.

For example, if the product code is 1234567 with the parameters 3 and 7, the Begins Expander would index:

123  
1234  
12345  
123456  
1234567

This is an extremely effective technique as it is helpful to a searcher that doesn't remember the entire product code; they can just start to type the beginning of the code and Search As You Type (SAYT) / autocomplete will show all possible product codes.



The screenshot shows a search bar with the text 'be0' entered. Below the search bar, there is a dropdown menu titled 'Search Suggestions for: "be0"'. The suggestions listed are: 'be01465', 'be01291', 'be01175', 'be01348', and 'be01571(c)'.

*enasco.com begins to suggest product numbers after 2 characters are typed*

# 03 COMPLEX PRODUCT NUMBERS

## EasyAsk's 'Part Number Expander'

A 'Part Number Expander' is especially useful for complex part numbers that include a combination of letters, numbers and other characters.

A user might forget whether characters were separated by a hyphen or a slash, or might omit letters on the end.

The Part Number Expander takes each part number and creates all the different versions of terms and inserts them into the searchable index so that if any of them are searched for, they will match to the product.

The code is broken up into parts and the separators are substituted in all combinations.

For example, if the part number is

123-HC/1345AB

the Part Number Expander would index:

123-HC-1345AB	123
123/HC/1345AB	123-HC
123/HC-1345AB	HC
123 HC 1345AB	1345

...amongst many other combinations.

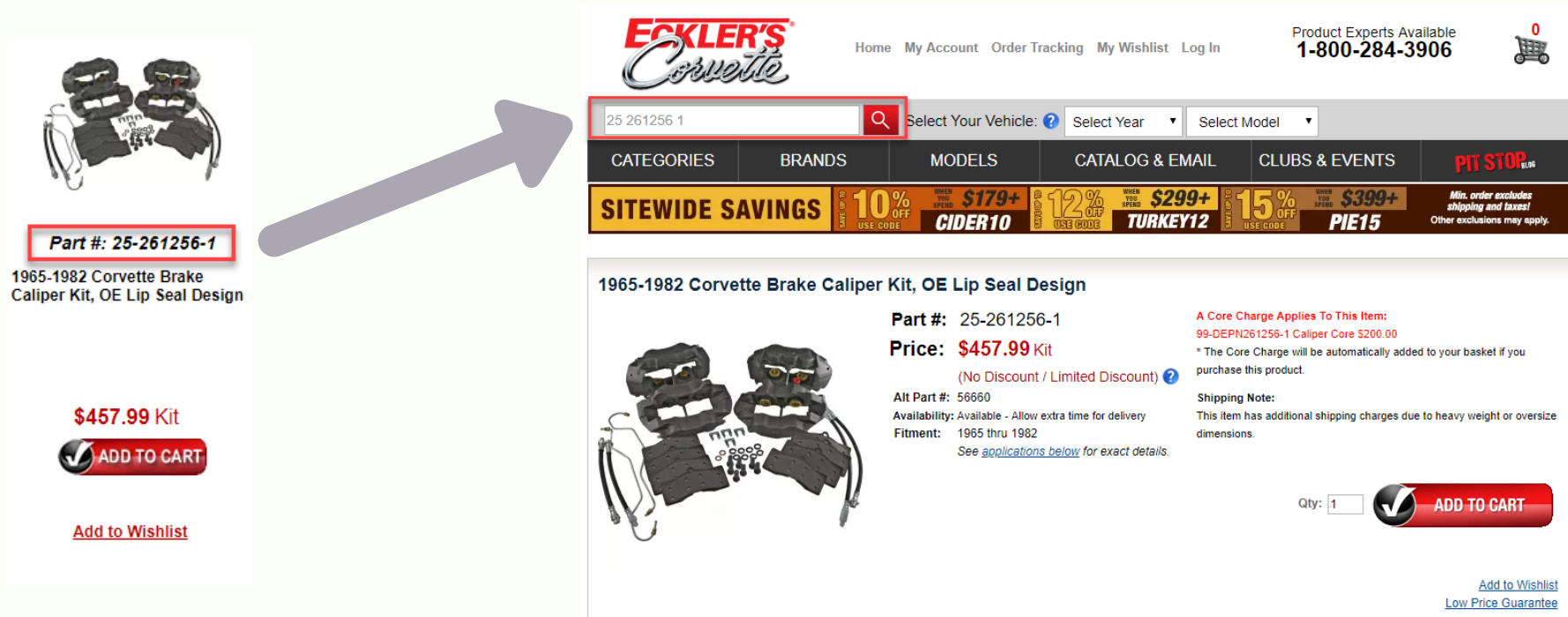
If a customer types a part number that is slightly different (for example, using spaces instead of hyphens) the correct part will still be found.



