Executive Summary

The use of mobile devices in business-to-business (B2B) commerce is rising rapidly. An omni-channel presence is no longer limited to retail and consumer markets, but speaks with equal gravitas to the much larger B2B sector. Increased revenues, enhanced customer loyalty, and lower transaction costs are now possible using platforms that are easily accessed by portable and mobile devices in the hands of standalone buyers and experienced sales reps.

Resistance remains, however, within B2B organizations that may be unaware of the power of mobile commerce, or believe that their industry is incompatible with – or too complex for – the desired simplicity of mobile. In fact, many of their customers already use mobile for research, product comparisons, and personal purchases, and are expecting the same type of experience when they make purchases for their employers. The secret is not to completely emulate the business-to-consumer (B2C) environment, but to adopt leading practices and supplement them with ease-of-use features specific to business procurement and purchasing processes.

This paper highlights the challenges of the B2B marketplace and provides clear steps for answering objections and implementing timely and recommended practices. When these steps are taken, the perceived complexity of the needed changes may be overcome. It is not too late for companies to leverage the evolving benefits of mobile commerce.
The Shift to Digital Commerce

There is breaking news for B2B organizations that have not yet fully adopted mobile and online commerce. Companies that fail to respond to this change may experience a decline in revenues, market share, and profitability.

Business and industrial customers are turning to mobile as a platform to conduct research, plan procurement strategies, and conduct business. They are quickly following the trend established in the consumer (B2C) world, in which mobile devices play a central role in connecting buyers with sellers.

Contrary to the beliefs of some B2B executives, most customers do want to make business purchases online. From paper clips to medical devices, the reality is that a new wave of agile, omni-channel commerce that places mobile first and includes responsive web design, allows customers to order from anywhere. They demand many of the features commonly available in consumer commerce, such as fast order fulfillment, order replenishment, order details, account history, and profile management. They expect to receive accurate shipments that may vary in quantity and selection each time.

This new set of business customer expectations is leading to a blending of sales strategies. Firms that would have historically been considered classic B2B now see themselves as both B2B and B2C. This act of making things simpler for people to buy is known as consumerization, and it is one of the key drivers of change in today’s marketplace.

Not all organizations share a sense of urgency to embrace the consumerization of B2B e-commerce. Some organizations still follow the traditional approach of using print catalogs and relying on field sales representatives to build awareness and close sales. The complexities of contracts, purchase orders, and multi-source or multi-destination shipments have made digital commerce appear to some to be impractical.

Yet, more companies are making the commerce transition and gaining a competitive advantage. For those few to which this shift does not yet apply, it is likely that their business would be negatively impacted sooner rather than later. Now is the time to start preparing – because waiting until after the shift has occurred might be too late.

Real-World Optimized Mobile Commerce

A large distributor of industrial products was an early adopter of mobility to serve its diverse B2B customer base throughout North America. Working with Accenture, this company focused initially on a few key areas, starting with a mobile-friendly store locator to help customers quickly find one of its hundreds of B2B will-call centers across the continent. Now, when an architect or engineer is working at a job site and an urgent need arises, an online order can be placed via smartphone or tablet, and the buyer is directed to the nearest facility where the order can be picked up. Since many B2B customers buy the same items repeatedly, a mobile optimized shopping cart displays that user’s most frequently ordered items, which can be quickly added to the cart and ordered with a simple tap on the screen, reducing the need to search through thousands of possible items. Throughout every visit, the responsive design of the site detects the size of the smartphone or tablet screen, and renders the display to deliver the best experience.

It’s possible for customers to use any one of 20 or more different browsers and versions across multiple devices, and therefore understanding the customer’s needs and factoring this into a responsive design is critically important. As with this company, a recommended practice to facilitate successful mobile commerce is to take an incremental, iterative approach towards making changes and adding new functions, starting with a solid foundation and employing responsive design concepts at the beginning of a re-platforming effort.

The Trends are Clear

Mobile commerce currently accounts for less than 10 percent of business sales, but more than half of all B2B customers are shifting transactions from offline to online or self-serve options. The percentage of B2B traffic coming from mobile will soon rise to match the 22 percent of traffic from mobile on B2C sites, according to data from Usablenet.¹

Many business buyers already watch mobile videos related to their work, access work-related mobile content outside of business hours, read reviews and product information, and compare features and prices on their mobile device.

