



GUIDE

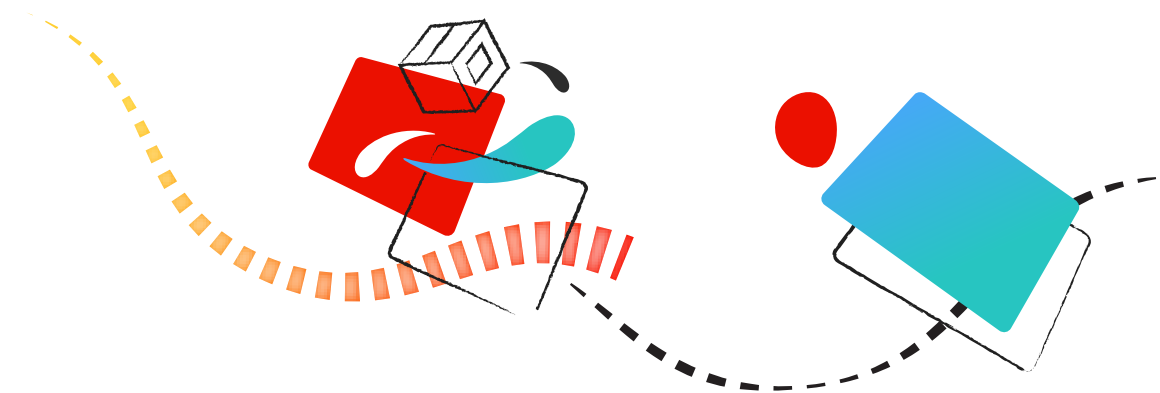
Get your B2B ecommerce project approved.

B2B ecommerce leaders share their trials and tips to help you get your B2B ecommerce project approved.



Table of contents

Introduction	3
Meet the ecommerce Experience Makers	4
Win hearts and minds: Make an emotional case	5
Learn before you leap	6
Use the voice of your customer	9
Find the right people	13
Make the business case for ecommerce	14
Dive deeper into the world of being an Experience Maker	17



As a digital trailblazer, you know you need to offer customers excellent ecommerce experiences. But getting leadership on board with investments in new technology isn't always simple. And yet, in today's market, the stakes are rising fast on winning approval for digital commerce initiatives. By 2023, ecommerce will reach US\$1.8 trillion dollars—which, according to Statista, is 17% of all B2B sales in the US.

One reason many projects don't get budget may surprise you. Aspiring leaders often focus only on business considerations such as cost and return on investment (ROI). The financials are important, but there's another key area that many B2B project leaders—at Adobe, we call them *Experience Makers*—may not realize they need to emphasize in their pitch: buy-in.



By 2023, ecommerce will reach

\$1.8 trillion,

which represents 17% of all B2B sales in the US.

“ Getting the people to buy in to your idea is as important as getting the business case right. You need to build enthusiasm for your ecommerce platform project as much as you need to justify the business case.

Ed Kennedy

Product Marketing Lead, B2B Commerce
Adobe

Curiosity, passion, and ambition surrounding a project can be as vital to its success as ROI or total cost of ownership. “You have to be persistent. Be confident in your abilities and passionate about your projects. Be willing to go outside your lane and find paths that are more desirable,” says Gabby Helms, director of digital marketing and ecommerce for SalonCentric, a beauty products wholesaler.

Likewise, you have to make it clear how ecommerce will benefit each group of stakeholders. “We asked people throughout the organization—sales, IT, fulfillment, and more—what they wanted to see in the new system. Their insights helped us design an ecommerce site that had benefits and reduced work for many teams,” adds Jenn Grabenstetter, vice president for digital growth and experience at Sealed Air (SEE), which supplies packaging materials, equipment, services, and automation to provide essential protection for products and people.

Whether your project is a fairly simple website upgrade or a total digital transformation, this guide can show you how to:

- Improve your pitch to your executive team
- Build enthusiasm for digital commerce projects
- Create your business case for ecommerce

Meet the ecommerce Experience Makers.

Experience Makers Gabby Helms and Jenn Grabenstetter used different paths and processes to make their respective ecommerce projects succeed. The lessons each one learned on her journey can help you learn how to pitch a B2B ecommerce platform initiative successfully.

You’ll also get tips from Ed Kennedy, an Adobe Commerce insider who’s helped many Experience Makers deliver successful ecommerce projects. He’ll bring your attention to a few essential tasks that are too often overlooked.



Gabby Helms

Director
Digital Marketing and Ecommerce
SalonCentric, sub-distribution
division of L’Oréal



Jenn Grabenstetter

Vice President
Digital Growth and Experience
Sealed Air (SEE)



Ed Kennedy

Product Marketing Lead
B2B Commerce
Adobe



Win hearts and minds: Make an emotional case.

