The value of a digital customer portal from a business perspective



The basics of a B2B customer portal

4 key pillars explained

13 min read

QUICK ANSWERS 2 min read

B2B self-services: What are the biggest timesavers for my customers?
After-sales services: How to create cross- and up-selling potential to your installed base?
Digital sales processes: What is the added value of my sales department?
Digital service models: How to create tailored services to meet customer needs?

THIS IS AN INTERACTIVE WHITEPAPER!

BEST EXPERIENCED WITH ACROBAT READER

A digital customer portal is the next evolution of the B2B online shop, because it is the best customer-centric solution you can offer. Covering a large part of the full customer lifecycle, it provides a full spectrum of services during the various phases of the relationship.

This whitepaper is about the four pillars of a customer portal. With this knowledge, you can build a customer portal that provides and supports a seamless buyer journey. This will strengthen brand loyalty, boost sales and differentiate yourself from your competitors.
A survey — conducted by Copperberg — of 125 e-commerce leaders in manufacturing revealed that 55% of the respondents will invest in a digital customer portal in the next 12 months.

THE EXPERT

Tobias Giese
Global VP Digital Solutions



If you do what you always did, you will get what you always got (and probably even less). So, now is the right time to take action when it comes to digitalization. Boost your B2B business by offering your customers a seamless buyer journey. How? By creating a digital customer portal. You are right on time! I would love to hear your opinion about this whitepaper.

Contact me, or my colleagues

EMPOWERING THE CUSTOMER

B2B self-services: What are the biggest timesavers for my customers?

B2B buyers want to manage their own data, products, and service agreements. Also, they want 24/7 access to processes and content. This reduces their administrative workload and they can retain their internal processes.

Read more

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EMPOWERING THE CUSTOMER

B2B self-services: What are the biggest timesavers for my customers?

Paperwork, different phone numbers for different services, office opening hours: for the B2B customer, they are nuisances. The better you cater to the specific needs of your customers — company-wide! — the more you stand out from your competitors. When developing new (digital) services and business models, keep in mind the changing relationship between you and your customers. B2B buyers have B2C expectations when it comes to service, efficiency and customer experience.

What do B2B buyers want?

Make your B2B buyers happy with:

- Self-service management of company profiles, procurement structures, and user roles, offers, delivery notes, invoices, etc.
- Custom order processes, e.g. configuration of customized catalogs, bid and project management, integration of e-procurement solutions.
- 24/7 access to processes and content.

Why? Because it reduces their administrative workload and they can retain their internal processes.

55% of e-commerce leaders invest in digital customer portals

A survey (conducted by Copperberg) of 125 e-commerce leaders in manufacturing showed that 55% of the respondents will invest in a digital customer portal in the next 12 months. A customer portal allows customers to **"... take care of their company and account data themselves, without calling their sales agents for every adjustment. [...] For large organizations, the key to digital self-service lies in providing the information**

infrastructure. [...] A single portal for customers to: oversee and manage their installed base, purchase spare parts or consumables, book services or individualized training. A personalized experience to put them at ease, in an attractive, clear, and accessible manner and optimize the buyer journey."