# 03 COMPLEX PRODUCT NUMBERS

## EasyAsk's 'Part Number Expander'

Ecklerscorvette.com demonstrates how the Part Number Expander can avoid no results for customers:



The image shows a comparison between a product listing on the left and a search result on the right. On the left, a product listing for a '1965-1982 Corvette Brake Caliper Kit, OE Lip Seal Design' is shown with the part number '25-261256-1' highlighted in a red box. An arrow points from this part number to the search box on the right. On the right, the search results page for '25 261256 1' is displayed, showing the same product listing. The search box on the right contains the text '25 261256 1' with a red border. The product details on the right include the part number '25-261256-1', the price '\$457.99 Kit', and a note about a core charge.

The part number for this disc brake set is 25-261256-1. If a customer replaces the hyphens with spaces in the search box, the exact product is still returned.

# EASYASK MAKING THE DIFFERENCE



Demco encountered problems with product number variations and saw outstanding results when they implemented EasyAsk's software.

Demco (a library and schools supplier) were a printed catalog business before launching online. Their web system only used the internal product codes, which were just numbers, whereas in the catalogs, each number had a 2-character prefix with a hyphen. So, if the internal product code was 1234, in the catalog it could be rx-1234, kb-1234, depending on the different catalogs that were issued throughout the year.

The company found that a teacher or librarian would look in the catalog, find the product they required, and then when they tried to find the product online, the search failed every time.

Because the printed catalog didn't match what was in the database, the user wouldn't be able to find what they wanted, and so would call the helpdesk who would take the order over the phone.

When the company implemented EasyAsk software, they provided EasyAsk with their data, plus a list of catalog prefix and suffix codes for those printed catalogs that were in circulation.

As part of the build process, EasyAsk indexed product numbers with and without prefixes and suffixes, and with and without hyphens. From the moment that the EasyAsk system went live, customers were able to find the products using the catalogue codes and calls to the call centre were halved.

EasyAsk made a huge difference in this case, can your website do this?

# 04 CUSTOMER-SPECIFIC CATALOGUES

**“A customer should never see a product that isn't available for them to buy”**

Providing customer-specific catalogs is a unique search requirement for B2B companies and can present unique challenges when it comes to eCommerce. But if it is done well, the personalized experience for your B2B customers will certainly pay dividends.

There are 3 possible situations that a B2B company may need to cater for:

The company has products that all customers can see and buy.

The availability of products may be based on location. Customers in the North-East might only see products that are stocked in the North-East warehouse. Location of the stock also limits which products a customer should see.

Certain customers are only authorized to buy from a particular range or category of products.

When the customer searches, it is important that they can only view the products that are available for them to buy. There may be custom products produced by a company that are only available to one particular customer.

For example, coffee companies need branded cups, so it is important that those custom products are in the supplier's catalog, but cannot be bought by anyone else.



# 04 CUSTOMER-SPECIFIC CATALOGUES

## Differing Needs

Within a typical B2C system, the search system would search the entire catalog and show results, but in the above situations, the catalog indexing process needs to define who can buy which products so that the search system is able to present products in the results correctly.

This can become very complex, which is why less-configurable search systems can't handle it.

