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Research survey conducted by Sapio Research

# B2B eCommerce Trends Report for 2023

A multi-country report on the impact of  
eCommerce in today's B2B sector



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## Introduction

B2B firms need to make it easy for customers to find, research and buy from them. Any friction in the process could prompt a potential customer to opt for a competitor. This is particularly pertinent when we factor in an uncertain economic climate; against which backdrop the B2B sector is increasingly embracing eCommerce's potential.

The benefits of eCommerce storefronts or portals have long been recognized within B2C but as we settle into the post-pandemic era of increased remote working, more sophisticated digital communications, and a shift towards customer lifecycle marketing, the B2B sector is raising its eCommerce game.

The ability of eCommerce to improve customer experience, boost business growth and open up new market segments are some of the reasons adoption is growing within B2B. Not to mention the ability to better personalize sales and marketing interactions; a must when dealing with large decision-making groups, complex sales engagements and long buying cycles.

This year's B2B eCommerce Trends Report surveyed more than four hundred B2B professionals in the US and Europe to understand firms' changing attitudes towards eCommerce; where they plan to invest; the role of channels such as online marketplaces; and how B2B organizations are driving value from their eCommerce solutions.

The results paint a picture of a market alive not only to the immediate revenue opportunities eCommerce represents, but to a raft of broader competitive advantages which ambitious organizations can capitalize on in 2023 and beyond.



### What do we mean by eCommerce in a B2B context?

Traditionally, eCommerce in B2B often referred to self-service tools, sometimes known as customer or dealer portals. However, since the technology has become more widely adopted, and user experience more closely mirrors business-to-consumer (B2C) or direct-to-consumer (D2C) online shops, eCommerce within B2B now encompasses a wide range of applications and processes; from simple self-serve tools to end-to-end, personalized purchase journeys.



## Methodology

This research was conducted among **403** companies in the US, UK, Germany, Netherlands, Denmark, Norway and Sweden with revenues above **\$20** million. At an overall level, results are accurate to **±4.9%** at **95%** confidence limits assuming a result of **50%**.

## Key findings

**78%** of B2B organizations have an eCommerce storefront or customer self-service portal.

**52%** of revenue, on average, is generated through online eCommerce orders.

**64%** plan to increase their eCommerce investment over the coming year.

**51%** already use online marketplaces and another **26%** plan to do so in future.



**83%** of respondents view omnichannel as important to their overall strategy.

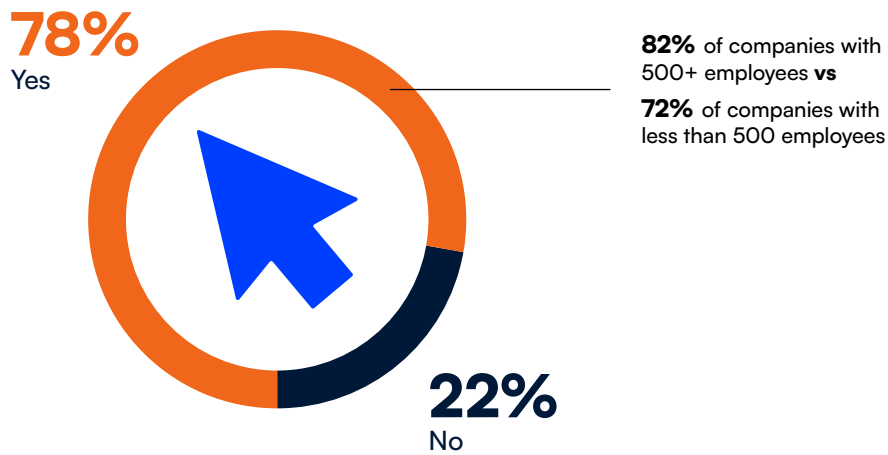
### Sapio Research

The interviews were conducted online by **Sapio Research** in February 2023 using an email invitation and an online survey.

## More than three-quarters of B2B firms now offer eCommerce portals

eCommerce is playing an increasingly important role in B2B. More than three-quarters (**78%**) of businesses provide their customers with an eCommerce storefront or customer self-service portal — up **26%** since last year.

**Q:** Do you currently provide your customers with an eCommerce storefront or customer self-service portal used, for instance, for online ordering, order history, payments, or other self-service capabilities?



### Firmographic outliers

Adoption rates vary by industry and company size. Sectors which historically relied heavily on offline sales and marketing channels are perhaps slower to adopt an eCommerce strategy than younger industries. Equally, larger firms are more likely to be offering eCommerce options to their customers than smaller ones.

Examples of variation in eCommerce adoption rates include company size:

- **82%** Companies with **500+** employees, compared to
- **72%** Companies with fewer than **500** employees





## 24/7 availability and customer experience are top priorities for customers and vendors alike

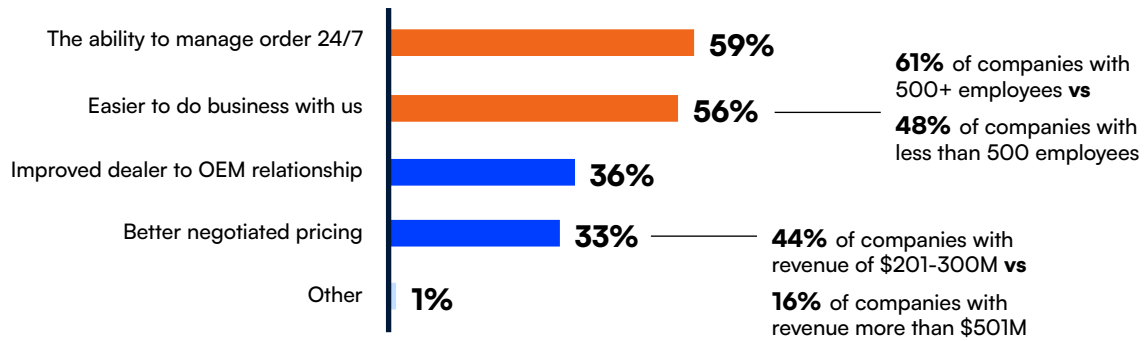
When it comes to the biggest benefits eCommerce can offer, B2B organizations and their customers are in agreement:

