



The definitive guide to B2B ecommerce

How to build exceptional buying experiences for the new B2B landscape

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01

Executive summary

Millennials are on the rise in B2B, increasingly moving into positions that afford them decision-making power. In fact, 70% of B2B buyers are projected to be millennials by 2025, and they expect digitally rich purchasing experiences.

These new expectations—fueled by the fact that online buying is more efficient and available 24/7—are in turn shifting the B2B landscape.

That means a reimagining of the entire buying process, focused on delivering delightful, human-oriented experiences—achieved by automating manual tasks such as order taking and data sharing in favor of more meaningful in-person interactions and intuitive, self-serve experiences. Buyers overwhelmingly prefer to manage their orders and accounts online—83%, in fact, and that number is growing quickly. And they won't adopt a new tool that makes it more difficult to place orders.

So yes, that's another thing you can blame on millennials: the shift to a new standard in B2B commerce.

And that's okay.

Because as technology evolves and generational expectations change, so too will buying habits. Which means that you must adapt the way you sell to avoid falling behind so far that you never catch up.



85%

of B2B companies believe
it's critical to centralize
their commerce onto a
single platform.

source: Shopify data

But the truth is, many businesses aren't equipped for this change. The legacy platforms that have long powered their commerce functions are clunky and unintuitive. And those who rely on custom-built commerce platforms are often subject to hefty developer resources and investment. What's more, the manual processes and bloated tech stacks associated with these platforms lead to limited growth opportunities. And the larger the enterprise, the more difficult it is—especially if they're managing multiple smaller lines of businesses in a decentralized way.

That's what you're up against.

Yet the appeal to overcome these obstacles speaks for itself. B2B commerce represents a massive opportunity, currently estimated to be worth \$7.7 trillion—more than double the value of DTC commerce, at \$3.8 trillion. And with firms like McKinsey & Company declaring that “B2B ecommerce has taken the lead as the most effective sales channel,” it's no wonder that 85% of B2B companies believe it's critical to centralize their commerce onto a single platform in order to take advantage of the opportunity without creating unscalable processes that will limit their future growth.

Ultimately, it's really all about getting more efficient. More streamlined. More self-serve. All in the service of making the experience more convenient and intuitive to both buyers and internal teams, designed so that anyone can quickly learn your commerce setup and reduce your dependence on highly specialized staff and expensive training.

In this guide, we'll dig into what this new era of B2B commerce looks like, how to seize its remarkable opportunity, and how B2B brands that invest in a modern experience are thriving.

Shopify is a leader

Between our medals in all 12 categories in the 2024 *Paradigm B2B Combine* or our designation as a Leader in *The Forrester Wave™: Commerce Solutions for B2B, Q2 2024*, one thing is clear: Shopify is all in on B2B.

→ [GET DETAILS](#)

02

B2B businesses are complex—but Shopify makes it more intuitive



As promised, let's take a closer look at each of the challenges we just mentioned, along with a bit more context—and ways to overcome them with Shopify.

It's hard to keep pace with changing buying behaviors

Millennials grew up in the age of digital exploration. And as the digital world evolved to become faster, smoother, and more personal, it did so with millennials—and commerce generally—in tow. Blockbuster was replaced by Netflix. The taxi cab by Uber and Lyft. And the general store by Amazon. Why? Because they're more convenient and meet buyers where they are.

That's a microcosm of the world millennials were raised in—and it's an illustration of why they bring with them the expectation of seamless, modern purchasing experiences online.

It's hard to keep pace, but it's crucial when it comes to meeting the needs of buyers—a whopping 87% of whom said they would actually pay more to work with a supplier that had an excellent ecommerce experience. What's more, 90% said they would leave a supplier for a competitor if that supplier's digital channel couldn't keep up with their needs.

Make the wholesale experience feel familiar

Fortunately for B2B brands everywhere, similar surveys and data have revealed what will capture and keep millennial attention: ease of use. But tactically, it's not always clear how to make that a reality. We have a few ideas that can help get you on your way.

With Shopify, you get everything you need right out of the box to exceed your customers' expectations of modern B2B buying. More specifically, you can provide them with a tailored, self-serve experience that adapts to buyers' unique pricing, product, and account needs.

Tailor wholesale buying

Your buyers have a wide range of needs, and they likely buy from all over the world. That means different markets, channels, and expectations. You can make them each feel at home by using Shopify to tailor the experience, showcasing the correct pricing, currency, payment and shipping options, and more to match their journey or customer context. And with Shopify, you also gain access to unlimited catalogs you can use to customize pricing and product availability through our intuitive admin interface or APIs.