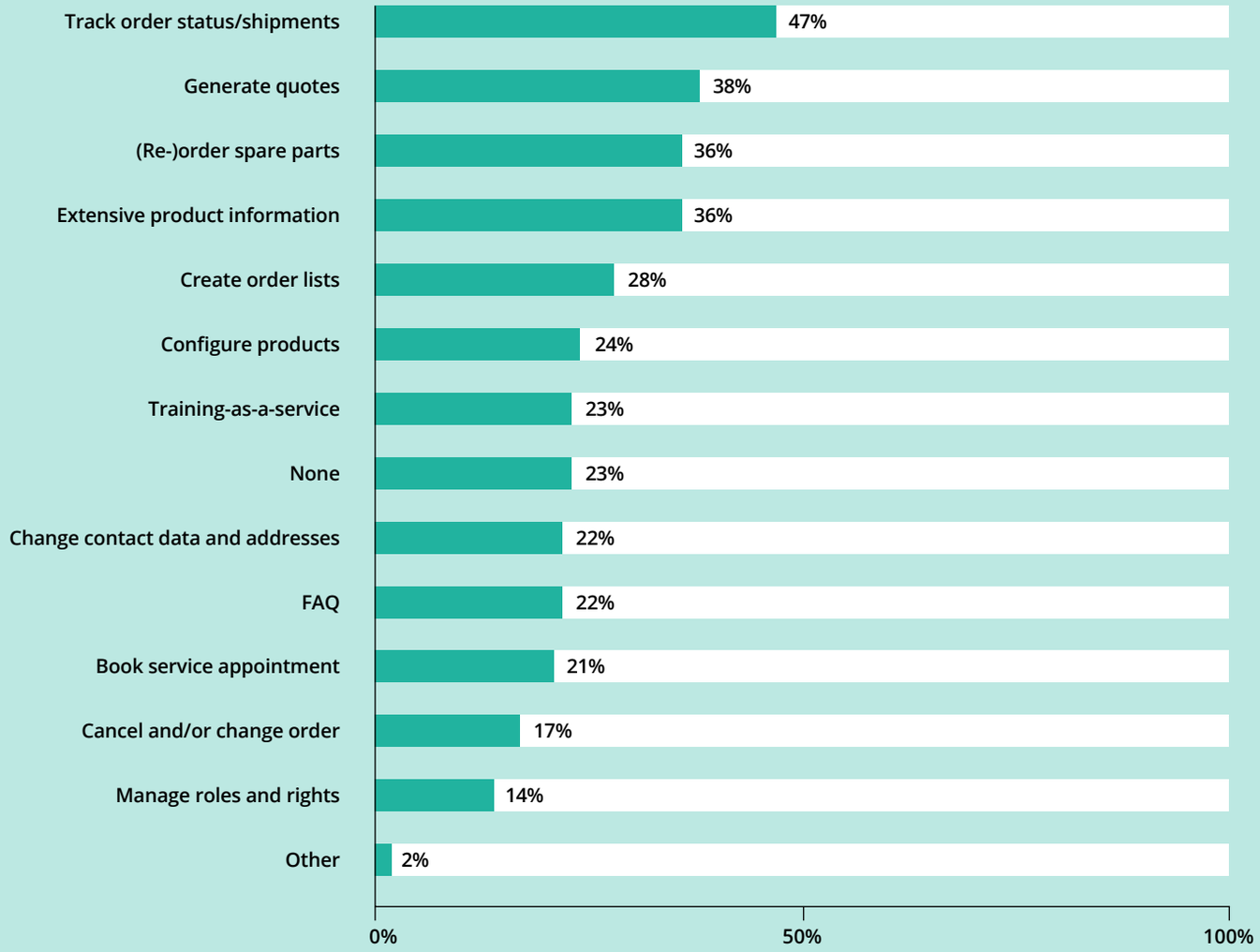
Top 4 digital services

According to the survey, the top 4 digital services offered by e-commerce leaders in manufacturing are:

1 Track order status/shipment (47%)
2 Generate quotes (38%)
3 (Re-)Order spare parts (36%)
4 Extensive product information (36%)

A customer-centric digital business needs at least these 4 features.

With which digital self-services do you support your customers?



POST-SALE IS PRE-SALE

After-sales services: How to create cross- and up-selling potential to your installed base?

Vendors can use product-related services to boost customer satisfaction. After-sales can boost up- and cross-selling opportunities. The keys to success: personalization and seamless interaction between vendor and customer. All information must be accessible in a central location.

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POST-SALE IS PRE-SALE

After-sales services: How to create cross- and up-selling potential to your installed base?

A first purchase is a great start for a long-lasting and profitable relationship. The initial purchase is not always the most profitable one though. Important purchases for revenue and profitability are spare parts, services and consumables. As a manufacturer or whole-saler you have much information about your customers and their needs and requirements. You can use this knowledge to boost your sales and customer satisfaction. A customer portal delivers every customer a 360° view and all options for purchase, after-sales and relation-ship processes.

Data is your best friend

A digital customer portal contains up-to-date customer data, buying history and information relevant to the machines or products in use. This data is presented in a smart and personalized way, so that it is easy for the customer to manage it. The data can be used to create personalized and perfectly timed offers for replacement, additional purchases, spare parts, consumables and even anticipate upcoming needs. As a result, buyers will find the right product in no time. This results in risk reduction: no incorrect orders anymore, no return and handling costs leading to dissatisfaction.

A portal might even contain services to signal the need for preventive action: no more unplanned downtimes or an out-of-stock situation. Also, you can use a digital customer portal to introduce your customers to new products. This increases the share of wallet and customer loyalty.

The keys to successful after-sales services are personalization and seamless interaction between you and your customer, covering all stages within the customer life cycle, as well as fast and flexible communication across all touchpoints.

BETTER CUSTOMER SUPPORT

Digital sales processes: What is the added value of my sales department?

Even though sales processes become increasingly digital, human interaction is more important than ever. Sales representatives become consultants, providing ideas and support on potentially complex issues while guiding the client through the buying process.