EasyAsk provides a custom implementation for each customer, so that any of the challenges described above can be handled.



A paper products manufacturer became an EasyAsk customer and now has certain products in their catalog that are marked with customer IDs, whilst other products are marked as being global.

Their coffee store customer buys branded cups, so when they log in the customer ID is passed to EasyAsk, who pass back only the right products.

The implementation of customer-specific catalogs varies completely between B2B customers, so it isn't possible to just use defined rules; the flexibility to support all different circumstances is necessary.

# B2B PERSONALIZATION

**Being able to search and see personalized results based on pre-negotiated terms is imperative for your B2B customers. They should never see a product that isn't available for them to buy.**

**Your search system should be aware of product availability for any given customer.**

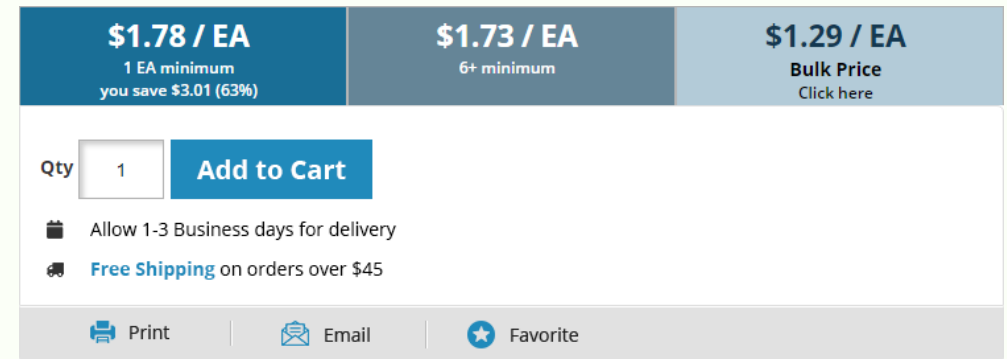
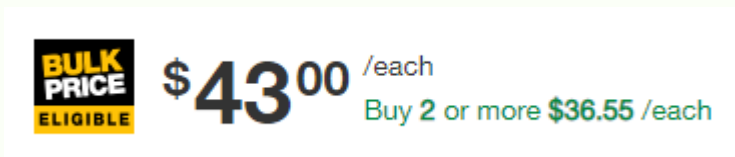
**Is your search system up to this?**

# 05 DYNAMIC PRICING

Pricing is a critical component of a B2B eCommerce site. 55% of manufacturers see dynamic pricing as their biggest challenge\*. There's nothing more disastrous than a customer seeing the wrong price for a product.

The emphasis should be on accuracy and processing speed.

It is common for B2B prices to be individualized based on factors such as contract, purchasing frequency and volume. Sometimes bulk prices are displayed, grouped according to the number bought:



There are 2 main pricing situations that your search system will need to cater for. We will explore them and discover how best they can be handled:

Price  
Groups

Dynamic  
Pricing



# 05 DYNAMIC PRICING

## Price Groups

Rather than allocating individual prices for every customer, some businesses have levels or groups of prices, e.g. Level 'A' to 'E'.

Depending on the group level allocated to the customer, they'll see one of a number of prices.

In these situations, if the customer is identified, the search system can index all prices and decide whether to pass back, for example the Level 'A', Level 'B' price.

This situation works well when there are up to about 10 price levels.



# 05 DYNAMIC PRICING

## Dynamic Pricing

In this situation, every customer has negotiated prices, based on volume or contract etc. and the search system can't know the price in advance.

There are several ways in which a search system can handle dynamic pricing:

- a) The search system indexes a standard price, and a message is displayed alongside the product on the search results page along the lines of:

“This is the standard price. For your pricing, view the product details.”

When the customer accesses the product details screen, the price for that particular customer is calculated and displayed.

The advantage of this method is that price attribute filters, such as price sliders or selectors, can be displayed on the search results page, giving users the option to filter results based on the standard prices.