- **24/7** availability
- Customer experience



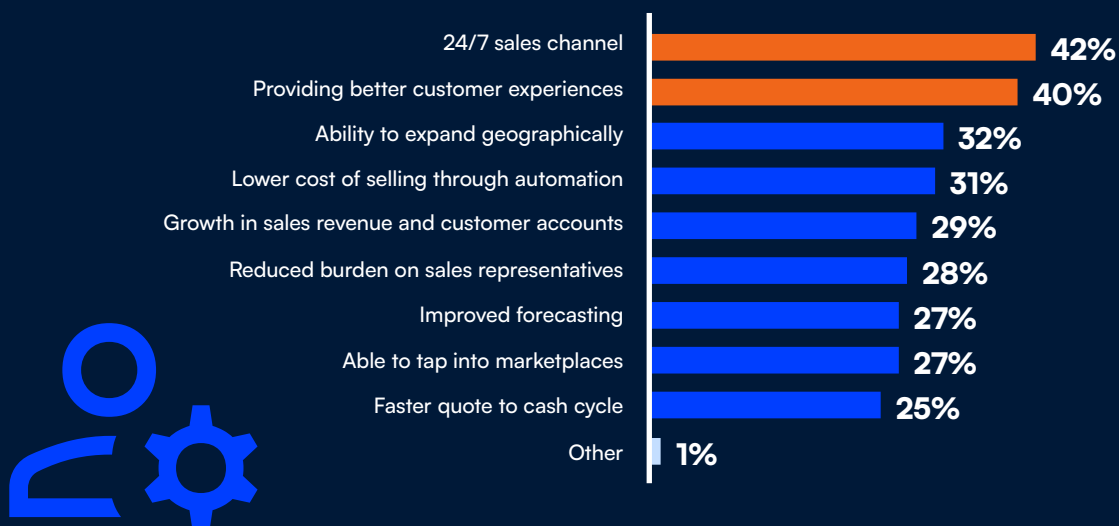
### What customers value

**Q:** You said that you have an eCommerce self-service portal. What are the benefits you hear most from your customers (or distributors)?



### What B2B organizations value

**Q:** What have been the main benefits of B2B eCommerce/self-service for your business?

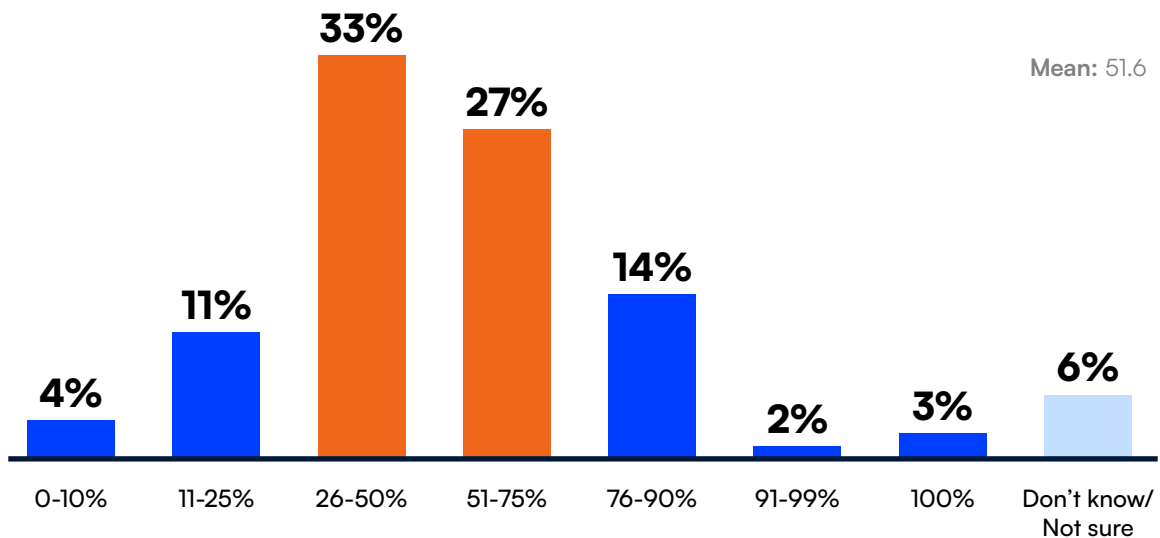


## The commercial impact of eCommerce

eCommerce represents a significant revenue channel with organizations using it to generate, on average, more than half their B2B revenue.

- **52%** of revenue from online eCommerce

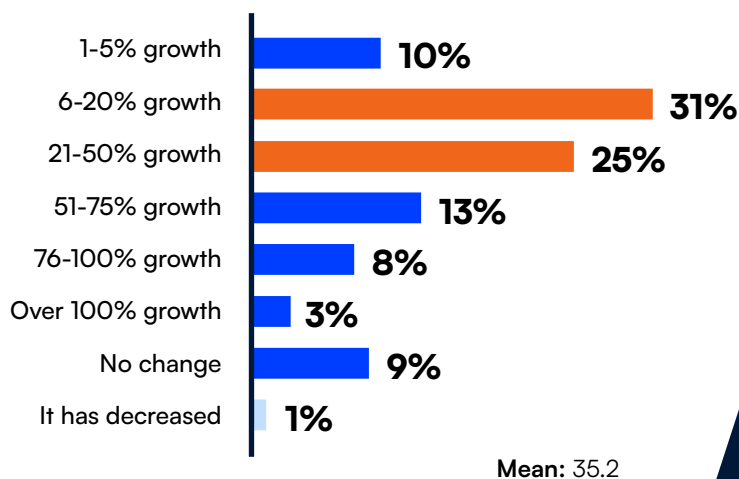
**Q:** What percentage of your B2B revenue is from online eCommerce orders?



Introducing eCommerce opens up new revenue opportunities, with respondents receiving a boost of over a third in sales income since implementation, on average.

- **35%** growth in sales revenue

**Q:** How does last year's sales revenue compare to the year before you implemented eCommerce?



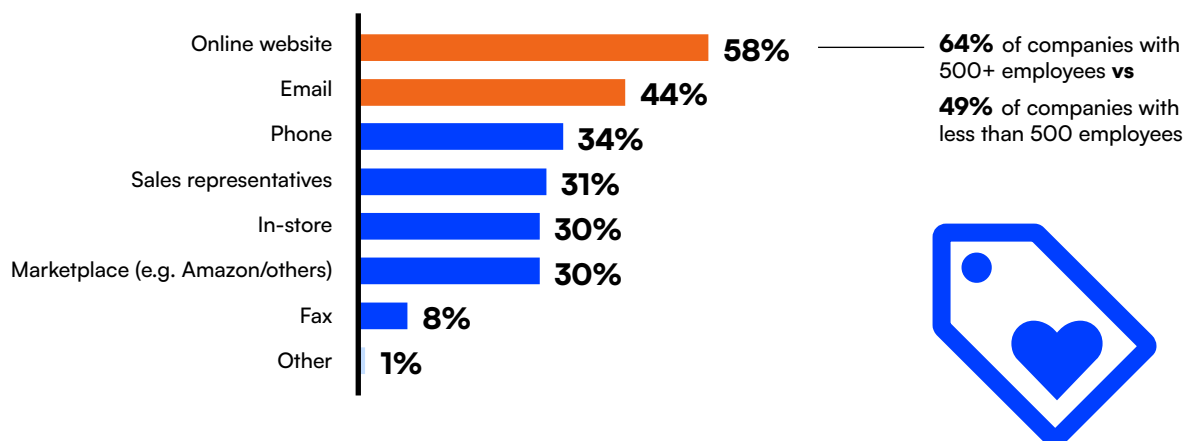
**The shift in B2B sales** from offline to online channels will continue, according to a 2022 report from Forrester. In the US, eCommerce sales are predicted to grow by **10.7%** between 2022 and 2027, with offline sales dropping from **63%** to **55%**.