Personalize storefronts

Whether your business is a mix of DTC and B2B or fully B2B, Shopify helps you create powerful storefront experiences with content personalized for all of the customers you work with. We help you tap into your data to fuel this effort, with engaging moments like product recommendations and promotions, as well as more effective marketing and sales strategies. Banner messages, section blocks, and promotional messaging are all examples of items that can be personalized for specific customer contexts (B2B vs. DTC) and regions. This is a surefire way to keep your customers on your site and coming back again and again.

Offer self-serve purchasing

Here's an eye-opener for you: according to TrustRadius, 100% of buyers want to self-serve all or part of the buying journey. What's more, 83% prefer purchasing through digital self-serve channels over speaking with sales reps. Like we said, although in-person interactions are still common, they're becoming less so, especially for smaller customers. Of course, larger customers still require hands-on time, but the focus of that time will move to discussing merchandising, pricing strategies, and new products.

100%

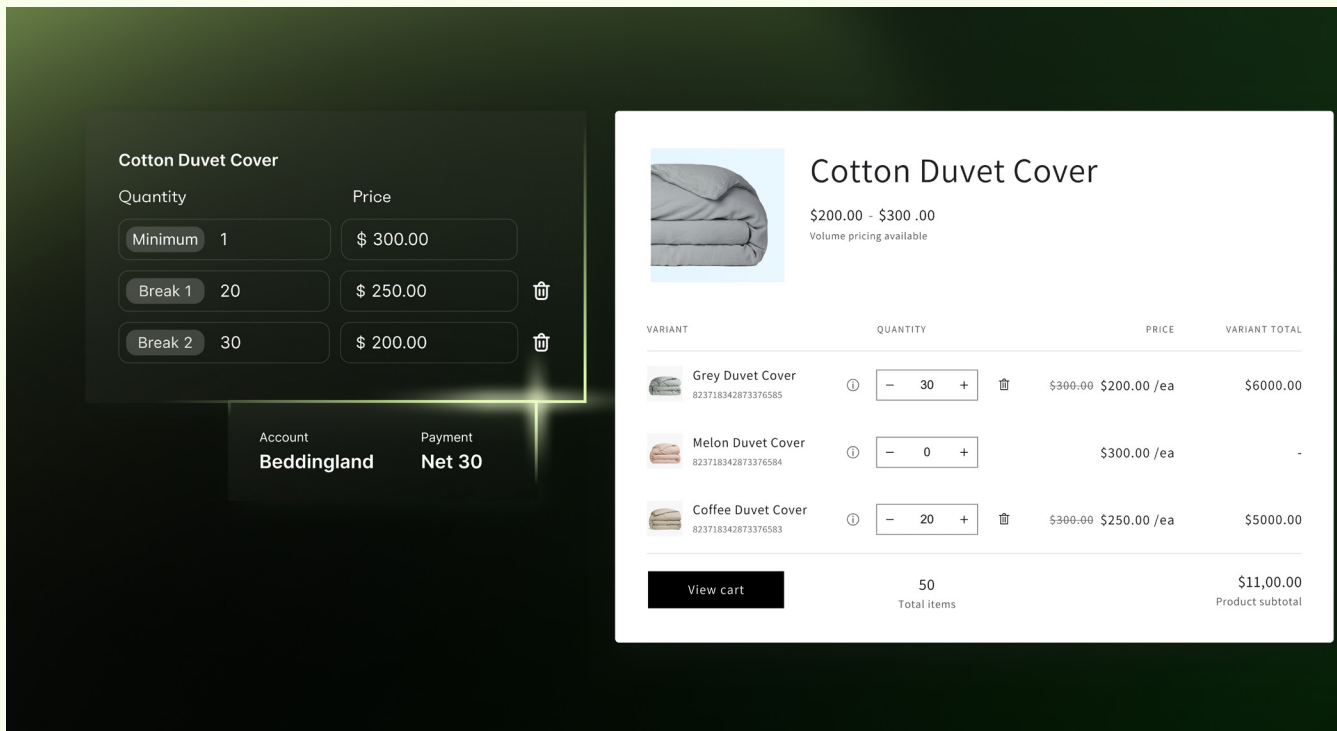
of buyers want to self-serve all or part of the buying journey

83%

prefer purchasing through digital self-serve channels over speaking with sales reps

And despite what some might assume, self-service doesn't have to mean distancing from customers. In fact, a Forrester case study of Carrier's switch to Shopify found the company actually got *closer* to the purchasing audience than ever before. This was a result of the digital team's extensive workshops with business units to better understand their target customers and the current state of their people, processes, and technology, and a collaborative technology road mapping process for addressing those insights.

And you can too. With Shopify's intuitive and customizable portal, you can scale your operations by letting buyers place orders with quick bulk ordering tools—and make reordering a breeze to drive higher order frequency.