These customers are not simply shopping online for new items. They are turning to mobile commerce to support the maintenance of their existing purchases and infrastructure. According to the Aberdeen Group, the sale of spare parts and after-sales services in the United States represents eight percent of annual gross domestic product. That means American businesses and consumers spend approximately $1 trillion every year on assets they already own. Supply firms generate up to half of their revenues by servicing products.²

The New B2B Playing Field

Fifty-seven percent of business products vendors say they are shifting their commerce transactions from offline to online, and 44 percent agree that B2B commerce is adopting B2C best practice, according to research conducted with B2B marketers and salespeople worldwide in February, 2014.³

In a 2014 address, Suresh Vittal, vice president for Strategy, Digital Marketing at Adobe, indicated that 40 percent of corporate buyers spend at least half of their procurement budget online, and 59 percent of these make purchases of $5,000 or more⁴.

The business world is changing, and the mobile customer is the primary driver of this change.

New technologies such as smartphones and tablets are available at an easily affordable cost. These devices access the information that was once held in catalogs, and can process transactions that were once sole property of the back office. Whether the device’s customers use are their own, or are provided by their company, they are quickly becoming the access points of choice for business purchases.

Social media (professional forums) and collaborative work environments are changing the collective mindset, from highly formalized and siloed to open and spontaneous. Customers expect instant access to product listings, images, and past purchase records. Many customers have experience with commerce sites such as Amazon.com, so they know this can be done, and they are demanding the same be made available within the B2B community.

For example, an office coffee company that has based its relationship on delivering coffee to its customers one day per month for the past 30 years is now facing the prospect of having to supply custom shipments in a much faster turnaround, or lose their business to younger, more agile startups.

Changing demographics guarantee an increased number of younger professionals at the helm of decision-making and purchasing activities. For these people, online and mobile commerce is not a novel option – it is the standard from which all other decisions and actions are based. Changing attitudes towards the purchasing process are encouraging more consumers to buy directly from brand manufacturers.

Personalization and real-time marketing are replacing broadcast advertising. Data is collected, tested, processed, and targeted to create messages that speak directly to an individual, whether as a private consumer or as the official purchaser for a company.

This new playing field also hosts the next stage of the relationship, continuing the positive experience for customers – the continuum between sales and marketing, in which customer care takes shape.

Objections and Counterpoints

It is natural and prudent for decision-makers in any industry or company to view change with skepticism and perform due diligence on its applicability. But a key fact remains: this has to be done now.

The complexity of B2B commerce, in terms of multiple buying decisions, multi-faceted sales cycles, and numerous steps and options for payment, are just a few of the objections and justifications against launching an agile and comprehensive mobile B2B functionality. For each reasoned excuse there is a counterpoint – an answer that demonstrates to the vastly larger commercial marketplace the benefits of adopting the best practices of B2C into B2B, and expanding them even further.

Those who have consciously chosen to avoid or delay a mobile B2B implementation have done so not only on the customer-facing side, but also internally, by lagging significantly in developing teams, a knowledge base of leading practices, and future potential. In fact, over 50 percent of B2B companies do not currently have a mobile strategy.⁵ Many are behind the times in the online process in general, having placed other priorities in front of adequate Internet presence.

In addition to the potential loss of business that this represents, any delays can provide an opening for younger or more agile players to move in and grab market share.

² Aberdeen Group, www.aberdeen.com
⁴ B2B Commerce Trends, Address at Game Plan Conference, Suresh Vittal, Adobe, November, 2014
⁵ Q4 2013 Global B2B e-commerce Online Survey conducted in partnership with Internet Retailer.
B2B brands offer more complex products for sale than those in B2C, and the sales cycle is longer.

B2B products and services are priced too high to be purchased with the click of a mouse.

The scale of the product or the sales cycle is no longer relevant to the process, since the technology behind mobile commerce allows for greater clarity in everything from product images through to simplifying the procurement/purchase procedure.

B2B involves complicated partner, reseller, and sales rep channel relationships, and the B2B buying decision involves more than one individual.

Mobile technologies actually facilitate complicated relationships, taking advantage of flexible databases and procedures to verify that regulations are correctly followed, and enable communication, confirmation, and accuracy.

B2B customers want a human touch, and do not really want to buy online!

This old-school thinking can find its source either in reluctance by suppliers to invest in a new marketplace, or an underestimation of B2B customers’ current habits, perhaps based on a lack of understanding of social media / professional forums and their role in modern commerce. Suppliers and buyers who are hesitant to incorporate Twitter or LinkedIn into their marketing and competitive awareness platforms, for example, stand to miss out on a great deal of direct information on habits and trends in the marketplace, not to mention customer feedback and competitive intelligence.

