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The new B2B imperative: why digital excellence can’t wait

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B2B organizations know they need to adapt, but are they moving fast enough to meet buyer expectations?

In a world where the large majority of B2B revenue already flows through online channels, the stakes for digital transformation have never been higher. Enterprises are responding by making changes that positively impact the buyer journey.

At the same time, B2B organizations need to improve critical business processes. To drive these transformations, they're leveraging advanced technology like AI search to elevate the digital experience.

For the 300 B2B ecommerce leaders we surveyed across North America and EMEA for our **B2B Ecommerce Site Search Trends Report 2025,** striking the right balance between enhancing the user experience (UX) and managing back-end processes is a complex challenge.

As market demand and technology evolve, companies must navigate competing priorities — such as securing customer data, ensuring the quality of new and existing customer relationships, and effectively managing a range of contractual agreements — while improving UX.

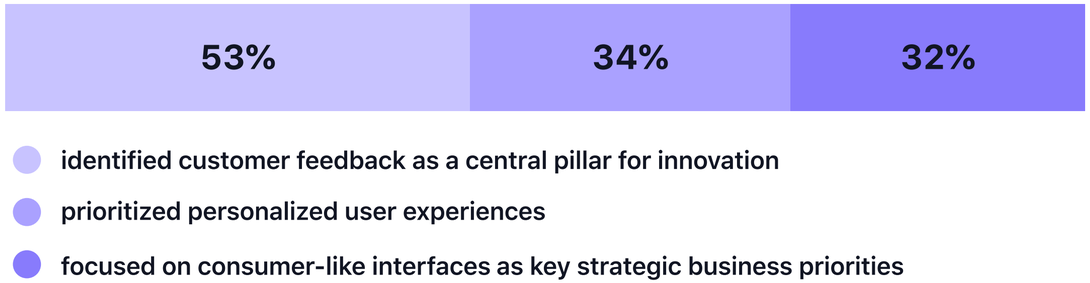
The data from our 2025 report demonstrates that AI is a key driver of this evolution. Sixty-seven percent of respondents used AI in some form, and 91% of those surveyed saw sales increase by as much as 49% through their online sales channels over the past year.

IT stack changes and challenges

Client relationships and products are critical elements in the B2B sales mix, but our research suggests the focus in the B2B ecosystem is shifting from the product to the client. Major ecommerce retailers are setting the bar on online shopping expectations. As a result, managing B2B client relationships, along with customer experience, is moving to the foreground.

Our data shows that 53% of respondents identified customer feedback as a central pillar for innovation. Similarly, 34% prioritized personalized user experiences and 32% focused on consumer-like interfaces as key strategic business priorities. This data highlights a shift in mindset, where B2B organizations are adopting customer-first principles that were once hallmarks of B2C.

B2B ORGANIZATIONS ARE ADOPTING B2C-LIKE CUSTOMER-FIRST PRINCIPLES



These priorities align with what B2B business leaders identified as some of their biggest challenges. Companies surveyed pointed to security (30%) and data management (28%) as areas of concern as they transition to a more customer-centered orientation. Bringing a new level of engagement to buyers requires gathering buyer data to personalize experiences, which could require new security certifications or infrastructure. There may be expansion or adoption of new technologies to build out how that data is stored as well.

B2B businesses also wanted to improve digital experience components by ensuring continuity across different sales channels. Thirty-two percent of those surveyed wanted to improve the online mobile experience for their customers and 24% were seeking to develop seamless cross-channel B2B capabilities. This, in another shift toward a B2C approach, shows the industry is seeking opportunities beyond the traditional B2B sales venues to meet their customers where they are.

Respondents were also enthusiastic about implementing generative AI solutions to improve critical search and discovery functionality. Generative AI's ability to automate catalog management and personalize marketing materials underscores its transformative potential to enhance both operational efficiency and customer engagement.

AI: a key enabler

The report shows that the B2B ecommerce space is enthusiastic about AI's potential. As AI adoption progresses, it’s reshaping the way B2B enterprises meet customer demands and innovate in a competitive landscape. However, there is significant room for growth as enterprises assess how AI technology will fit into their tech stacks.