## The role of eCommerce in today's B2B sales and marketing mix

eCommerce's impact extends far beyond transactional benefits within the purchase process, and this is reflected through the channels by which businesses receive orders. Online websites are the most popular channel for sales, with **64%** of companies with **500+** employees citing it as the source from which they receive the most orders. By comparison, **49%** of businesses with less than **500** employees cited online websites as their top sales channel.

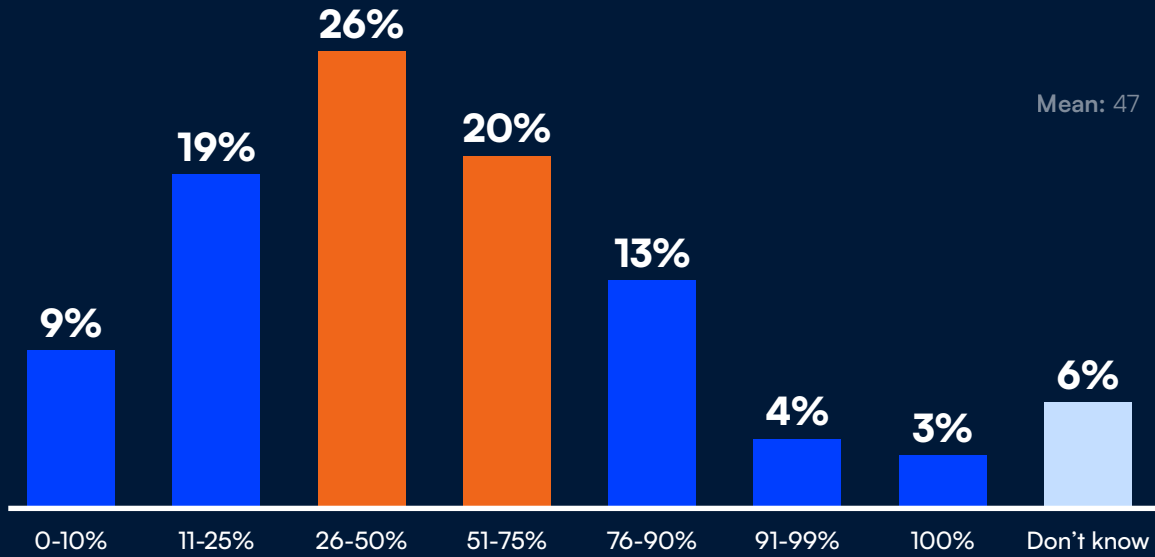
What's more, website (**58%**) and email (**44%**) are the most popular sales channels for B2B buyers, according to our respondents; and nearly half of sales happen online.

### Q: Through which channels do you receive sales orders most often?





**Q:** What percentage of your sales are made online today?



On average, respondent report around half (**47%**) of sales are made online

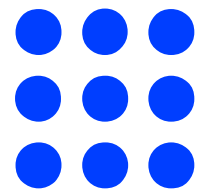
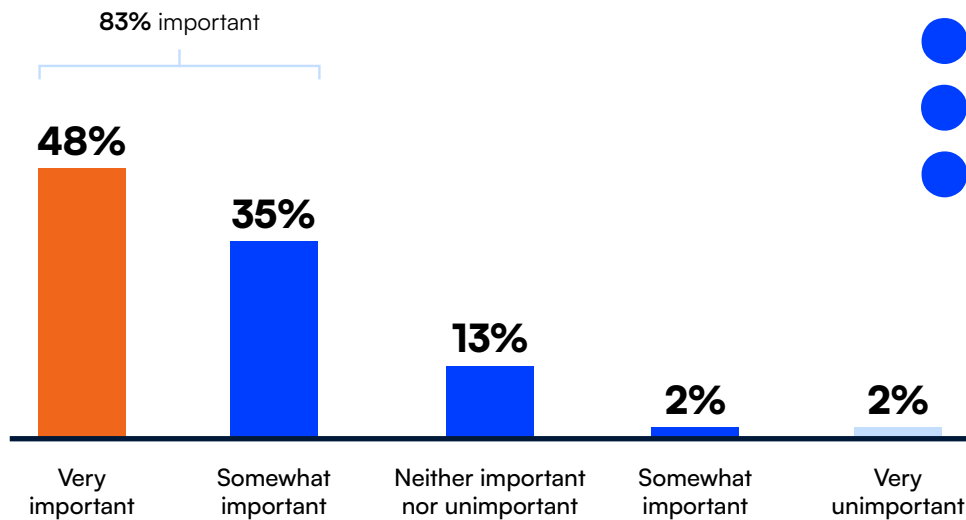
## eCommerce underpins crucial omnichannel strategies

Being able to operate effectively online and offline, with as seamless a customer experience as possible across all channels, is key for today’s B2B organizations.

- **83%** consider an omnichannel approach as important for their overall sales and marketing strategy.

With that in mind, eCommerce platforms become even more integral, in order to streamline processes and synchronize data across outlets as varied as online marketplaces, corporate websites, print catalogues and distributor websites.