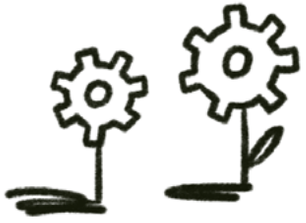
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BETTER CUSTOMER SUPPORT

Digital sales processes: What is the added value of my sales department?



E-commerce will multiply the sales team's efforts and performance. Routine tasks can (and should be) be done via online channels. This allows the team to be more focused on key accounts and new business development.

Who's afraid of e-commerce?

Many sales teams consider e-commerce as a threat to their customer relationships and compensation structures. Convince your sales force that digital is not simply a commercial order entry channel. The opposite is true! Digital is a driver of omnichannel, end-to-end customer experience combining branches, distributors, sales people, and contact centers. A digital customer portal frees up time for sales staff to focus on their (new) accounts. Time they do not have to spend on manually processing orders and checking order statuses for example.

Instead, the sales force can become more solution-oriented, data-led, and consultative. Digitized sales processes enable sales and support staff to serve customers more individually. This also leads to increased sales, lower costs and avoids recurring tasks and mistakes.

Game changer

When B2B organizations succeed in providing a holistic view of the customer, using data to create insights that address specific customer problems, they can create tailor-made solutions that give the sales force extra power in communicating with their customers. After all, business is — and will always be — about good relationships. When aligned properly, a digital customer portal will be a game changer for sales.

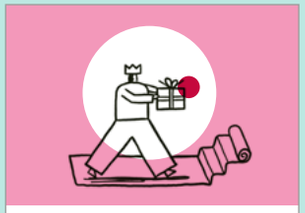
Capabilities of a digital customer portal include:

- Integration of mobile apps
- Customer onboarding in a portal
- Guided shopping
- Co-browsing

Why co-browsing?

Co-browsing is an ideal tool for your sales team to interact with customers before they meet. Sales can co-browse through the product catalog together with the customer, prior to the meeting and discuss which products the sales agent should present during the visit. When the buyer decides that this is the right product, he or she can immediately place an order via a mobile app.

Also, co-browsing is a great feature when a customer needs support in finding the right product in the online catalog. With the aid of an internal sales agent, the customer can find and select the perfect article. The sales agent can then add the product to the customer's cart and add it to a re-order list, to speed up the process upon return. As is represented in our report The State of Digital Innovation within Manufacturing, **"the goal of a digital customer portal is to simplify everyday work for customers and improve efficiencies at the side of the seller"**. This is of utmost importance for customer loyalty. If you want to read more about customer loyalty, please read this whitepaper.



WHITEPAPER

Boost your online sales by putting your B2B customers first

CUSTOM-MADE SERVICES

Digital service models: How to create tailored services to meet customer needs?

Vendors can use services to create tailored offerings and hence real added value for specific target groups. This strengthens customer loyalty and generates new opportunities for sales and value creation.

Read more

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CUSTOM-MADE SERVICES

Digital service models: How to create tailored services to meet customer needs?

Digital transformation provides a huge scope for additional business. Services are a key differentiator here. As you can read in our report The State of Digital Innovation within Manufacturing, "a large part of manufacturers only makes 0%-25% of their total revenue from online sales, via outdated systems that put internal information first, not the needs of the customers."

Real added value

Vendors can use services to create tailored offerings and thus real added value for specific target groups. In doing so, they strengthen customer loyalty and generate new opportunities for sales and value creation. As products become increasingly digitized within the Internet of Things, they can be replicated in digital form and used to gather data. This provides insights into product usage and other customer behavior. Vendors can then identify specific customer needs and create tailored services to meet them. The digitized products ("digital twins") can be registered in a portal and linked to those digital services.

User benefits

1. Products linked to maintenance contracts
2. Overview of digital products with usage information
3. Metered billing for product use (product-as-a-service)
4. Automated re-ordering via Kanban systems

More than just a B2B webshop: the digital customer portal in machine manufacturing

TRUMPF

Trumpf report

The next step

So, what should be your next step? In short, look for a B2B commerce platform that enables you to create a customer-centric B2B portal that will boost your business. The commerce platform selected should:

- Be scalable, to support growth
- Be one central platform to support all your shops, digital services, regions, business models etc.
- Guarantee the right ROI

Which solution is the best fit for your business? Our commerce solution selection guide may help you.