It's time to move beyond the assumption that business decisions are all about the financials. Ed suggests that Experience Makers start with the people and vision, saying, "Projects get approved—and are successful—because of the people behind them." Take these three steps to get the ball rolling.

Three steps to getting your ecommerce project approved



Unite your team



Gain support of
your boss and
your boss's boss



Understand the
organization
decision process

First, create enthusiasm within your team—especially if peers are advocating for a different project. As you unite your team to support a shared initiative for B2B ecommerce, you can create a bold vision for digital transformation. This helps build momentum—essential when the inevitable setbacks and obstacles arise.

Second, get support from your boss—and your boss's boss. Your likelihood of success rises when you find an executive sponsor who will champion the cause and help you overcome organizational inertia.

Third, understand how decisions get made within your organization. To do that, you'll need to answer these questions:

- What is the culture like?
- Who has budget?
- Who has influence over strategic decisions?
- How can you align the initiative with leadership's strategic goals?

Learn before you leap.

Save time during the approval process by discovering what your executives care about *before* you make your presentation.

Keeping the answers to these questions in mind can help you interest your executive team in the pitch (and keep them supportive throughout the project):



What are your organization's external threats and close competitors?

At Gabby's company, hearing that competitors had mature ecommerce presences—and that their own customers had ecommerce needs—was a motivator for leadership, so that was a core part of her pitch.



How much does the executive team value becoming a

customer-centric business? Jenn's project centered around transforming how customers purchased from SEE—from manual transactions to digital purchases. The executives knew they needed to respond to changing customer expectations as well as update their existing analog sales process.



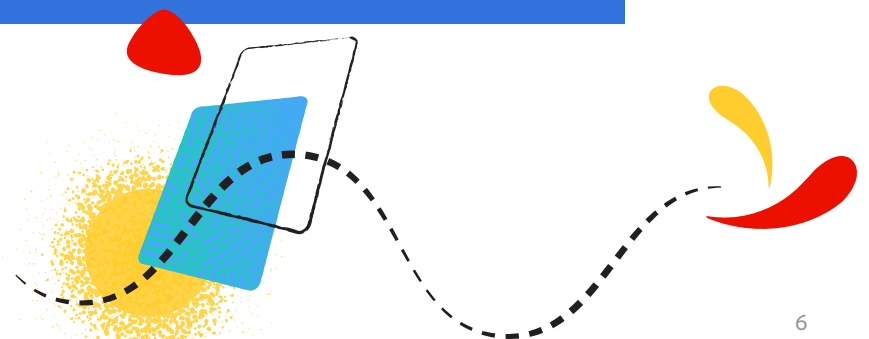
Does your organization seek to be an innovator in your industry?

Instead of pitching her project as "just" an ecommerce website, Jenn incorporated the philosophy and internal branding that it was the start of a digital transformation. Getting executives to share that vision was key.

Once you know these answers, look for an executive sponsor who will champion the cause, especially if you'll need to present to a larger steering committee or board of directors. An executive champion can help overcome organizational inertia, which can be vital to the bottom line—in fact, according to research from Deloitte Insights, firms with higher digital maturity report 65% higher profit margins than their lower-maturity counterparts.

65%

higher profit margins are reported by firms with more advanced digital maturity, compared to their lower-maturity counterparts.



Gabby's project was born when she shared some ecommerce ideas during team meetings. Gabby's boss encouraged her to research those ideas. Momentum built from there—and soon she needed to create a business case. She explains: "At first I was hesitant to share my ideas for the ecommerce platform since that wasn't my area, but I knew it was important. I knew the company could do better by our sub-distributors and their customers, and I was willing to say that to the team." SalonCentric reports to an oversight committee within the parent company, L'Oréal, and Gabby eventually had to present to that committee.

“ I knew the company could do better by our sub-distributors and their customers, and I was willing to say that to the team.

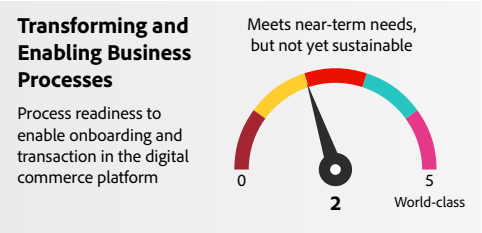
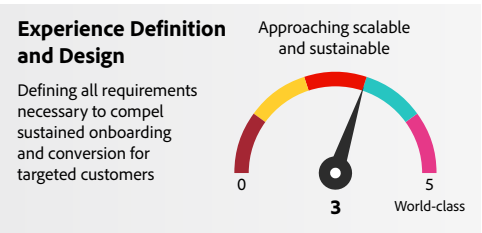
Gabby Helms

Director, Digital Marketing and Ecommerce
SalonCentric



Jenn had to present to multiple executive teams to gain and maintain support—and that didn't end when the project was approved. She shares a B2B ecommerce program scorecard with senior leaders every four weeks, and she presents to the board of directors every two months. She observes, "Having regular meetings with the executive committee gives me a great opportunity to keep up enthusiasm for the project, share the excitement of our wins along the way—and ask for suggestions from our very experienced leaders, when we hit stumbling blocks."