**Q: When it comes to your overall sales and marketing strategy, how important is omnichannel?**



**Omnichannel is a path to market share growth, according to a 2022 study by McKinsey which found that, “what customers want from omnichannel is ‘more’ — more channels, more convenience, and a more personalized experience. And if they don’t get what they’re looking for, they’ll take their business elsewhere.”**

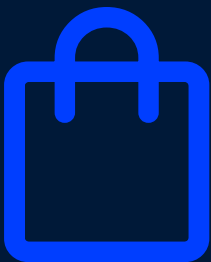
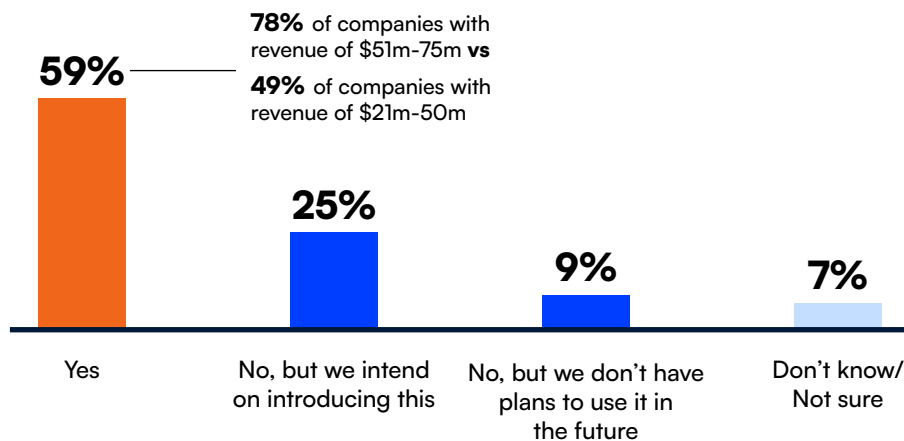
## A competitive opportunity in the small-to-medium sized enterprise (SME) space

B2B companies are drawing on eCommerce to increase the efficacy of other channels. Data and functionality within an eCommerce storefront or portal can be used by sales representatives to improve the selling process.

- **59%** use their eCommerce portal for sales representative assisted selling

There are variations within the SME space, however. **78%** of companies with revenues between \$51-\$75m use their portals for sales representative-assisted selling. Smaller companies — i.e. those with revenues between \$21-50m — appear to be slower to introduce this technique, with only **49%** using it. Harnessing the potential for eCommerce to improve the broader sales process could offer a competitive opportunity for companies in the lower turnover bracket.

### Q: Do you use the portal for sales representative assisted selling?



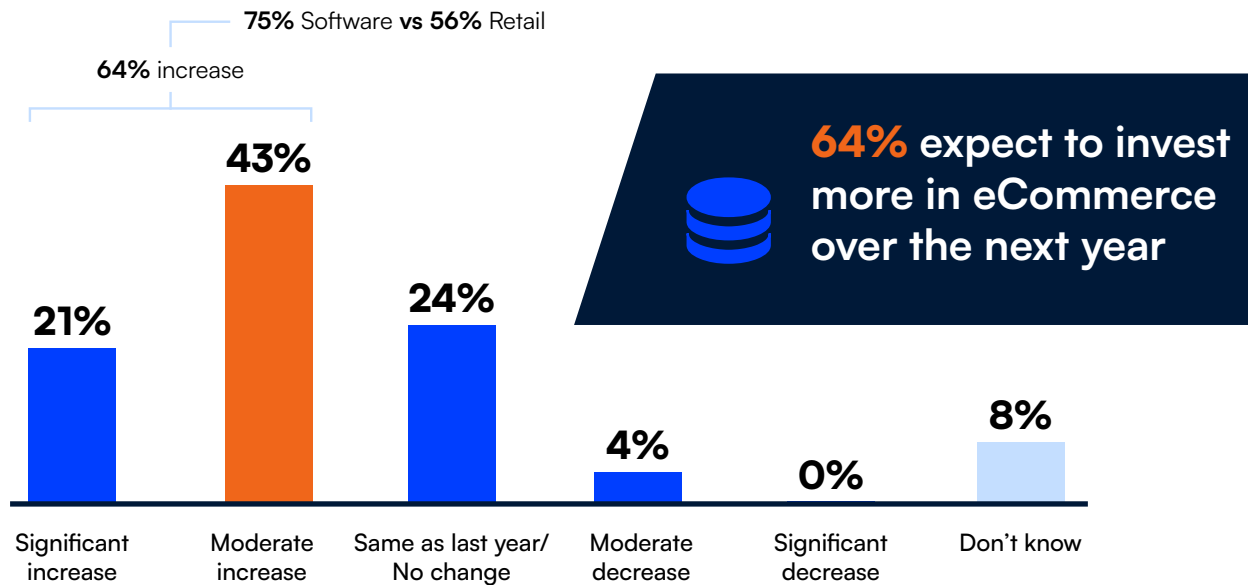
**Assisted selling is a strategy which combines insights from technology** with a layer of human expertise to increase conversion rates and nurture sales through the pipeline. Sales representatives can use data on potential customers' areas of interest, held within the eCommerce platform, to reach out directly with further information and guidance. Insights on browsing behavior and purchase history can be used to inform up-sell and cross-sell strategies in order to maximize revenue potential. The customer experience can also be improved by employing inventory management tools to keep purchasers up to date with the fulfilment process.

## Investment levels increase to boost customer satisfaction and sales

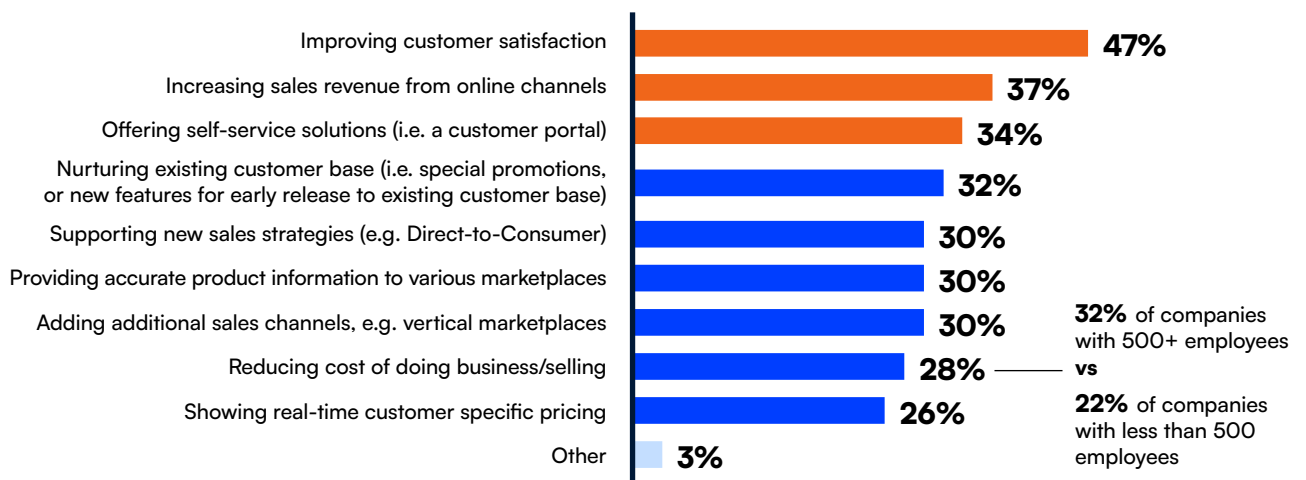
Investment in eCommerce continues to rise as B2B businesses recognize the benefits.