# 05 DYNAMIC PRICING

## Dynamic Pricing

- b)** For each page of results, the ecommerce system calculates and retrieves the prices for the products that are going to be displayed on that page.

Most sites only show one page at a time, approximately 10-12 products. Once the search system has passed back the product IDs, it can calculate the prices based on pricing rules, which can then be shown on the product results page.

The search system uses a pricing engine to pass back appropriate prices.

The disadvantage of this method is that any price attributes on the search results page become invalid.



# 05 DYNAMIC PRICING

## Dynamic Pricing

- c) An advanced, flexible search system can call a pricing engine as part of its process.

This means that it can retrieve exact pricing before the attributes are calculated, passing back the correct pricing for each customer.

This method allows for totally dynamic pricing.

For every product in the results, a price is needed, which does mean that page load time can be affected. For on premise B2B customers, this overhead would be reduced because the pricing engine will be running on the same internal network, or even the same server that the search system is running on.

# FLEXIBILITY IS THE ANSWER

When displaying search results, there is sometimes the need for the price to be more than a single number. Sometimes a set of prices according to volume is required. The search system will need to be able to pass all prices back, perhaps displaying them in a table showing quantity vs price.

Does your search system have the ability to pass back multiple prices?

Every B2B business has differing needs, and it is essential that search systems are flexible to reflect this. EasyAsk can index multiple prices, calling out to a pricing engine if required, and pass back pricing structures in the results, as opposed to just a simple price. It may be that a business has a set of thresholds for discounts, or individualized pricing based on customer ID.



**EasyAsk adapts to all circumstances.**  
This isn't the case for all search systems.

# 06 OMNI-CHANNEL

An omni-channel approach is increasingly hailed as the most effective way to do business.



And most businesses would now claim to offer a multi-channel experience, where their customers can access their products or services in a variety of ways, such as on a desktop or mobile site, a mobile app and in a brick-and-mortar store.

But not all multi-channel experiences are omni-channel; a company could have many channels providing different levels of service.

True omni-channel is when the experience is consistent across channels however, or wherever a customer accesses your product or service.



# 06 OMNI-CHANNEL

## What does Omni-channel mean in the B2B World?

Your B2B customers are inevitably also B2C shoppers, so will be expecting the same capabilities. Although the B2B experience is not usually so personalised as for B2C companies, there are still lessons to be learnt from them.

In B2B, it is equally important to provide customers with a consistent experience across multiple channels. Information that is gathered on one channel should be available across all others. Whether a user is logged in, speaking on the phone, or directly to a sales representative, information such as prices, stock information, product details and order history should all be consistent.

A call centre representative should know what their customers usually order and should have all information in front of them. A customer should be able to log in to a B2B site and re-order items. This consistency is what drives a great customer experience.

The most important channels in B2B are:



eCommerce website:

- o Mobile site
- o Non-mobile site



Call Centres

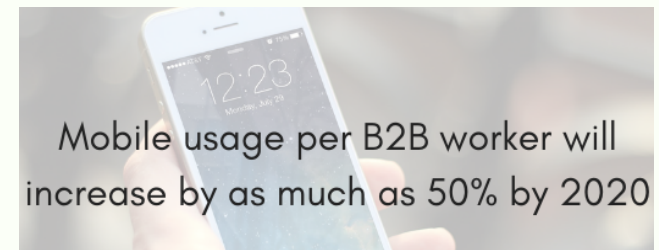


Sales Representatives



Printed Catalogues

# A WORD ON MOBILE



It is essential to recognise the increasing importance of mobile in B2B. BCG estimate that mobile usage per B2B worker will increase by as much as 50% (from two hours a day to three) by 2020\*.

In a mobile environment, particularly with the proliferation of voice search, we have no idea how a user is going to search. There is the unknown factor of how a user may choose to speak their request. When using voice search, people are more verbose; they don't think as carefully about the words they will use, and they throw in unexpected words.