As an Experience Maker, you can prepare yourself emotionally for the challenge. Know now that you can be a change agent—if you're willing to step forward and make a strong case for your vision.



Program scorecards were delivered every four weeks to senior leadership and every two months to the board of directors.



SEE—bringing teams together

Problem

SEE is a global packaging technology company devoted to the science of protecting food, consumer products, and industrial goods throughout the global supply chain journey. The company knew it needed to adapt to changes in industry and customer expectations, which would require them to accelerate their transformation to automation, touchless operations, digital-first shopping, and sustainable packaging.

Action

SEE began the search for an exceptional order- and account-management solution that could be integrated with customer service and case management technologies.

In her role of responsibility for digital growth, Jenn Grabenstetter assembled a customer experience team that included user experience designers (internal staff) and customer feedback experts (external partners). The team created an ecommerce system that treated B2B customers like consumers: excellent back-end tools plus a front-end experience that was simple and efficient. The solution integrated a set of out-of-the-box tools for CMS, asset management, marketing automation, and ecommerce.

The team also addressed nuanced challenges such as automating freight and shipping terms by product or customer and managing inventory for organizations with 20 to 30 individuals who place orders.

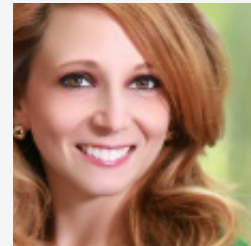
Results

The new ecommerce system more than meets customer expectations. Buyers report getting prices and confirming orders even faster than they expected would be possible. SEE still provides familiar human sales support by unifying customer experience, sales, and ecommerce interactions. This holistic approach to transformation has allowed the ecommerce platform to function as a catalyst for change to operations across the entire organization.

SEE used phase one of its ecommerce initiative to enhance the experience of the existing customer base, instead of immediately targeting buyers who weren't familiar with SEE. Jenn observes, "Every time we launch to a new tier of customer, the value proposition changes. They have different priorities and different needs. Next year's plan is to grow the existing base and reach untapped audience bases incrementally to learn what they want from us."

SEE business model

- **Manufacturer:** SEE is a manufacturer that sells products to businesses.
- **Distributors:** SEE has many distributors that specialize in specific geographies or industries.
- **Businesses:** All types of companies use SEE's packing and protection products, including food manufacturers, ecommerce businesses, shipping and freight companies, and more.
- **Businesses can purchase from authorized distributors or directly from SEE.**



“ Our vision is to change how we operate, not just sell ecommerce.

Jenn Grabenstetter

Vice President for Digital Growth and Experience
Sealed Air (SEE)

Use the voice of your customer.

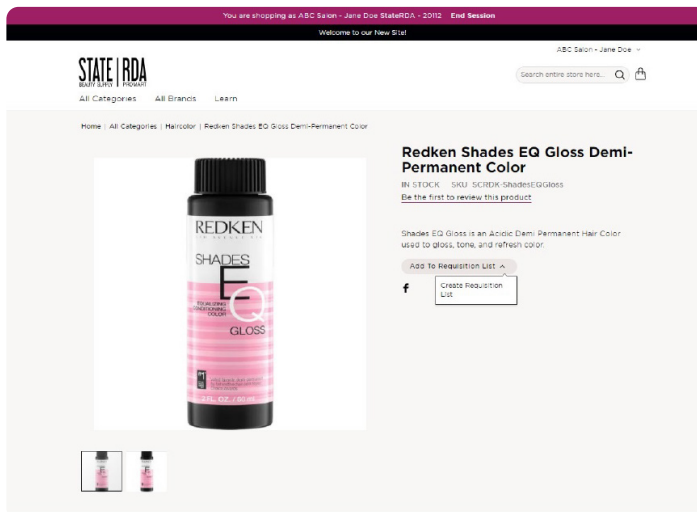
Start with the qualitative side of the project. If the project is as exciting as you believe it is, your executives, sales teams, and partners will be proud to share it with customers and point to it as an area of innovation.