### Q: What are your eCommerce investment plans in the coming year?

Nearly half of respondents say they are investing more in order to improve customer satisfaction.



### Q: What are your main reasons behind your eCommerce investment plans?



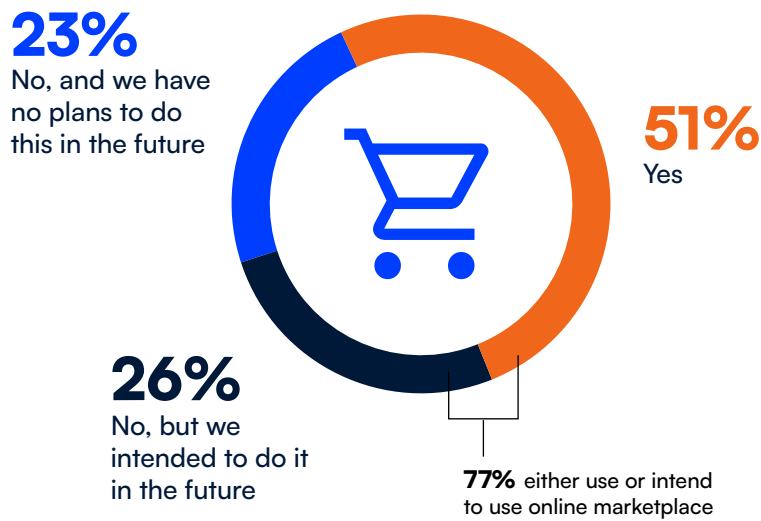
This increased investment isn't surprising, when we consider findings from McKinsey: "Corporate decision makers are turning to eCommerce at every stage of the buying process, from research to reorders, and will walk away if the experience doesn't deliver what they need."

Other benefits B2B organizations expect to gain from their investments are increased sales (37%), the ability to offer customers self-service options (34%), and nurturing existing customers (32%).

## Capturing the growing online marketplace opportunity

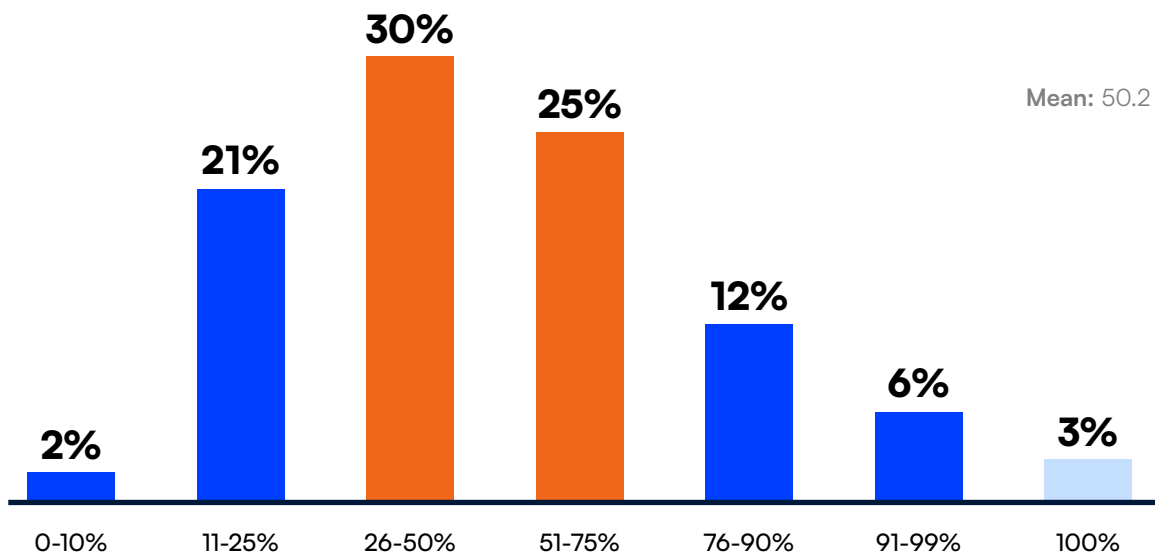
As online marketplaces such as Amazon become more prevalent in the B2B sector, and are better understood by B2B buyers and vendors alike, adoption of this channel is growing. More than half (**51%**) of firms now sell via online marketplaces compared to **44%** in last year's report.

**Q: Do you sell on online marketplaces such as Amazon or an industry specific marketplace?**



Those businesses using online marketplaces generate half of their business that way and expect those sales to increase by around **40%** in the coming year.

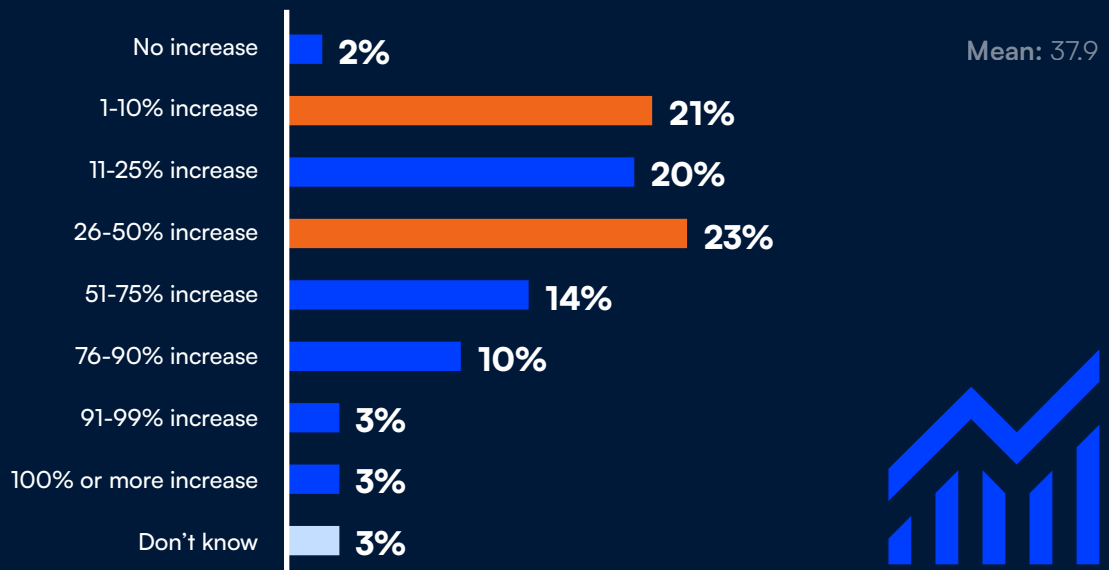
**Q: What percentage of your business comes from online marketplaces?**