Empower your sales teams

While it's true that buyers expect a mostly self-serve B2B experience, that certainly doesn't diminish the importance of your sales reps. In fact, it actually means your sales teams can spend more time making sure their relationships with buyers are as authentic and valuable as possible. To that end, you should look to equip your reps with all the tools they need, available on Shopify: simple reordering, up-to-date product pricing, customer data, and access to information. Doing so will help cut down time spent on manual hours and add more time on strategically meeting buyers at the right moments to get deals done.

B2B platforms of the past aren't up to par with modern standards

DTC is well known for simple, intuitive sites optimized by rounds and rounds of UX research and content design. In contrast, B2B sites typically prioritize the business's requirements over the buyer's experience. This means that ease of use and personalized, self-serve buyer experiences often fall by the wayside.

Businesses could maybe get away with that in the past—but remember the stat we shared earlier: 87% of buyers will pay more to work with a supplier with a better digital experience. In other words, a clean user experience is so important that buyers are willing to pay more for it—they're making businesses pay for not prioritizing their experience.

The B2B buying experience is complex, yes. But the UI doesn't have to reflect that. Accomplishing both your complex logic and an intuitive experience is possible with a platform that prioritizes innovation and UX. And in fact, the way you present your B2B business is becoming a major competitive differentiator in a saturated market. The smoother and more intuitive your experience is, the more you'll win. And on Shopify, you can do just that. The clean, intuitive DTC experiences we're known for also carry over to B2B. The added bonus? Managing both on Shopify means everything is unified on a single platform.

Power all of your commerce within a single ecosystem

The wonderful thing about moving more of your business onto a single platform is that it really is beneficial to any business. Maybe yours is blending the DTC and B2B worlds, or maybe it's purely focused on B2B—whatever the case, working from one platform is key to making all your operations more efficient and more cost effective, with clear benefits to your bottom line.

With Shopify, you can do just that. Because our platform is designed specifically for commerce—with a mission to make commerce better for everyone—you can power all of your different channels and customer types you work with from a single place.

87%

of buyers will pay more to work with a supplier with a better digital experience

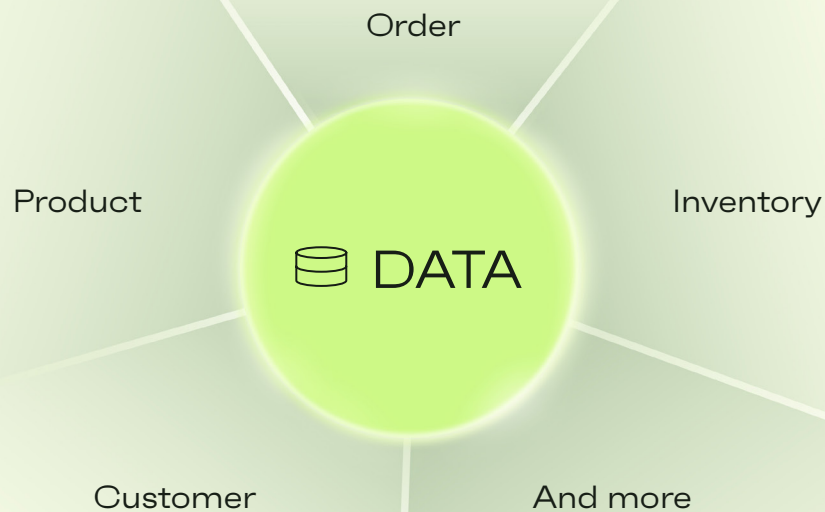
Trust the experts

By harnessing more than 20 years of commerce excellence, Shopify is in the best position to help B2B businesses evolve and innovate quickly. We also pride ourselves on helping all brands build an exceptional self-serve presence that will help them scale and grow—whether they're just starting out or they're a global enterprise. No matter what your business model is, Shopify gives you powerful features to bring your business online—like customer-specific pricing, sales rep permissions, automated workflows, and a vast app ecosystem. So whether you're all in on B2B or you need to balance DTC and B2B, you can sell exactly how you want.

And the cherry on top? You'll get the world's best-converting checkout, trusted by 644 million global customers.