As part of preparing her pitch, Gabby spent time meeting with distributor store owners and customers. She made sure she understood what customers wanted and how the ecommerce platform could support customers going forward. "I learned that salon managers need to be able to order and receive supplies without taking time away from serving customers during business hours," she explains. "Salon managers are also stylists, so if they're not at the chair, they're losing money." She communicated to leadership that B2B digital commerce is vital to the future of the company because it's best for customers.



The most compelling topics in Gabby's emotional case were beating competitors, becoming a dominant market force, and being able to franchise in the future.

Gabby's pitch pointed out that not only does a strong online presence show competence—it is also essential to staying competitive. The most compelling topics in her emotional case were beating competitors, becoming a dominant market force, and being able to franchise in the future. And research supports her point: According to Gartner, 54% of millennials prefer a "rep-free" buying experience when buying from suppliers and vendors.



SalonCentric's new B2B storefront allowed sub-distributors to create requisition lists for easy repeat purchases.



Jenn's strongest emotional arguments included retaining existing customers by exceeding their expectations, and building pride in the company's focus on making life better for both customers and employees.

Jenn's pitch highlighted the transformational power of the initiative. Rather than simply offering online shopping, she wanted the project to "revolutionize the way customers viewed and felt about the products and services offered by SEE." Keeping that worthy aim in everyone's mind was essential when they faced mid-project challenges such as managing expectations, combatting impatience, and preventing scope creep. Her strongest emotional arguments included retaining existing customers by exceeding their expectations, and building pride in the company's focus on making life better for both customers and employees.

The screenshot shows the Sealed Air customer dashboard. The top navigation bar includes the Sealed Air logo, account information (Sold to: Buchanan Packing, Ship to: Twi Pods), a search bar, and icons for search, cart, and help. The sidebar on the left contains navigation links: Dashboard, Quick Order, Order Management, Product Catalog, Help Center, and Company Account. The main content area is divided into several sections:

- Recent Orders:** A section titled "Recent Orders" with a "View All Orders" link. It displays three order cards, each with a progress bar and order details:
 - Order 1:** PO# 314159265, Ordered: Mar 2, 2022. Progress: Submitted, Processing, Shipped. Est. Order Complete: November 15, 2021. Shipping To: Twi Pods, 314 Circumference Circle, Syracuse, NY 31212. Sales Order #: 589793238.
 - Order 2:** PO# 161803399, Ordered: Feb 22, 2022. Progress: Processing, Shipped, Delivered. Shipment: Green Packaging, 2997 Golden Road, Memphis, TN 31132. Sales Order #: 874989484.
 - Order 3:** PO# 60221515, Ordered: Jan 1, 2022. Progress: Processing, Shipped, Invoiced. Shipment: Sustainable Pac Tech, 1023 Mole Avenue, Charlotte, NC 28215. Sales Order #: 602214076.
- Product Recommendation:** A section for "Fasfil Mini Adaptor" with a description: "Trust the proven performance of SEALED AIR® brand Instapak® foam for your custom-fit protective packaging solutions." and a "Browse Catalog" button.
- Quick Order:** A section titled "Quick Order" with a "Go to Full Quick Order" link. It contains two input forms:
 - Order from Material Number:** Two input fields for "Enter Material Number" and "Qty.", followed by an "Add to Cart" button.
 - Order from Template:** A note: "File must be in .csv format and include 'SKU' and 'QTY' columns." with a "Download Template" link and an "Upload File" button.

The footer of the dashboard includes the text: ©2021 Sealed Air | Privacy Policy | Terms & Conditions | User Agreement.

Sealed Air (SEE) focused on reducing friction for customers by creating an intuitive dashboard to see orders, contact support, and quickly order from a CSV file or part number.

SalonCentric—culture plus confidence

Problem

A complicated business structure creates unique challenges. State | RDA sources inventory from parent company L'Oréal and partner brands, supplying 272 brick-and-mortar stores (State Beauty Supply | RDA Pro Mart) across the US.

State | RDA stores needed high-quality ecommerce websites to keep their customers from having to step away from serving their own clientele to resupply their salons. Internally, State | RDA staff spent considerable time correcting sales tax discrepancies and coordinating inventory between the supplier and the stores.