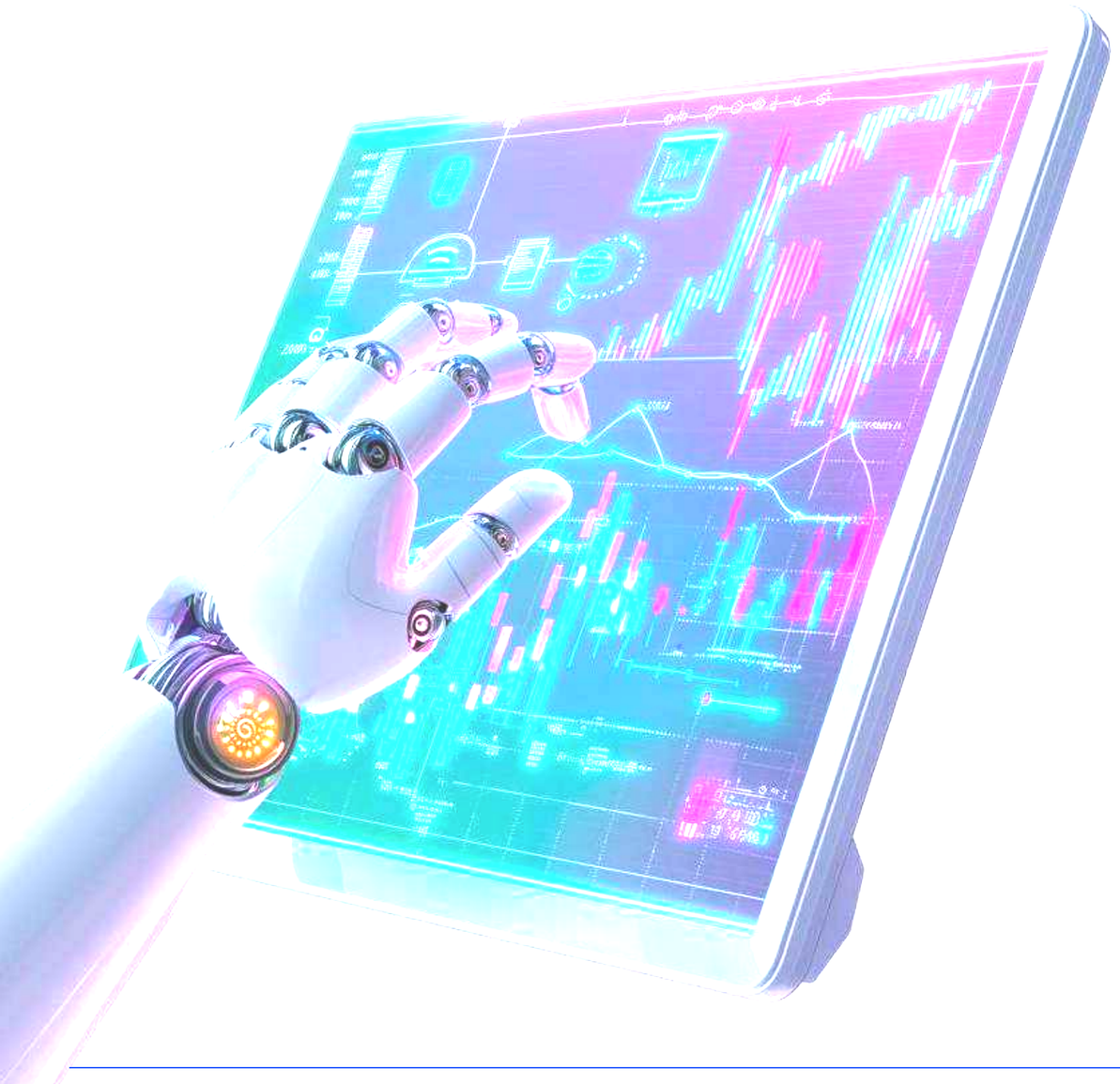
With 41% of B2B organizations surveyed already using AI at an operational level the scope of advanced technology integrations will increase through 2025. For respondents, AI is viewed as a powerful tool to help achieve significant business outcomes:

PROBLEM AREAS THAT AI COULD SOLVE	#	%	SEARCH AND DISCOVERY ROLE IN ADDRESSING PROBLEM AREAS
Improving product data quality	(n=50)	25%	41% | 29% | 30%
Implementing dynamic pricing adjustments	(n=51)	24%	36% | 31% | 33%
Enabling faster product innovation and development	(n=59)	24%	35% | 44% | 21%

Nevertheless, only 35% are harnessing the full capabilities of these advanced technological solutions. Most respondents are in the early stages. They are moving carefully as they take the next steps in their digital transformation, implementing AI across their tech stacks. This creates an interesting paradox: while most organizations recognize the importance of AI and advanced tech, the majority are still in early stages of adoption, navigating challenging operational landscapes.

Data suggests that many B2B organizations are evaluating best approaches. They want to use the technology to enhance the customer experience and upgrade critical business processes. At the same time, they are concerned about impacts on security and the trust earned in longstanding client relationships.

Hesitant about making a systematic technology change, B2B businesses are sensitive to impacts that an algorithmic application across the ecommerce stack might have on business architecture and



processes. For many, the complexity of integrating AI without disrupting existing systems presents a significant challenge, particularly in industries with deeply ingrained legacy architectures.

Although AI is increasingly viewed as a powerful and dynamic tool that can be used to address specific business challenges, these concerns are holding many B2B businesses back. Rather than simply jumping on the AI bandwagon, B2B organizations are taking a more considered approach to their AI implementations.