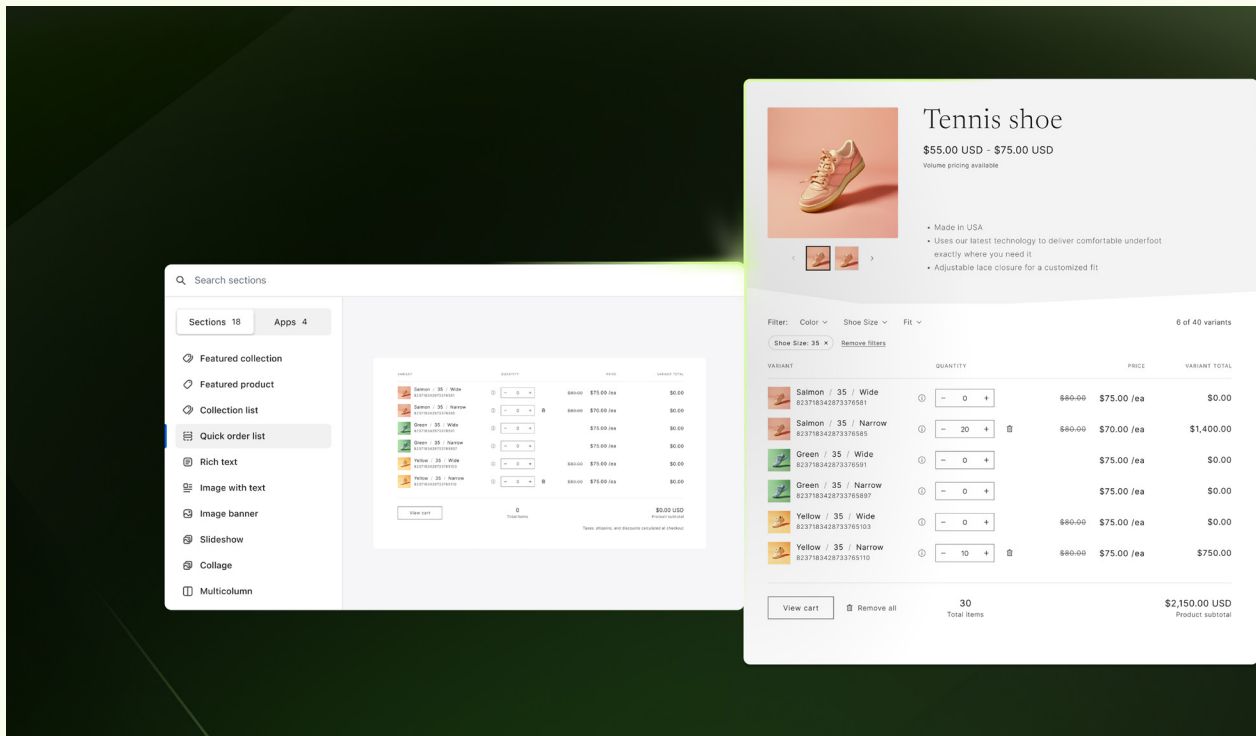
Unify commerce

Data is the heart and soul of business—which means it's absolutely essential to get it right. By consolidating it all onto Shopify, you can do just that. With this central source of data, you'll have all your customer, product, inventory, order data, and more all in one place. The results? More accurate data, which leads to better insights into your business, including how certain products, channels, and promotions are performing. From there, you can test new initiatives and adapt quickly as you learn from your customers. Plus, with real-time data without race conditions, you can minimize inaccuracies and engineering risk—while creating an overall more predictable buyer experience. And one more perk: by deploying and managing all your channels from one place, you can reduce your total cost of ownership.



Prioritize ease of use

Front to back, start to finish, Shopify is built to be easy to use and understand. On the front end, that means you can bring even your most tech-averse buyers online with an intuitive self-serve experience. They can easily manage orders and accounts, which not only helps them—it saves your back-office teams valuable time. On the back end, that means anybody on your team can quickly learn your commerce setup and workflows, reducing your dependence on highly specialized staff and extensive training.



In the case of Carrier, prioritizing ease of use on their platform has transformed how their distributors turn inventory.

As Forrester writes: “Carrier’s distributor networks are often specialized for a region, which means they’re often unique. To support the varied business models at specific points in the value chain, the experiences must be alike but not the same.”

Unifying their operations onto a single platform allowed them to compose and customize these unique experiences across many regions while reusing components, with improved outcomes for everyone involved.

Cut costs by investing in an innovative platform

If there's a universal truth in commerce, it's that commerce is always evolving. And the businesses that fall behind are the ones that can't keep up with that evolution.

At Shopify, we understand that better than anyone. That's why we're committed to staying on the leading edge of commerce innovation, building a platform as future-focused as your business dreams. We dedicate thousands of engineers to this endeavor, and every year they deliver on that promise: they build and ship more than 200 new features across the platform that are immediately available for you to use. This ensures that you're always equipped to meet the needs of a B2B market that's always changing.

Launch and adapt quickly and for less

We mentioned that simple tasks can take longer with a custom platform. With Shopify, the opposite is true: you can set up a store in record time with our scaled composable framework. In fact, a new Shopify storefront can be implemented 37% faster—and for 33% less—than with the average competitor thanks to lowered overhead and outsourcing costs.

Our straightforward admin UI, APIs, and other first-party features also make it a breeze to manage both sides of your business. And once you're live, you can make all the tweaks you need from an intuitive interface. Test new promotions, messaging, markets, customer segments, and more, and then make any changes you want instantly based on feedback from your customers.