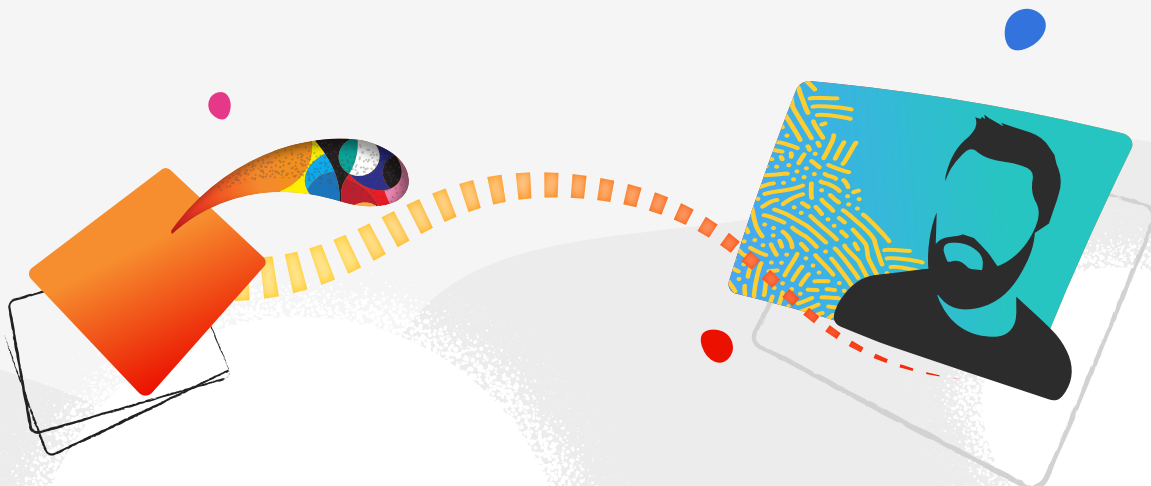
Action

Gabby Helms's role at SalonCentric was in store education management. Ecommerce wasn't her responsibility, but she saw the unmet needs there and felt driven to find solutions. After finding an ecommerce platform vendor that could meet the need, Gabby presented her ideas to the executive team. "Instead of approving the project, they asked me to do more research—twice. They wanted more data before aligning with my vision. They agreed that we needed a holistic approach to customer experience, but they needed to see a detailed plan before signing off on it." The third time she presented her ecommerce initiative, she won approval.

Phase one began with websites and social content for stores, plus better integrations for sales tax and inventory controls for the company's staff. Gabby also created a social presence for the State | RDA brand on three digital channels, with emphasis on creating content for store use.

State Beauty Supply | RDA Pro Mart business model

- Manufacturer: L'Oréal (parent company, maker of beauty supply products) and their partner brands
- Distributor: SalonCentric acts as a distributor to salon professionals and the State | RDA sub-distribution channel.
- Sub-distributor: Locally owned and operated State Beauty Supply | RDA ProMart stores act as another layer of distribution.
- State | RDA Pro Mart provides value-add services to these store operators and the end customer (licensed beauty professionals) to support their businesses and sell products.
- They operate the ecommerce website for store operators and beauty professionals to purchase products.
- Consumers receive hair services from licensed professionals who sourced products from these State | RDA sites.



Results

State Beauty Supply | RDA Pro Mart store owners liked the offering: 40% of them migrated their online presences to the new ecommerce platform, with far higher year-over-year retention than the previous website-building system had earned. State | RDA store owners, salon buyers, and sales staff all reported that the new system was easy to use.

The key, Gabby explained, was to work in stages. “We offered store websites to only a small portion of our stores at a time. That gives us time to deal with issues as they crop up. We’re also saving a few great initiatives, like a loyalty program, MSI [multi-source inventory], and ERP [enterprise resource planning] for phase two.”

Beyond operational changes, Gabby reported that leadership is talking about long-term strategy more than ever. The new focus is on dominating the market and working toward SalonCentric franchising, rather than responding to crises as they arise.