## Respondents using online marketplaces expect sales from those platforms to increase, on average, by around **40%** in the coming year

**Q:** How much do you expect sales from online marketplaces will grow in the next 12 months?



## The proliferation of online marketplaces for B2B

Amazon and eBay are the best-known of the generalist online marketplaces, but in recent years there has been an explosion in the number of specialist niche sites. Examples include:

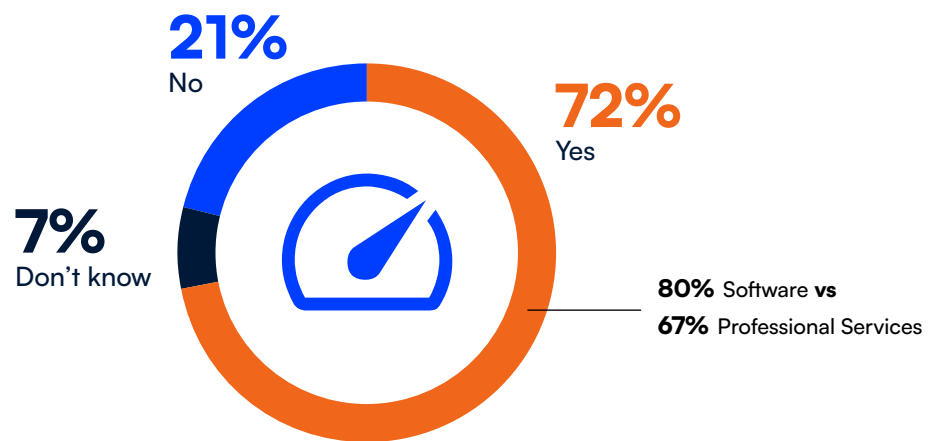
- **Kitmodo** — machinery
- **IronPlanet** — heavy equipment
- **Infra.market** — construction
- **Elemica** — process manufacturing materials
- **Chemnet** — chemicals
- **PartCycle** — used auto parts
- **Brickhunter** (UK) — bricks
- **SupplyHog** — building materials, tools
- **ePlane** — aircraft parts
- **GoDirect Trade** — aerospace parts



## B2B eCommerce in the palm of your hand

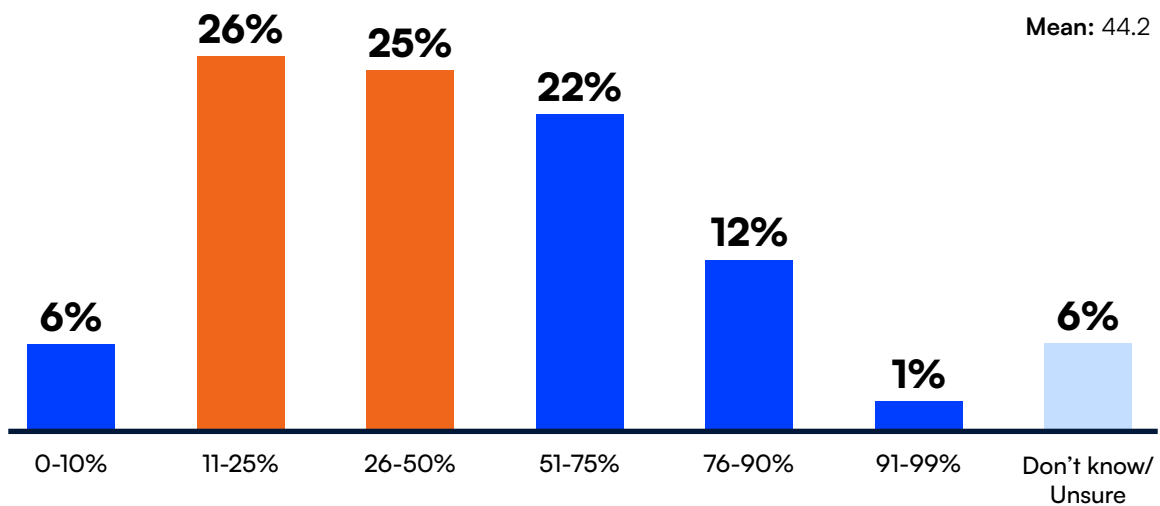
B2B buyers increasingly expect a consumer-grade experience from their purchase experience, including the option to use mobile devices. **72%** of firms have responded to the growth in demand for browsing, researching and buying on mobile devices — **14%** more offer this functionality than in last year’s survey. This move makes sound commercial sense, when we consider that those who do offer mobile eCommerce make **44%** of their sales that way.

**Q: Does your business currently offer customers and field sales representatives the ability to conduct eCommerce transactions easily through their mobile devices?**



Of those who don't yet offer mobile eCommerce options, a quarter are planning to introduce them within the next year.

**Q: What percentage of your sales are made on a mobile device today?**

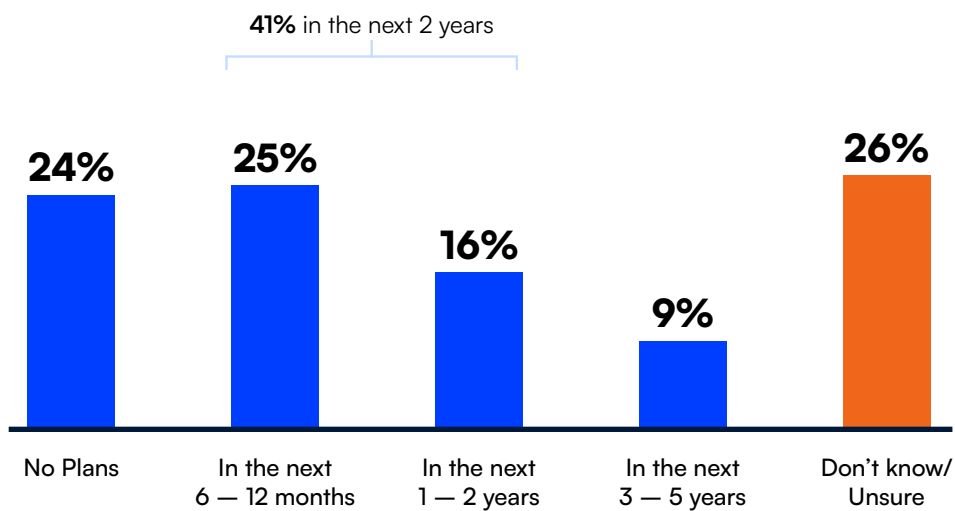




A quarter (**25%**) of respondents plan to offer customers the ability to order on a mobile device within the next year. **24%** have no plans to do so