Find out how much you can save on Shopify with our total cost of ownership calculator.

Carrier's low cost of
Shopify implementation

90%
faster

10%
lower in cost

Future-proof your business

It's true that nobody knows the future. But we improve our platform based on rigorous research into trends and outlook on where commerce is headed. Our agility creates agility for you, whether you're just trying to implement new features or you're looking to run thoughtful experiments that help you test out new markets or new ways of streamlined operating. In Forrester's evaluation of Carrier's Shopify implementation, they credited low cost of implementation—90% faster and at 10% lower than on their traditional monolith platform—as a key factor behind their ability to relaunch more than 40 storefronts unified onto Shopify's streamlined platform.

We make sure our customers are ready for the future of B2B. And even more importantly, our platform is built to grow with you and be as flexible as your business needs require. So that as your business grows, or even if you have complex strategies, we'll grow with you as our platform evolves.

It's tough to grow a business with manual processes and bloated tech stacks

One caveat to throw your way now. While it's undeniable that B2B is shifting overall toward online ordering and self-serve experiences, there's still a significant portion of B2B commerce that continues to rely on traditional, manual methods. In fact, [McKinsey & Company](#) reports that one-third of B2B transactions are conducted via manual methods like phone and fax.

As the shift to digital continues, it's crucial not to ignore these manual processes.

But let's not muddy the point:

As Forrester writes, "Using a traditional approach with a traditional platform, [a B2B business like Carrier] was at the end of their ability to digitalize their offline businesses. [They] needed a new method—a method with different economics."

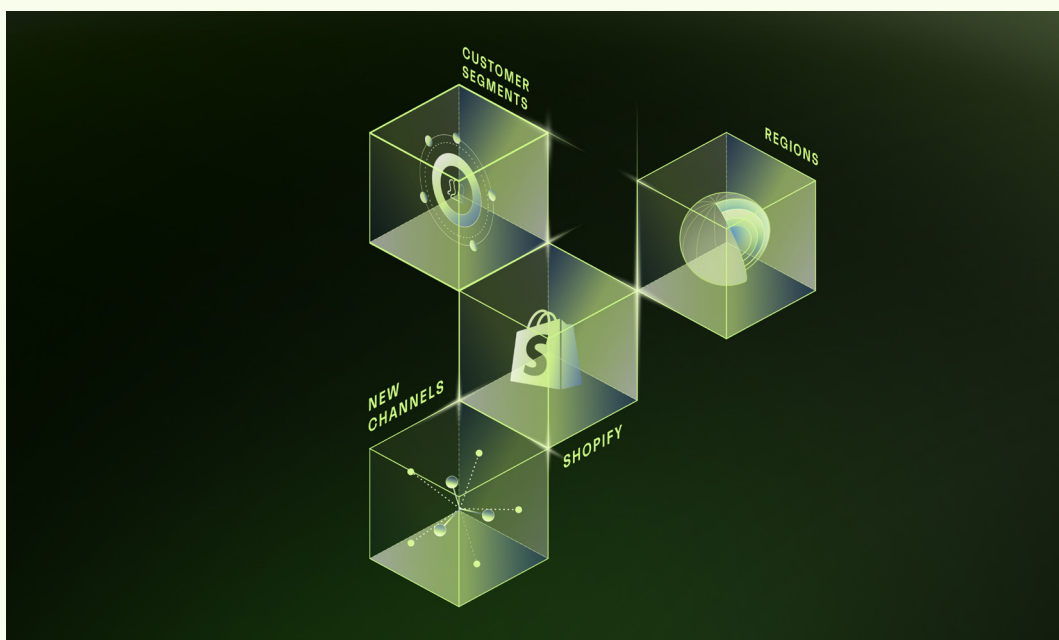
In other words, the current state of affairs in many B2B businesses is that some manual processes are still—and will always be—necessary. Which is precisely why it's so crucial to streamline as much of the rest as possible. The key, then, to growth in B2B is mastering the omnichannel approach: connecting with buyers through direct ecommerce, sales reps, trade shows, distributors, eprocurement, marketplaces, and even in-person showrooms.

If this sounds like a recipe for internal inefficiencies, a bloated tech stack, and a tangle of disconnected software and processes that need to be first undone and then synced, don't worry: that's the old way of being. Platforms like Shopify give B2B businesses the flexibility needed to set up and manage each workflow in a single, unified platform. This in turn creates efficiencies and streamlines the stack.

Streamline the back end for efficiency

To grow your business across channels, you'll need a unified back office that can support all the multiple front offices—each with its own specific products, content, delivery, pricing, and packaging. With Shopify as your unified commerce engine, it's easy to expand into new channels, regions, and customer segments—and test experiences to quickly adapt to your customers' needs—without adding more weight to your tech stack.