40%

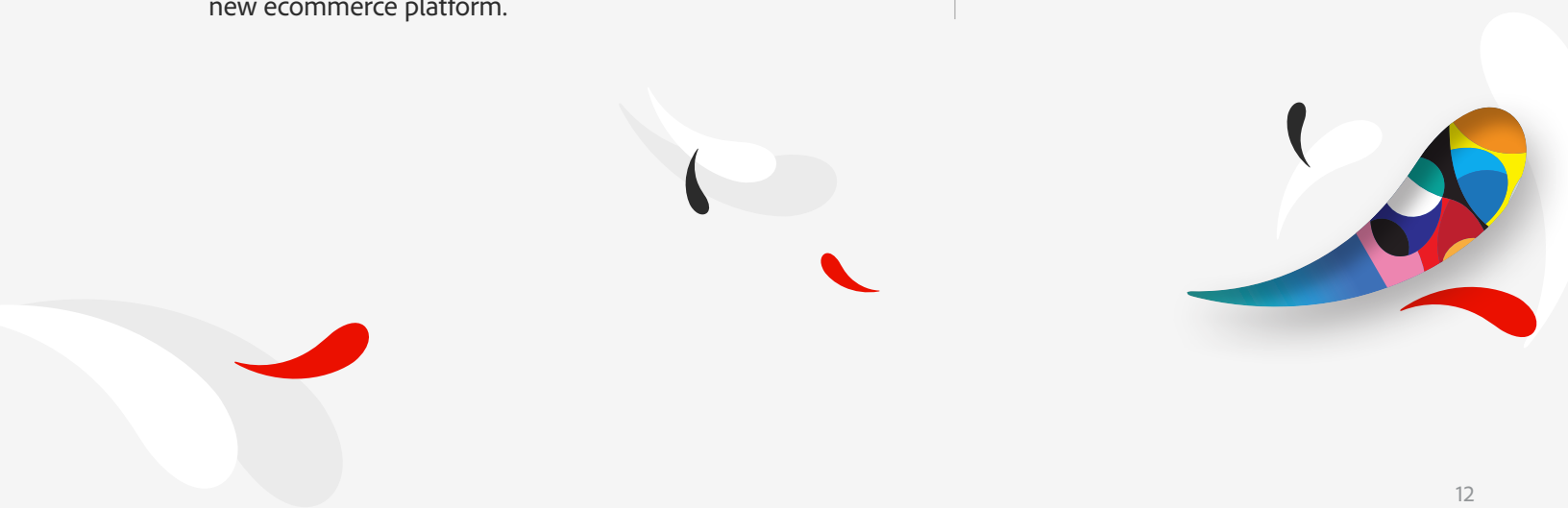
of State Beauty Supply | RDA Pro Mart store owners migrated their online presences to the new ecommerce platform.



“Recognize the value of your contribution. Think about the people whose lives you can improve—in my case, this initiative saves time for salon owners by letting them buy supplies without losing income by leaving the chair during business hours.”

Gabby Helms

Director, Digital Marketing and Ecommerce
SalonCentric



Find the right people.

Adobe's head of product marketing in B2B commerce, Ed Kennedy, has seen the importance of the people behind a project. "I've seen projects with solid financials, but the wrong mindset, fail. I've seen projects with weak financials, but great leadership, succeed," he offers. "The success of a project comes down to people." He adds three tips for project leaders:

1. **Strong leadership and vision are more indicative of success than the financial picture.** Ed reminds Experience Makers not to underestimate the importance of emotional variables, because no decision is 100% based on numbers. He suggests the pitch be evenly balanced—half about the people and half about the business case.
2. **To succeed, a proposal may require you to create cultural and operational change.** If your organization's bureaucracy hasn't prepared leadership to listen to your proposal, you may need to do more work before pitching. Consider the general level of enthusiasm, the politics, confidence, potential champions in different departments, and your own ability to evangelize the project.

If your organization is more conservative, you may succeed by positioning an incremental addition of ecommerce functionality. If your company is more aspirational, communicating digital transformation will be critical.

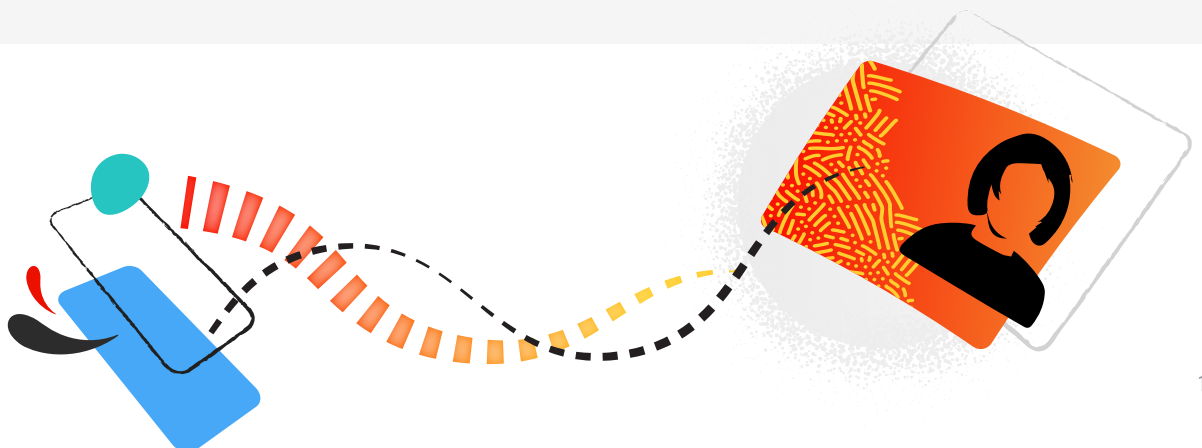
3. **The people and the numbers should walk side by side.** Ed suggests building enthusiasm for the project and the business case at same time, giving each the same level of importance. For example, using qualitative or quantitative feedback from customers can help you prove your business rationale.