Mobile B2B threatens existing sales reps’ commissions, careers, and their carefully nurtured customer relationships.

Mobile B2B can actually assist sales reps by equipping them with digital catalogs, order forms, and payment channels on their own wireless devices. Rather than replacing sales reps, mobile serves to enhance their efficiency and profitability by connecting more directly with buyers.

Secure transaction technology, paired with numerous options for approval of and payment of big-ticket items, means that B2B companies and their customers are provided with a wide range of protections, making the purchase of a million dollar machine as safe as a one-dollar iTunes download.
If customers are choosing to purchase directly from brand manufacturers, and we are a distributor or reseller, then we stand to lose.

There is no benefit to changing from an existing sales business model.

No company will lose if it leaps quickly towards understanding and embracing the mobile marketplace, by adapting its procedures to suit. Although this represents a new frontier in business, it is not too late – there is still an opportunity for those who wish to do so.

OBJECTION
We already have a website, and we see no value in modifying it for mobile.

ANSWER
Mobile-enabled purchasing sites make it easier to cross-sell and up-sell. They realize savings through the less-expensive medium of online: ($1.00 spent on an online portal platform yields $4.80 in IT labor avoidance), they reduce support costs and generate incremental business. Approximately 31 percent of e-commerce revenue is incremental.

The answers to these objections come from observing the success of those organizations that have ventured forth and embraced online and mobile B2B. These include mobile phone and wireless data service providers whose products and services, until recently, were considered too expensive, and the business contracts too complex to be sold online.

---

6 Business-to-Business (B2B) Portals: Trends, Differentiators and Opportunities for Communications and High Tech Companies, Copyright © 2011, Accenture
Leading Practices
Playbook

The very dynamic, fluid nature of mobile B2B means it is not too late for any company to join the transformation. What is needed is a playbook: a collection of strategies that anticipates the roadblocks, and lays out a clear path to successful strategic execution.

A number of B2B companies have already succeeded in building online and mobile spaces that specifically address the needs of their customers – using some techniques closely related to B2C, and others that clearly highlight the differences between B2C and B2B.

Three high-priority action steps that can help get a mobile commerce house in order are:

• Design the sales experience with mobile in mind. This means that both the mobile site and the traditional website must leverage responsive design to promote ease of use and address the complexities associated with the B2B process. Examples of this include customer service, simple purchasing, bulk orders, and reorders. Select a few common scenarios that the company wants to be best at, and focus on those. The age of the static online catalog has passed and has been replaced with an agile, omni-channel, mobile-first approach that delivers a dynamic, reliable, personalized, easy-to-use, and immersive experience.

• Build an order anywhere structure that applies to both the purchaser and the sales rep, who can meet with the customer and use a tablet or smartphone to put together an order on their behalf right then and there, taking advantage of responsive features such as quick-order or order templates and last order summaries. This approach is designed to make purchasing easy for all parties, and actually helps increase the value of the sales rep in the relationship. If implementation of a complete order anywhere system is cost-prohibitive, then it is essential to at least incorporate an order anywhere mentality that supports the procedure in small measures.

• Focus on mobile sales guidance which takes a proactive stance in managing a customer’s needs, empowering the rep to show the customer the product details, videos, fact sheets, data sheets, and product images – making full use of available product content management tools. This step functions as a sales guidance tool, using product content to educate the customer and promote a long-term business relationship.

The additional leading practices listed below will help any organization make the leap to online mobile B2B safely and intelligently7.

• Employ a user-centric design process. Successful mobile B2B comes from assessing customer needs and factoring those into the design process. This requires starting with a mobile device and creating an experience that will render most effectively on that device, rather than replicating a desktop site onto the smaller screen. Wireframing, user profiles, and real-world testing for every device (tablet, smartphone, laptop, and desktop) assist in creating a physically practical and intuitive approach to reviewing, comparing, and purchasing products.

• Get the back office in order, as well as the front end. Logistics that support payment, processing, and delivery must be synchronized such that information on mobile and desktop correspond.

• Understand what the user wants. While a typical B2C consumer may be willing to put up with impersonal or irrelevant content, B2B purchasers have little patience for this, or for any sub-par experience. It may be said that B2B buyers are looking for any excuse to remove a vendor from their list of potentials. Personalization keeps the conversation possible.

• Keep only the most critical site elements. Mobile sites must offer only what is important to mobile users. Everything else must be removed.

• Take advantage of functionality such as CPQ (Configure Price Quote), which enables a customer to select and configure all the desired options and components of a complex piece of equipment and calculate a quote for the entire package.