It is imperative, therefore, that the engine processing the request is incredibly intuitive and flexible.

This way, no matter how a user asks, they can find what they asked for.

\*Source: <https://www.bcg.com/publications/2017/marketing-sales-digital-go-to-market-transformation-mobile-marketing-new-b2b-buyer.aspx>

# 06 OMNI-CHANNEL

## Streamlining

The most cost-effective way for a business to deal with customers is without human intervention, providing a consistent experience across apps, mobile and desktop sites.

Failing to provide this kind of consistency will really annoy your customers.

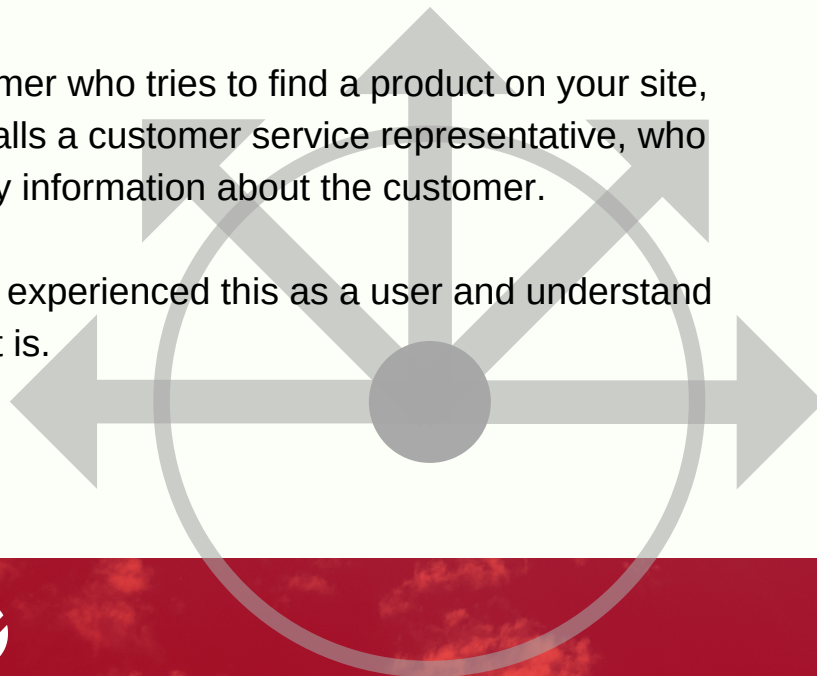
Imagine a customer who tries to find a product on your site, fails, and then calls a customer service representative, who doesn't have any information about the customer.

You've probably experienced this as a user and understand how frustrating it is.

Being able to take information from a web session and see that in a call centre is vital. The call centre can then take minimum details and see what a customer has been doing on their screen, avoiding the need for the customer to repeat it all.

When it comes to search, your system should be showing the same information across channels. If a customer speaks to a call centre agent, they should see the same search results as the customer.

Streamlining means taking information and orchestrating it across all touchpoints.





# EASYASK MAKING THE DIFFERENCE



An office and schools supplier contacted EasyAsk for help when they realised that they were losing business due to a lack of consistency across channels.

Before implementing the EasyAsk search system, the information in their printed catalogues didn't match the information on their website.

Customer searches failed because the catalogue numbers were different, and customers had to call the call centre to place an order.

Unfortunately, the call centre had their own system for understanding catalogue numbers which was different from the web system.

These separate and inconsistent systems meant that the company was dealing with the same customers multiple times in order to process one order.

EasyAsk enabled the company to streamline their business. After implementation, customers could do everything online, thanks to EasyAsk indexing printed catalogue numbers alongside website catalogue numbers.

This once again highlights the importance of consistency across all B2B channels.