“ The success of a project comes down to people.

Ed Kennedy

Product Marketing Lead, B2B Commerce

Adobe



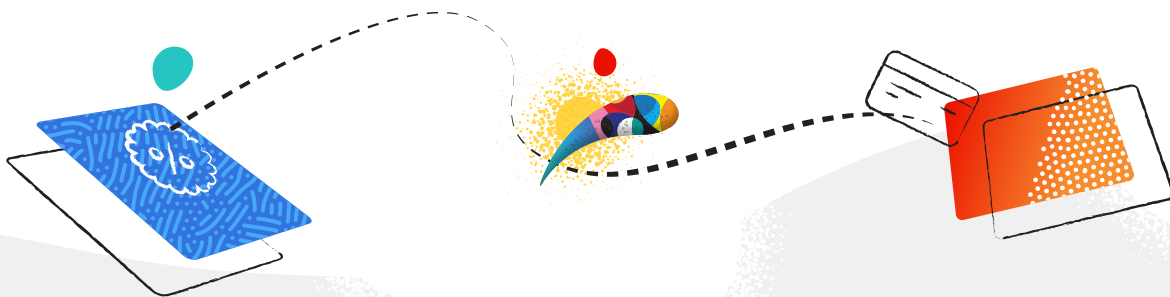
Make the business case for ecommerce.

Winning budget and securing resources are essential.

The business case begins with knowing how you fit into your industry. Gabby's pitch included a clear view of the SalonCentric sub-distribution's unique positioning in the industry. "We don't just stock and sell inventory. We also offer continuing education credits, product demos, signage, and merchandising. Some of our competitors had good ecommerce, but none of them do all that we do."

Use the following phrasing to structure your problem statement:

1. Our [**customers, channel partners, customer service teams**] are struggling with the process of [**manual re-ordering, placing orders by phone or fax, answering order-status questions**].
2. Our new project for the [**ordering portal, B2B ecommerce platform, customer portal**] will solve these problems by delivering better [**product search and browsing, online ordering, repeat orders, mobile-friendly experiences**].
3. We expect this initiative to improve key metrics for [**improving customer retention, increasing revenue, decreasing customer service expenses, increasing operational efficiency, acquiring new customers, increasing revenue per customer, increasing revenue per product, retaining customers and wallet share / reducing attrition**].



B2B commerce is often a catalyst for a digital transformation.

By its very nature, B2B commerce changes how your departments will operate and how customers will interact with you in the future. Carefully consider which departments will need to change before pitching your B2B commerce project. Build alliances and support with leaders in these functions early to ensure your initiative doesn't fizzle out. B2B commerce initiatives are also an opportunity to improve outdated and inefficient processes.



Gabby's business case covered the expected break-even point, time to ROI, bandwidth for ramping up, and expected revenue growth. Jenn's presentation also included details such as fulfillment lead time, estimated delivery, B2B buyer expectations, and supply chain considerations. For both these Experience Makers, the business cases were about far more than just increasing revenues—they were about identifying opportunities to improve profitability.

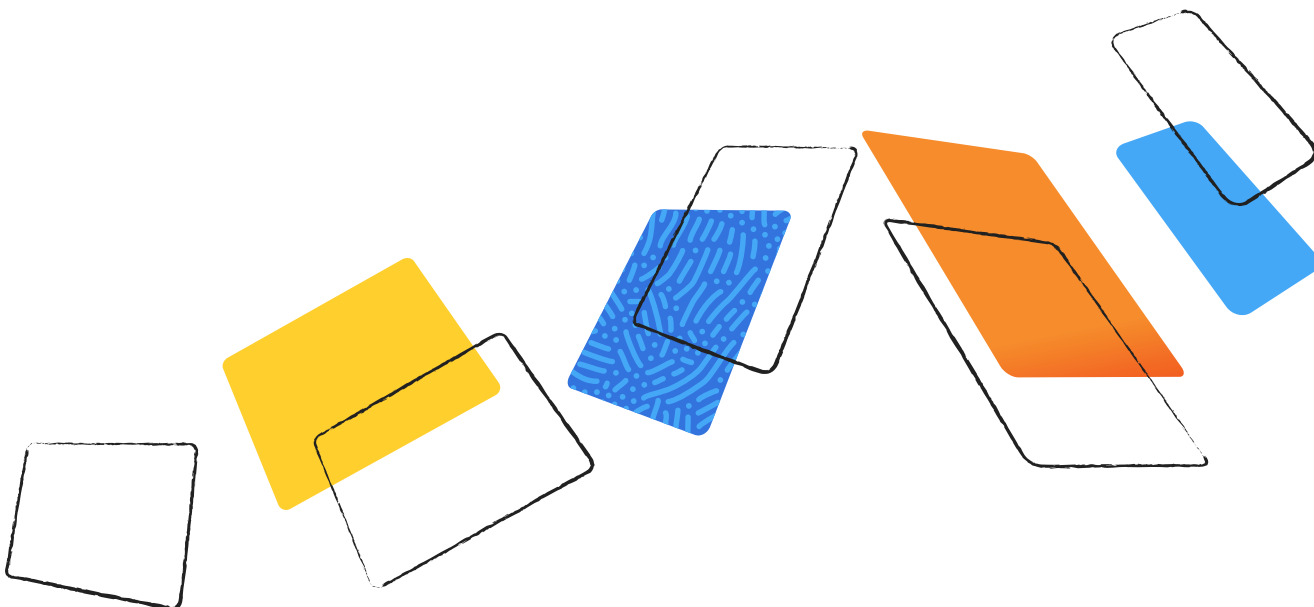
Gabby's vision for the SalonCentric sub-distribution's B2B digital commerce project encompassed not only the online shopping experience for customers, but the staff's work experience. "I found ways to improve processes for our staff, the store owners, and salon buyers," she says. "By reducing the time staff needed to resolve issues as they arose, we created a better experience for everyone involved."