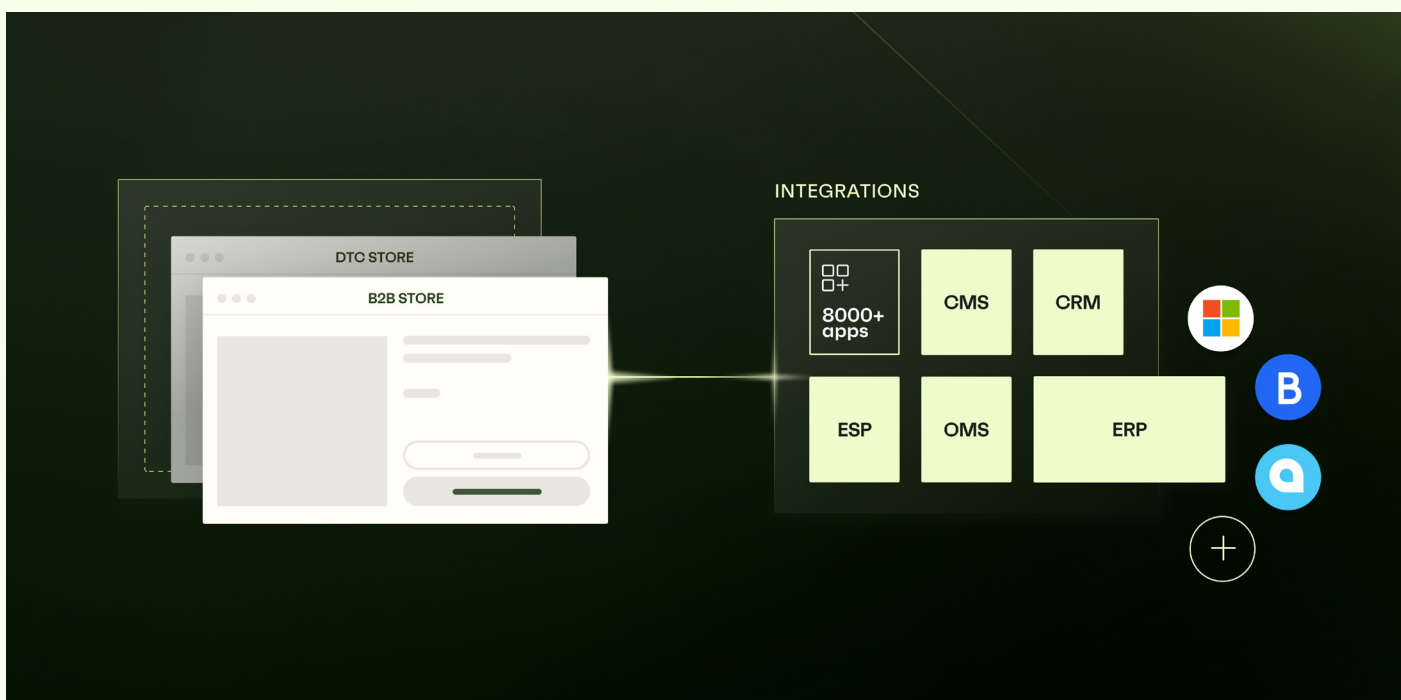
And a key feature: Shopify works as a standalone system or it can fit right into your tech stack to consolidate your operations.



Enjoy unlimited flexibility and seamless integration

Although Shopify is ready to go on day one, you're also free to add as much functionality as you want to the base platform. You can tailor your business solutions with headless storefront APIs, inject custom data with metafields, write custom logic with [Shopify Functions](#), or customize your checkout with [Checkout Extensibility](#).

We know that ERPs are the source of truth for most B2B businesses, which is why we've made it easy to connect to yours. We've partnered with the leading ERP providers like Microsoft, Acumatica, and NetSuite to give you access to out-of-the-box integrations that allow you to seamlessly sync your data to and from Shopify. Plus, we have a suite of powerful B2B APIs to help you simplify your tech stack and connect Shopify to your CRM, WMS, and other external systems.



Shopify also allows you to customize your store and extend the platform to fit your business needs with an impressive ecosystem of more than 8,000 apps and tons of B2B-specialized partners. This way, you can not only customize your platforms to suit your ways of working, but also manage all of your channels and markets from a single platform.

03

Brands are already finding B2B success with seamless experiences



We've talked for a while now about how our platform is built for B2B. But we can walk the walk too. Take a look at these examples of real businesses that have already launched on Shopify—and seen major success.