# THE OMNI-CHANNEL EXPERIENCE

**Your web users should be able to see all of the information that they could gain from speaking to a sales representative in a call centre, such as order status, product information, what's in or out of stock and delivery information.**

**Authorized users may even be able to see financial information, such as outstanding balances and payments made.**

**This omni-channel B2B experience must be brought together by a powerful search and merchandizing system.**

**Can your system handle this?**

# 07 MANAGING THE RELATIONSHIP

Bringing your B2B business online may present certain challenges, but there is no doubt that the possibilities and advantages far outweigh those challenges.

Being aware of what your customers are doing across all channels means that you can provide consistent information. But it also means that you can collect vital information about your customers' activity, such as their preferred channel, order and search history.

Understanding your customers' behavior enables you to manage your ongoing relationship with new and existing customers. Managing the relationship with your customers requires a two-pronged approach – being proactive and reactive.



Managing the relationship with your customers requires a two-pronged approach – being proactive and reactive.



# 07 MANAGING THE RELATIONSHIP



## Proactive

Don't take your customers for granted – it is important to proactively keep in touch with them.

Using a customer's order history, it is possible to personalize the products that you market to them. If a customer re-orders particular products frequently, those products should be pushed to the top of their search results.

One example of how EasyAsk are doing this is by using sales information to drive improved SAYT (Search As You Type) results, thereby providing a much better customer experience.

Another way to improve the experience for your customers at the same time as streamlining your business is to use your established relationship to drive your customers towards using your website.

This frees up customer service staff, saving your company money.

Why not incentivise your customers to use a better channel?

For example, customers who often phone the call center could be offered a discount for all online orders during the first month.

A further way to be proactive is to be aware of how your competitors are dealing with their customers.

Your sales representatives need to know whether they are offering competitive pricing and offers. Visit the sites of your main competitors regularly to see what they're doing.

# 07 MANAGING THE RELATIONSHIP

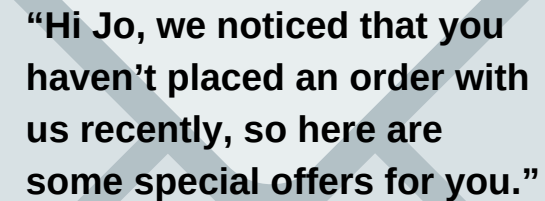
## Reactive

Understanding and keeping up to date with your customers' activity online allows you to react when there is a potential barrier. If a customer hasn't ordered as frequently as they normally do, contact could be made with them.

Perhaps the sales representatives could receive an alert when customers who order on a weekly basis stop or change the frequency of their orders.

Personalization can play a key role here, showing that you understand how your customers prefer to order and which products they would be interested in.

You could schedule automated, yet personalized, emails along the lines of:



**“Hi Jo, we noticed that you haven't placed an order with us recently, so here are some special offers for you.”**

When you use your analytics to pick up on any changes in your customer activity, it is much easier to respond promptly and resolve any issues or questions.

# 07 MANAGING THE RELATIONSHIP

## Using Analytics

Responding proactively and reactively to the measurements in analytics is vital, but how can you use them?

Firstly, it is important to set targets for the improvements that you wish to see, for example in conversion rate. You can then relate any changes that you make in your system to the improvements.

As well as measuring improvements to your conversion rates, there are other very useful indicators, such as how often users don't get results for their search (No Results).

You might monitor the ratio of call center versus website orders. As you improve your B2B site to match B2C standards, you should see the channel used by more of your customers.

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Most B2B companies are selling standard products, but there are certain businesses, selling complex products, that will only be able sell over the phone or face to face.

For these businesses, their analytics might show an improvement in the number of customers viewing or downloading guides or manuals from the website, as opposed to having a sales representative send it via email.

EasyAsk analytics allow you to see trends in how people are searching and navigating your site, meaning that you can monitor all of the results above.



# RELATIONSHIPS TAKE WORK

**The key contributor to managing the relationship with your B2B customers is staying in touch, proactively and reactively.**

**If your eCommerce solution allows you to monitor and analyze your customers' activity, you will know what helps and what hinders them from being a faithful customer.**

**Like any good relationship, a business relationship takes care and attention.**



# 08 CUSTOMER ACQUISITION

B2B buyers are inevitably also B2C customers of other companies, so when it comes to Customer Acquisition, a lot of B2C techniques apply.