Commerce solution selection guide

	SAP COMMERCE CLOUD	INTERSHOP COMMERCE PLATFORM	SALESFORCE B2B COMMERCE	ADOBE MAGENTO COMMERCE
Headless commerce support Completeness of APIs, IoT support	++	+++	+	+
Flexibilty In choosing best-of-breed solutions	+	+++	+	+
Mobile capabilities Progressive web app / responsive storefront	+++	+++	++	++
Personalization Segmentation, content personalization, catalog personalization	+++	+++	+++	+++
Digital customer portal Self-service portal	++	+++	++	++
Business intelligence & analytics Analytics native in platform	++	+++	++	+++
Integration capabilities Apis, impex, services framework, etc.	+++	+++	++	++
Advanced B2B features Customer hierarchies, authorizations, quotes and contracts, OCI punchout, etc.	+++	+++	++	++
Scalability Transactions, products, touchpoints, sales channels, business models	+++	+++	++	++
Time to market Time to implement, continuous development	++	+++	+++	+++
Total cost of ownership Investment and operational expenses	€€	€	€€	€
B2B commerce references	Karma Automotive, Maui Jim, Office Depot, New Era, Maxim Integrated	Dover Corporation, Atlas Copco, Rockwool, Trumpf, Würth	Avery Dennison, Land O'Lakes, Univar, Solvay, Samsonite	AB InBev, BMN bouwmaterialen, Liebherr, Rural King, Watsco

DIGITAL CUSTOMER PORTAL

The 4 pillars of the B2B customer portal





1

B2B self-service

- Cost-center management
- Track order status/shipment
- Quote, bid, and project management
- Simple, automated (re-) ordering processes
- E-service for catalogs and EDI/OCI integration

2

After-sales services

- FAQs, chat, ticketing systems
- Technical and commercial documentation, e-learning
- Automated offers for replacement, spare parts, consumables, services

3

Digital sales processes

- Guided shopping
- Integration of sales apps
- Co-browsing
- Pre-sales support
- Customer onboarding

4

Digital service models

- Digital product management
- Product-service bundles
- Product-as-a-service models

BENEFITS FOR DIGITAL

The next evolution of your B2B webshop

A digital customer portal is the next evolution of your B2B webshop. Retaining and expanding sales to your customer base starts with truly understanding the buyer journey and removing all possible frictions. When you succeed in genuinely helping your customers using a customer portal in every stage of the buyer journey, you will make the jobs of business buyers much easier, and you will reap huge benefits. Some examples:

- Customer satisfaction — superior buying experience — and retaining customers
- Increase average customer value (great business potential)
- Improve internal sales processes and make them much more efficient (opportunities for internal efficiencies)

This involves providing the right products and services for customers, at the right time and in the way they need it. In doing so, the customer perceives a superior buying experience, a higher value, and a higher return on their investment.

Check our website for more information!

BENEFITS FOR IT

A customer portal & IT

What does a customer portal need from an IT perspective? We recommend a B2B commerce platform with an API-oriented architecture, since this best fits the requirements needed for customer centricity. An API-based architecture with pre-integrated applications is a must to easily connect best-of-breed apps. The platform must also allow for deep integration into all relevant systems and business processes, such as ERP, PIM, OMS or CRM solutions.

A customer portal will then be a presentation shell on top of all kinds of enterprise wide services. Like orders from your commerce system or from other (offline) sources, IoT data from machines and installed base systems, financial data out of ERP and billing systems, tracking data out of supply chain systems etc.

Finally as the platform will be used to support your webshops in all regions, there will be thousands of individual customer portals. To support your company's growth ambitions, the technology must be cloud-based to make easy scaling possible in times of peak traffic.

Check our website for more information!

THE CUSTOMER

More than just a B2B webshop: the digital customer portal in machine manufacturing

Experienced by Rainer Schüßler



TRUMPF

Trumpf, known for high technology from lasers to digitally networked machine tools, created a digital customer portal: MyTrumpf. The machine manufacturer has thus set the course for long-term customer loyalty and increasing online sales.

In MyTrumpf customers benefit from highly customized convenient self-service options: they can register their machines, view service contracts, purchase spare parts, read up on contract information, and much more. For the future, Rainer Schüssler and his team plan to make all products available online: from standard machines and spare parts to tools and highly customized plant equipment. This includes a central login, standardized access to buying and processes, as well as access to machine data for example for proactive maintenance. Welcome, digital future!

ABOUT INTERSHOP

Always nearby



Intershop is the engine that drives digital commerce. Our powerful B2B e-commerce platform enables the world's leading manufacturers and wholesalers to transform their business and increase revenue in a digital-first world.

Our cloud-based solutions give you an essential foundation for digital success, plus the flexibility to deliver unique experiences and quickly react to changing needs. With a global presence and extensive partner network, we support your success every step of the way—creating opportunities to scale, innovate, and gain a competitive edge.

Intershop is built to boost your business. Discover what we can do at www.intershop.com.



SPEAK DIRECTLY WITH ONE OF OUR EXPERTS

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