**Q:** When do you plan to offer your customers the ability to order on a mobile device?





**59% of respondents have a PIM to help manage product information**

## PIM: a priority step on the journey to omnichannel

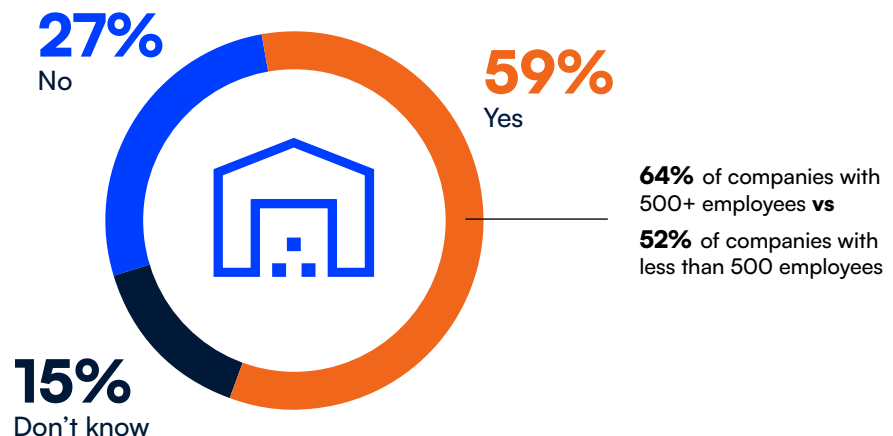
B2B firms with ambitions to offer a seamless, omnichannel experience are increasingly implementing Product Information Management (PIM) systems. PIM is a powerful single-source-of-truth (SSoT) engine that helps organizations consolidate, enrich and validate product data; publishing to any channel to deliver consistent product experiences.

- **59%** are using a PIM to help manage product information

The number of respondents using a PIM has leapt **293%** from last year’s survey, as organizations seek to effectively manage product information within complex ecosystems which can span online marketplaces, eCommerce sites, retail, print, distribution and wholesale. Larger companies are more likely to have adopted the technology, perhaps in order to manage a more complex sales process than their smaller counterparts.

- **64%** of companies with over **500** employees have a PIM, compared to **52%** of those with fewer than **500** employees.

**Q: Do you have a PIM (Product Information Management) system to manage product information in a centralized repository?**

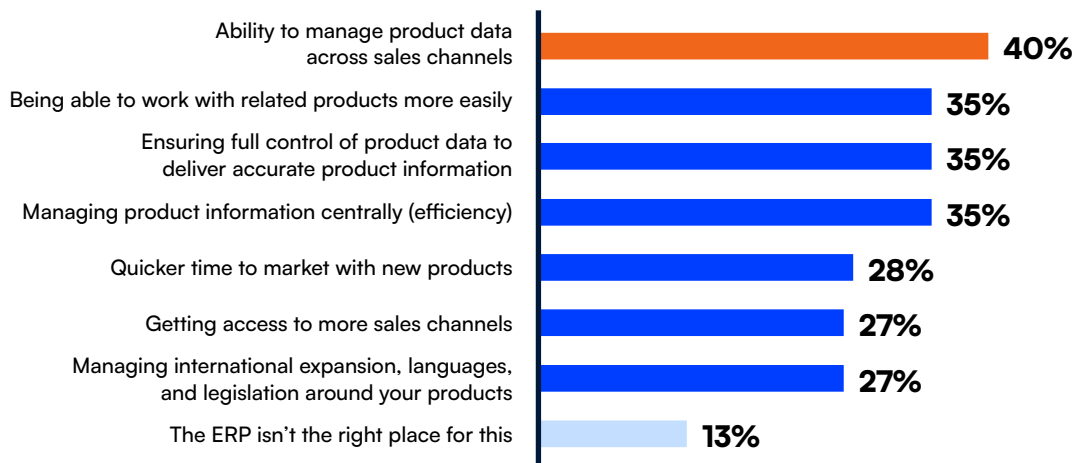


## Digging into the popularity of PIMs

What’s driving the high PIM adoption rate? As we settle into the post-pandemic era, it’s clear that an omnichannel approach encompassing both online and offline sales interactions is here to stay. Businesses which, in the past, might have held product data in siloed, legacy systems now recognize the need for a central repository to ensure better quality, consistency and connectivity.

- **40%** cited the ability to manage product data across sales channels.
- **35%** value the ability of a PIM to help them work with related products more easily, the improved control and accuracy, and the efficiency offered by centralized product management

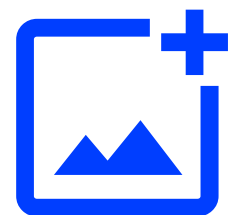
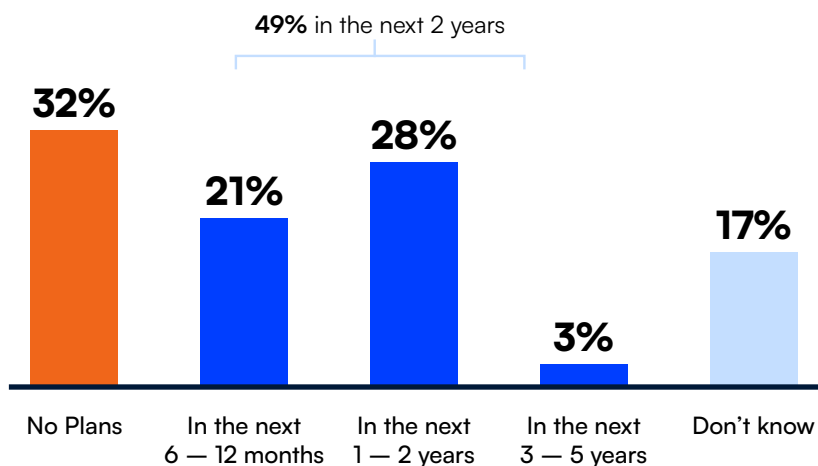
### Q: What are the main reasons why you invested in a PIM?



The adoption of this technology is set to continue.