• Position the product catalog to be visible before the login screen appears. This allows for better indexing and search engine optimization (SEO).

• Facilitate comparison shopping by offering an option for customers to use competitor part numbers while searching the site. Purchasers often shop using a spreadsheet or procurement list that refers to previous suppliers’ data. Including competitor part numbers makes the search process easier. (Example: www.mcmaster.com).

• Make allowances for unit of measure or international spelling variations. Different buyers may use different spellings or contractions for common terms. For example, foot, feet, ft., or the apostrophe symbol.

• Enable the ability to display catalogs specific to the contracts of individual buyers. Sellers often have pre-approved prices and selection options to which a buyer must conform.

• Offer highly-detailed product specification pages. The full capabilities of the digital experience should be made available to buyers. In addition to physical description, a product listing should include alternates, related products, compliance/regulatory information, and high-resolution images.

• Provide accurate inventory data. Real-time updates to the online mobile system should inform a buyer whether a part is in stock or will be available by a set date (availability to promise).

• Enable guided navigation and product selectors. The use of improved techniques for locating parts, such as a list of parts that appears after a certain related component has been chosen. “Since you have ordered a widget, here are the attachment bolts you may need.” (Example: www.quill.com).

• Offer quick order options. Ordering should be possible by simply inputting SKUs or pasting in a list of part numbers from a spreadsheet.

• Include quote engines that provide a legal quotation that can be used for approval purposes.

• Make split shipping an option. Allow specific contents of a single bulk purchase to be shipped to different customer locations.

• Have a responsive cart. This tells the customer where a product will be shipped from and if it can be shipped immediately. (Example: www.mcmaster.com).

• Ensure error tolerance when misspelled words are inserted into search fields.

• Provide location services to assist clients in connecting with closest shipping and delivery points.

• Lastly, consider creating an aggregated customer dashboard view for use by B2B sales reps. This is an advanced concept that will not be appropriate for every company, but which can aggregate the targeting capabilities of commerce technology and rich analytics from across multiple touchpoints – and display those results with curated content and big data showing trends in different industries. Sales reps with a significant book of business, who work with customers that place regular orders, can gain visibility into purchase history, browser history, search history from desktops and mobile devices, and other behaviors. These insights can be optimized into one consolidated view to enable sales people to proactively collaborate with customers and drive significant new sales opportunities based on their specific needs.

Mobile is the New Mainstream for B2B

B2B commerce teams should not dive in with abandon and mimic every component of the retail mobile experience. There are some capabilities that enhance B2B experiences and should be adopted from B2C, but there are other techniques that should be used judiciously or not at all. Focus on those user scenarios that are right for the business and fit into the overall commerce strategy.

For example, be sure to include personalized content, deep search capabilities, meaningful buying and browsing experiences, strong product content management, and comprehensive analytics, since all of these are essential capabilities for mobile B2B. On the other hand, gift-giving, social sharing, and customer review features are not likely to be applicable for industrial products.

It is critical for company decision-makers to view the mobile marketplace not as a luxury, but as the new normal for the way they do business. The mechanics of customization and consumerization of the modern business relationship offer greater opportunities for sustainable growth and expanding revenue streams.
About Accenture

Accenture is a global management consulting, technology services and outsourcing company, with more than 305,000 people serving clients in more than 120 countries. Combining unparalleled experience, comprehensive capabilities across all industries and business functions, and extensive research on the world’s most successful companies, Accenture collaborates with clients to help them become high-performance businesses and governments. The company generated net revenues of US$30.0 billion for the fiscal year ended August 31, 2014. Its home page is www.accenture.com.

This document makes descriptive reference to trademarks that may be owned by others. The use of such trademarks herein is not an assertion of ownership of such trademarks by Accenture and is not intended to represent or imply the existence of an association between Accenture and the lawful owners of such trademarks. This document is produced by consultants at Accenture as general guidance. It is not intended to provide specific advice on your circumstances.

About Adobe

Adobe is changing the world through digital experiences. We help our customers develop and deliver high-impact experiences that differentiate brands, build loyalty, and drive revenue across every screen, including smartphones, computers, tablets and TVs. Adobe content solutions are used daily by millions of companies worldwide—from publishers and broadcasters, to enterprises, marketing agencies and household-name brands. Building on our established design leadership, we enable customers not only to make great content, but to manage, measure and monetize it for maximum impact. For more information, visit www.adobe.com.

Adobe and the Adobe logo are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Adobe Systems Incorporated in the United States and/or other countries.