General good Search Engine Optimization (S.E.O.) practices, such as messaging on your site about which products you sell and using Google's pay per click, are important, as B2B buyers will be looking for your company in the same way.

With B2B companies, service takes on slightly more importance. A B2C customer looking for a new jacket will probably have price as the main factor when making a choice. B2B buyers, however, will be more likely to be looking for good availability and continuing good service.

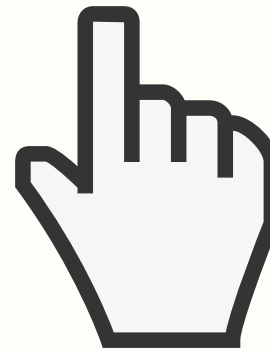
It is crucial that you market the fact that it is easy to do business with you.

Can they easily process new and repeat orders, negotiate deals, view order history and track orders?

Can they easily access detailed product information, such as product specifications, manuals etc?

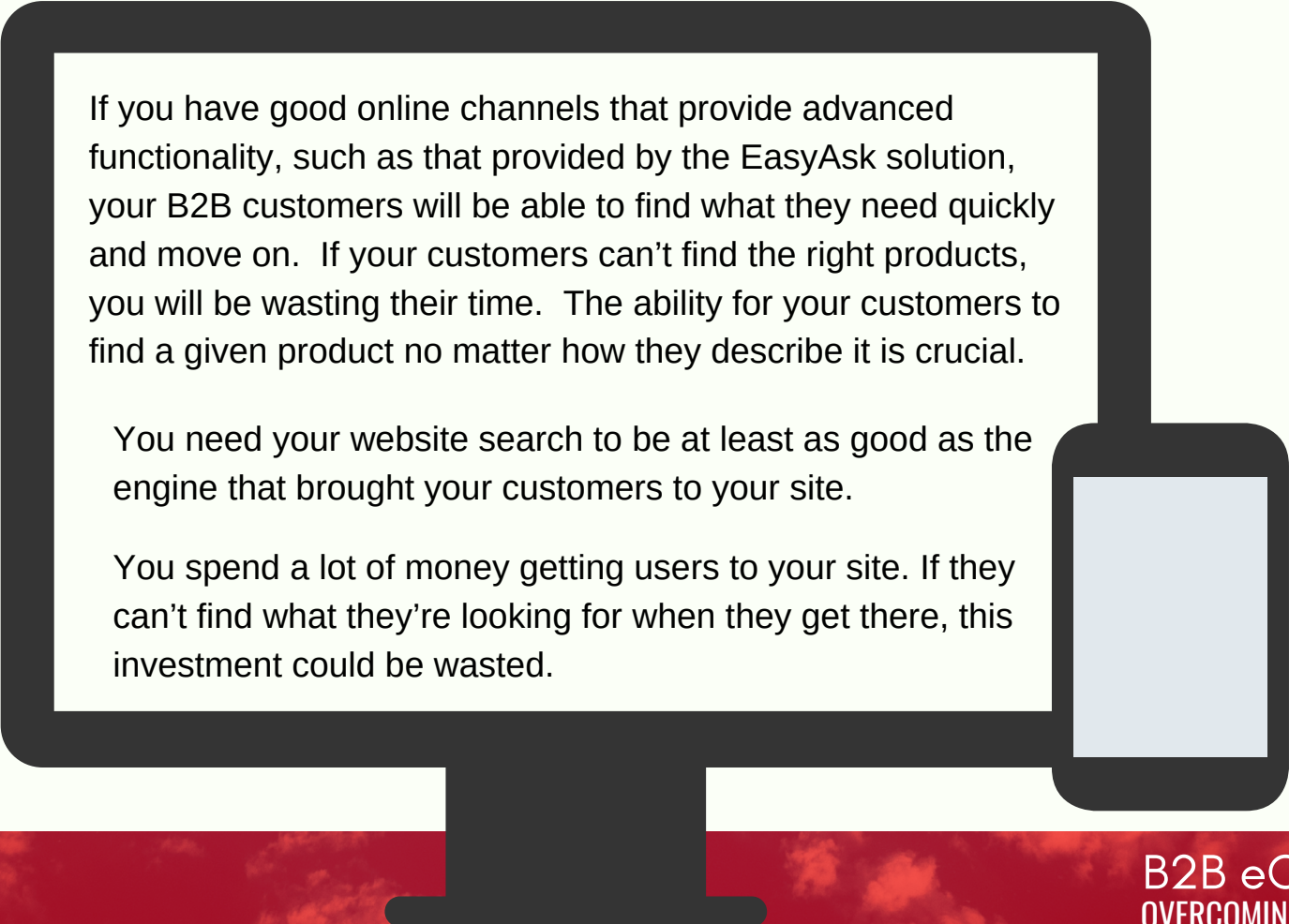
If your B2B site makes the whole buying process easy for your users, then you need to tell them this.