- Nearly half (**49%**) of those who don't yet have a PIM plan to invest within two years.

### Q: Are you planning to invest in a PIM (Product Information Management) system to manage product information in a centralized repository and feed product information to marketplaces, eCommerce sites, retail, print, distribution and wholesale?



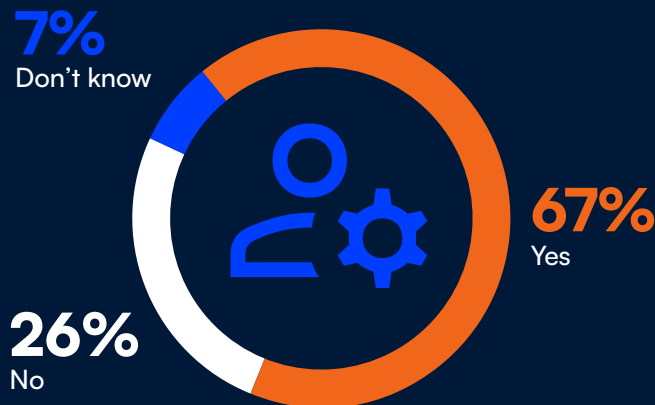


## B2B gets (even more) personal

eCommerce technology offers a wealth of opportunities to make the buying journey more relevant and targeted. B2B organizations are ever more aware that personalization offers a potential competitive advantage which mustn't be overlooked.

- **Two-thirds** of respondents (**67%**) offer a personalized shopping experience online, and of those who don't, **34%** plan to introduce it within the next two years.

**Q: Do you currently offer a personalized shopping experience online?**



**Traditionally, certain elements of marketing and customer experience have been viewed as the preserve of B2C,** with little place in B2B engagements. The use of emotion in marketing is one such example, and personalization is another. However, just as marketers now recognize that B2B buyers respond to emotion and storytelling in the office just as much as at home, personalization of experience has become equally accepted as a must-have. So much so, that according to Gartner, more B2B customers (**86%**) expect companies to be well-informed about their personal information during a service interaction than B2C consumers (**71%**).

## AI is now an integral tool for the majority

Commentators are predicting **2023** will be the year artificial intelligence (AI) goes mainstream across many industries. In the marketing sector, for instance, ChatGPT reached its first million users five days after launch. Generative AI tools like these are democratizing the use of AI to an unprecedented extent and opening up new opportunities for many organizations.

Within eCommerce, AI is an established asset in the nurture and cross-sell process.

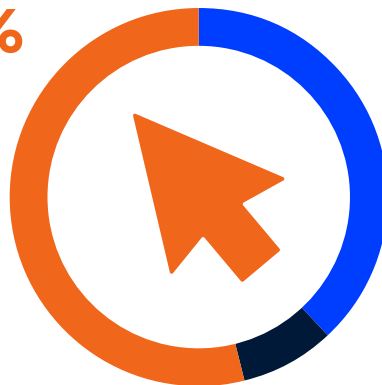


More than half (**54%**) of respondents use AI capabilities to help make product recommendations



**Q:** Do you use any artificial intelligence (AI) capabilities to help make product recommendations (such as other companies like yours are buying the following products, etc)?

**54%**  
Yes



**38%**  
No

**8%**  
Don't know

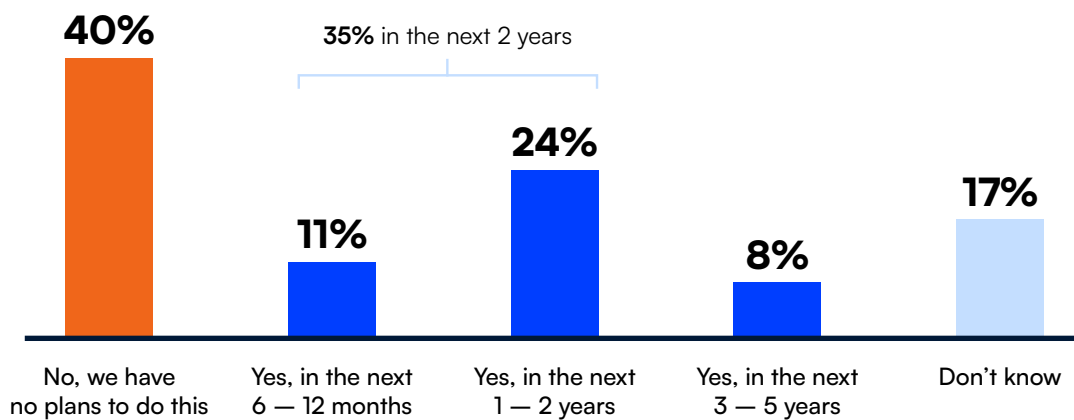


Among those who don't currently use AI, about 1 in 3 (35%) plan doing so in the next 2 years



A third of those firms who haven't yet adopted this technology within their online shopping environments recognize its potential benefits and are factoring AI into their development roadmap.

**Q:** Are you planning to start including AI capabilities in your online shopping environment?



# The future of B2B eCommerce —

**In the past, eCommerce was largely — and sometimes reluctantly** — adopted by B2B organizations in response to growing buyer expectations that the purchase journey should emulate B2C interactions. Once adopted, however, and now firmly embedded within the B2B space, unexpected additional benefits are surfacing.

Customer experience is the new battlefield for many B2B firms, and eCommerce — with its potential for 24/7 availability and personalization — is proving a valuable weapon in an organization's arsenal. And with more organizations offering eCommerce via mobile devices, buyers can interact when, where, and how they like.

Business growth is tough in turbulent economic conditions. Firms need to harness every opportunity to build brand awareness in the long term and generate sales in the short to medium term. Grabbing those growth opportunities becomes easier with eCommerce's sales and marketing advantages.

Maximizing marketing efforts across long sales cycles, and targeting dispersed purchasing teams, takes coordination and planning. B2B organizations are embedding eCommerce as a key tool within their marketing mix to increase touchpoints right across the funnel.

Omnichannel strategies are here to stay as the hybrid, post-pandemic world settles into an always-on expectation of choice and joined-up sales outlets. Introducing PIM systems as part of an eCommerce strategy offers B2B firms an unprecedented level of cross-channel product data control.

Opening up new markets becomes more straightforward with the adoption of eCommerce. More and more B2B organizations are planning diversification to online marketplaces, whether generalist or niche B2B, to access new market segments.

Increasing return on investment in areas such as offline sales is recognized as a valuable benefit eCommerce can bring. The technology is being used to increase conversion rates or improve cross-sell as part of sales representative interactions.

so much more  
than a sales tool.



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