Dermalogica takes control of their B2B complexity and customization

Dermalogica set out in 1986 on a mission to give skincare therapists—and their clients—the education and products they need to keep their skin healthy. But as the company grew, their custom-built B2B ecommerce platform stopped being enough. After moving to Shopify, the company saw a dramatic improvement in the B2B buying experience, letting their customers shop in a more effortless, familiar way while still balancing all the complexities of their B2B business.



”

Moving to Shopify has been a pivotal moment for Dermalogica Canada. Not only were we the first to market within the greater organization, but through our early adoption, we have become a basis for other markets to look at Shopify as a viable B2B option. One thing we can be confident in is that we can grow with Shopify as the platform evolves, which gives us the peace of mind knowing our technology stack is future-proofed.

Melissa Daniels

General Manager, Dermalogica

With Shopify, Dermalogica Canada achieved major benchmarks

338%

increase in reorder frequency

23%

increase in conversion rate

75%

of customers rate the buyer experience as a 4 out of 5 or higher

→ **[READ THE FULL STORY](#)**

Brooklinen soars to new B2B heights



From their DTC beginnings to their current hybrid position of adding B2B sales with major US hotel chains, Brooklinen has come a long way in their ecommerce journey. They had been struggling with manual, ad-hoc sales and knew this approach would be difficult to scale. So they turned to Shopify—a platform they felt balanced ease of use with a modern, branded buying experience that allowed their customers to self-serve their reorders without the need to contact a sales rep.

”

B2B on Shopify allows us to engage with these customers in a new way—kind of like a typical DTC customer but for B2B.

Kelly Hallinan

Senior Vice President of Emerging Channels, Brooklinen



With Shopify, Brooklinen saw fast results

-  Able to spend 80% of time working with customers
-  Unlock self-serve for customers to manage account and orders
-  Revisiting existing sections and customizations to take advantage of new Shopify functionality and evolving performance standards

→ [**READ THE FULL STORY**](#)

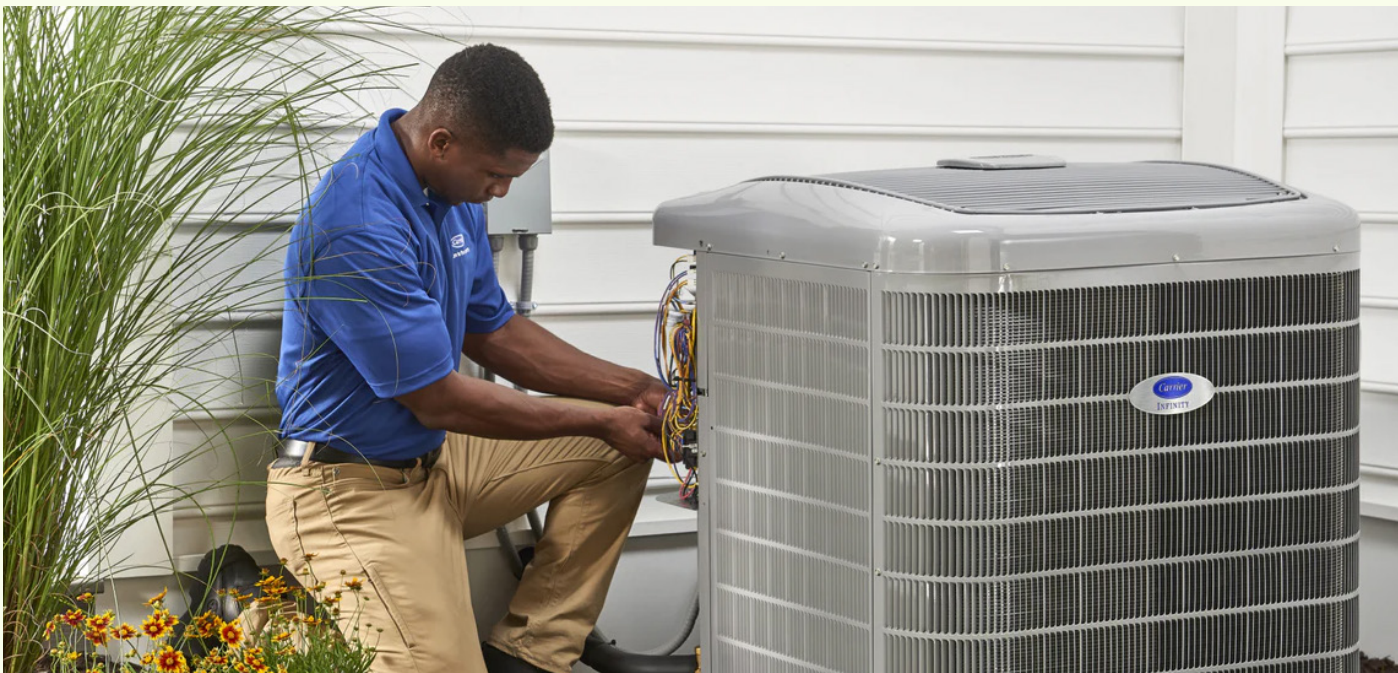
Carrier saves massive amounts of time and money in switching to Shopify

Carrier is the leading global provider of healthy, safe, sustainable and intelligent building and cold chain solutions.