SEE's initiative needed to support the company's essential purpose of making the world better than they found it. As a company transforming packaging into minimalistic, data-rich products that enable automations, SEE would need an ecommerce platform designed to be similarly minimalistic and value-added.

Jenn understood that the ecommerce solution needed to “treat our B2B customers as consumers—they come with consumer expectations even in the B2B environment.” Her vision also incorporated “what packaging has the power to become: turning every package into a digital connection. Packaging can send and receive information inside a manufacturing facility, in a retail environment, and even to the consumer. Packaging as a point of digital connection will unlock its potential in our economy and society.”



For both Gabby and Jenn, the business cases were about far more than just increasing revenues—they were about identifying opportunities to improve profitability and improve how their companies served their customers' needs.



Dive deeper into the world of being an Experience Maker.

Move forward with confidence.

Jenn and Gabby both offer advice to those seeking to spearhead B2B ecommerce initiatives in their own organizations.

Jenn points out that while watching a new project unfold can be exciting, when the solution goes live, “the spotlight shifts away from the designers and developers. Your team needs to be ready to exploit that channel for growth and deliver on the customer's expectations.”

The SalonCentric B2B ecommerce initiative changed not only the company's operations and ecommerce platforms for stores, but also Gabby's career trajectory. She championed the project while in a store education role, but has now moved to directing the organization's sub-distribution digital marketing efforts. She suggests that other Experience Makers “become the one who empowers others. Ask yourself: If it's not me, who else will do this? Realize your power to create change, to improve the world. Shake hands with new people. Introduce yourself.”

Both Gabby and Jenn's B2B ecommerce initiatives are transforming their organizations—and both projects owe their success to the Experience Maker with vision and enthusiasm who began them.

Let's build a plan.

Visit business.adobe.com/products/magento/get-demo.html to schedule time with us, and we'll show you how thousands of B2B merchants have used Adobe Commerce to bring their ecommerce vision to life.



Adobe Experience Cloud

Adobe Experience Cloud is the most comprehensive suite of customer experience management tools on the market. With solutions for data, content, engagement, commerce, personalization, and more, Experience Cloud is built on the world's first platform designed specifically to create customer experiences. Each product is built on a foundation of artificial intelligence and works seamlessly with other Adobe products. And they integrate with your existing technology and future innovations, so you can consistently deliver the right experience every time.

Adobe Commerce

Adobe Commerce is the world's leading digital commerce solution for merchants and brands. With Adobe Commerce, you can build engaging shopping experiences for every type of customer — from B2B and B2C to B2B2C. It's built for enterprise on a scalable, open-source platform with unparalleled security, premium performance, and a low total cost of ownership. Businesses of all sizes can use it to reach customers wherever they are, across devices and marketplaces. It's more than a flexible shopping cart system. It's the building block for business growth.

Sources

[E-Commerce Share of Total B2B Sales in the United States from 2019 to 2023](#), Statista, 2022.

[New B2B Buying Journey & Its Implication for Sales](#), Gartner, 2022.

[Uncovering the Connection Between Digital Maturity and Financial Performance](#), Deloitte Insights, 2020.



Adobe, the Adobe logo, and Adobe Experience Cloud are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Adobe in the United States and/or other countries.

© 2022 Adobe. All rights reserved.