B2B ecommerce players understand that AI can help generate clear bottom-line results (e.g., businesses using AI to enhance product data quality could expect measurable improvements in sales velocity and customer retention) and is a critical driver of digital excellence in the ecommerce space. But they need assurances regarding the security and safety of customer data and the impacts on client relationships and critical business processes.

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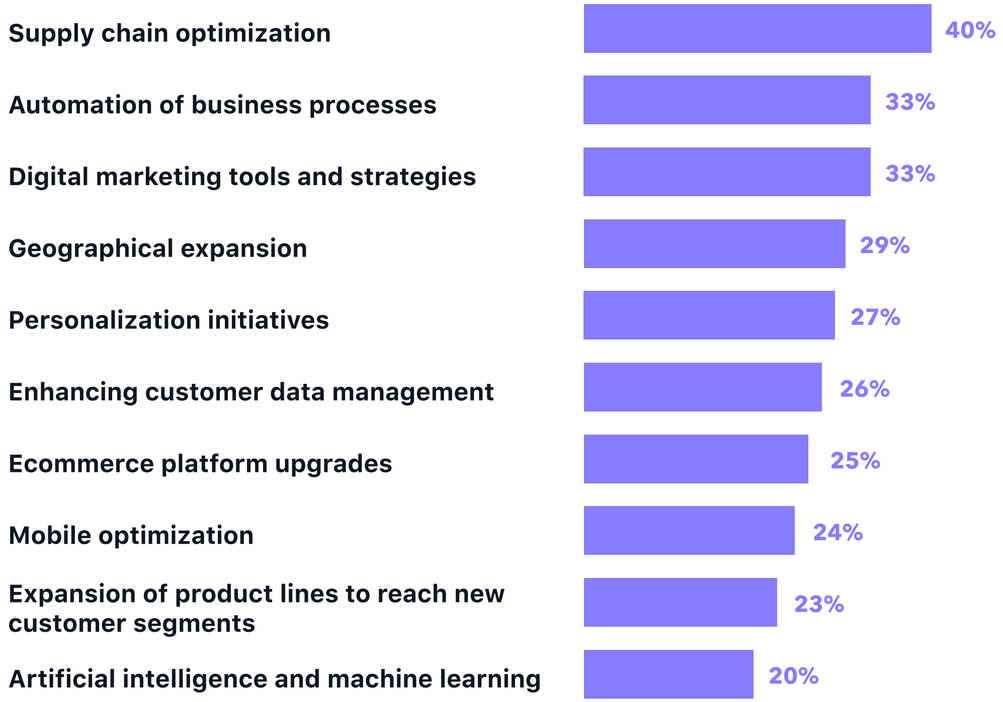
Future shaping trends

The tension between ambition and execution underscores a pivotal moment for B2B ecommerce, where companies must either embrace transformation or risk being left behind. While organizations recognize the need to make progress, the data shows that high implementation costs (30%), uncertainty around ROI (28%), and economic volatility in 2024 have all hindered infrastructure investment.

B2B businesses, with their more siloed and complex architecture, understand that a range of foundational elements must be in place before moving toward higher levels of AI integration. However, the key growth opportunities that respondents identified in the report all rely on AI-powered solutions. These opportunities include:



This list tells us that the most significant question about the AI transition isn't if it will occur, but when. To harness growth in these areas, B2B ecommerce enterprises will have to accelerate efforts in the coming year. This should help them meet buyers' expectations in ways that begin to emulate many aspects of the B2C experience.

The long-term view

Achieving digital excellence isn't a one-time investment; it takes an ongoing alignment of technical innovation and strategic vision. For B2B organizations, the success of a high-level technology upgrade — such as an intelligent, AI-enabled stack — depends on these processes working seamlessly together.

For example, in the case of supply chain evolution, this means optimizing operations and implementing sustainable practices that ultimately enhance visibility at all points through the supply chain process. Having the necessary technical expertise and buy-in at multiple business levels is critical to making the equation work.

Preparing for an AI implementation involves understanding business needs and taking a systematic approach (e.g., KPIs, pilot programs, and cross-functional teams to ensure technical feasibility and business alignment). It also requires carefully assessing where the technology can have the greatest impact.

The report shows that B2B businesses understand AI isn't simply a value-added feature. It is an integral technology that links customers to their data and maintains the quality and security of that data. It also enhances customer relationships and opens a range of innovative possibilities to B2B sales and marketing teams.

For B2B ecommerce, creating seamless cross-channel experiences, increasing personalization, and improving mobile capabilities makes the entire ecosystem more customer-centered. This development is no longer just a possibility; it’s inevitable.

The respondents are clear: ramping up to more sophisticated AI-powered solutions should not be a sprint. Instead, it’s a measured evolution that considers the challenges and complexity of operating in the B2B ecommerce ecosystem. Digital transformation isn’t a destination; it’s a journey, and the time to act is now.

Want to find out more about B2B and AI search?

Download the B2B Ecommerce Site Search Trends Report 2025.

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