As Forrester writes, “Carrier relies on distribution partners to reach a large number of many small regional markets, but those partners add distance between Carrier and the customer. Over time, the opportunity cost of being distanced from the customer grew. So did the cost of Carrier reps servicing distributor orders with aging, one-off platforms.”

With more than 40 storefronts to support serving audiences across the globe, building locally relevant self-serve solutions was an expensive and time-consuming challenge. In fact, on their traditional monolith platform, it cost \$2 million on average and between 9 to 12 months to stand up a single store.

Now, they can get a fully mature ecommerce solution for any of its complex selling audiences into the market for just \$100,000 in 30 days.



”

For us to monetize a new idea in 30 days is essentially an opportunity to test billion dollar ideas. Instead of waiting years to do it, Shopify allows us to do it in weeks.

Steve Duran

Associate Director of Global Commerce, Carrier



Shopify empowered Carrier to make major changes



Launch new ecommerce experiences in 30 days, compared to approximately 9–12 months on their previous platform



Reduce their cost from up to \$2 million per ecommerce website to just \$100,000



Test ideas, iterate and ship new go-to-market motions at the pace of a startup

→ **READ THE FULL STORY**

Filtrous invests in better B2B for both the present and future

Once powered by BigCommerce, multimillion-dollar lab supply company Filtrous decided to seek greener pastures when their year-long custom site build delivered underwhelming results. The lack of first-party B2B features, slow innovation, subpar customer experience, and the platform always breaking were major catalysts for this move. Moving to Shopify was seamless, which meant the team was able to quickly get their needed features up and running quickly: customer-specific catalogs, custom discounts, and payment options.

”

The constant updates to B2B on Shopify have left us pleasantly surprised. It seems like these releases are highly tailored to the needs of B2B merchants, and makes us feel like we’re being heard.

Yin Fu

Director of Ecommerce, Filtrous

With Shopify, Filtrous has seen major B2B success

-  Launched their wholesale storefront in just 63 days
-  Saved 10 hours of manual work per week for their customer service team, plus 2 hours of manual work per week for their sales team
-  Increased their organic conversion rate by 27%

→ [READ THE FULL STORY](#)





Want to read more success stories?

Check out our case study library to read more real-world examples of how Shopify is fueling next-generation B2B success.

→ [BROWSE THE LIBRARY](#)

04

Shopify is *the* B2B commerce solution



While change may be constant, that doesn't mean you have to be left behind. The opposite is a perfectly viable alternative.

With Shopify by your side, you'll be well equipped to handle the evolving B2B landscape, the growth you envision for your business, and the fluctuations that are inevitable in the future of commerce.

As you move fearlessly into that future of great B2B experiences, here's a recap of what we've covered and how Shopify can help:

- **Make wholesale experiences feel familiar**
Exceed your customers' expectations of modern B2B buying with a tailored, self-serve experience that adapts to their unique pricing, product, and account needs.
- **Power all your commerce within one platform**
Run your B2B and DTC business from one admin and even one store, so you can easily deploy and manage all of your channels and future-proof your growth.

- **Invest in an innovative platform to reduce spending**
Stay ahead of the rapidly evolving B2B market by relying on the commerce innovation fueled by our thousands of engineers and hundreds of new feature launches annually.
- **Streamline the back end for efficiency**
Set Shopify up as a standalone system or fit it right into your tech stack to streamline your operations.

Don't just take it from us

Our commitment to delivering powerful B2B solutions has paid off. Shopify medaled in all 12 categories in the *Paradigm B2B Combine*—an outstanding performance that's a testament to our exceptional capabilities as a B2B commerce platform. It also underscores our commitment to providing businesses with the tools and resources you need as you look to launch into new sales channels.

Shopify was also recognized as a Leader in *The Forrester Wave™: Commerce Solutions for B2B, Q2 2024*, achieving the highest possible scores in the Market Presence category and the Innovation and Partner Ecosystem criteria.

→ [**READ THE FORRESTER WAVE™**](#)

We made a promise to make commerce better for everyone, and that of course includes B2B. Because we believe buyers should expect the same high-quality experience in B2B transactions as they do in any other buying experiences.

No matter what your process is, what industry you work in, what products you sell, what segment you work with, at the end of the day you're still selling to a human being. And with Shopify, you can prove to them you know that.



Get in touch with one of our experts today

Whether you need more insight,
have a few questions, or want to
get started, we'd love to chat.

→ [LET'S TALK](#)

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