Perhaps you could create a video demonstrating how to enter an order on your system or share a Case Study of a customer showing how easy it is to work with you.



# 08 CUSTOMER ACQUISITION

Traditional customer acquisition channels, such as trade shows or publications, of course remain important for B2B companies. But an intelligent search and merchandizing solution on your website will ensure that the customers acquired through the more traditional channels, will continue to be your customers.

A stylized illustration of a computer monitor and a smartphone. The monitor is dark grey with a white screen area containing text. The smartphone is also dark grey with a light blue screen area. Both are positioned on the right side of the slide, with the monitor being larger and the smartphone being smaller and positioned below the monitor.

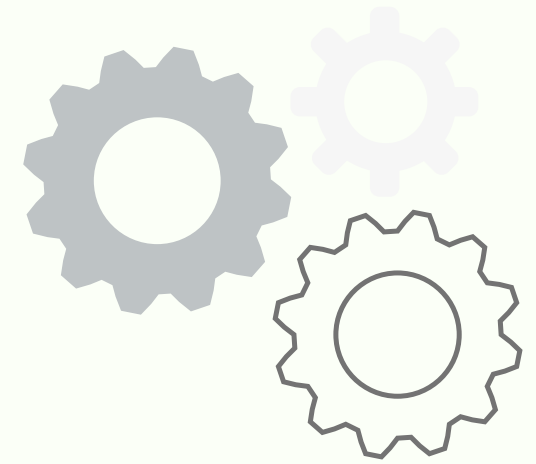
If you have good online channels that provide advanced functionality, such as that provided by the EasyAsk solution, your B2B customers will be able to find what they need quickly and move on. If your customers can't find the right products, you will be wasting their time. The ability for your customers to find a given product no matter how they describe it is crucial.

You need your website search to be at least as good as the engine that brought your customers to your site.

You spend a lot of money getting users to your site. If they can't find what they're looking for when they get there, this investment could be wasted.



# ARE YOU ECOMMERCE READY?



If you implement the features we have covered in this eBook, we are confident that your customers will be happier. They will be able to always find the right products, showing accurate pricing, ordering and delivery information. They will have their B2C expectations of your online experience met and will have a growing confidence in your company.

Many B2B eCommerce sites aren't providing what their buyers want, but overcoming the common challenges to B2B Ecommerce is possible with the right tools.



## EASYASK TOOLS

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EasyAsk offers the only site search and merchandising tool designed exclusively for the rigors and challenges of B2B eCommerce.

**EasyAsk can be configured for any platform, either commercial or built in-house.**

EasyAsk has long served the B2B customer segment and over 200 B2B distributors have chosen us to power their B2B eCommerce sites, including:

Aramark

Demco

Kaman Industries

Tacoma Screw

Crown Packaging

Ready to see how EasyAsk's eCommerce solution can help you?

Request a  
free demo!

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