

9xb's Rob Burns looks at eCommerce strategies via a case study from client Watco – a floor coatings and repair product operation which transitioned from traditional B2B sales to an award-winning online business.

The manufacturing industry has undergone significant transformation over the past few years with the opportunity for growth and improved productivity in abundance. But due to the complex nature of B2B sales transactions, the manufacturing industry has traditionally been slow to react to increased demand for digital eCommerce experiences.

The upward trajectory of B2B online sales looks to become business as usual – a trend sparked and accelerated by the pandemic as buyer behaviour shifts to digital. B2B buyers want consumer-inspired experiences and demand instant access to information, giving them the autonomy to self-serve.

Manufacturers now need to focus on evolving their strategies and leveraging digital solutions to meet B2B buyer needs. This will require specialist expertise to overcome complex challenges, from legacy technology constraints, entering new markets and the need to replicate offline experiences online.

## The self-service era

Putting the pandemic aside, the landscape of B2B purchasing has been changing for some time. Due to the increase in millennial decision-makers, advancements in commerce technologies and other market factors, B2B buyers are looking to gain more control and streamline their buying processes. The ability to self-serve isn't just a benefit to the buyer, but to the seller too who can reduce operational costs and increase customer satisfaction to drive more sales.



[Watco](#) identified the need to migrate its traditional buyers online to gain a competitive advantage and cater for its growing digitally savvy audience. A new eCommerce website was launched with country-specific

variants for the UK, France, Ireland and Germany. The flexible and scalable platform provided a configurable framework, free from constraints allowing Watco to continue to evolve and innovate whilst meeting the changing needs of their business and customers.

Watco's eCommerce website empowers B2B buyers to make informed decisions and transact without needing to call sales teams or wait for email responses. This has been achieved through customer-focused tools and features for easier, self-serve purchasing.

This included optimised on-site search, price inc/ex vat, coverage calculator, stock availability, customer reviews, sample requests, click and collect, wish lists, account area and more. Combining these features with detailed technical information, such as FAQ's, webinars, datasheets and advice pages, Watco delivers an exemplary online buying experience.

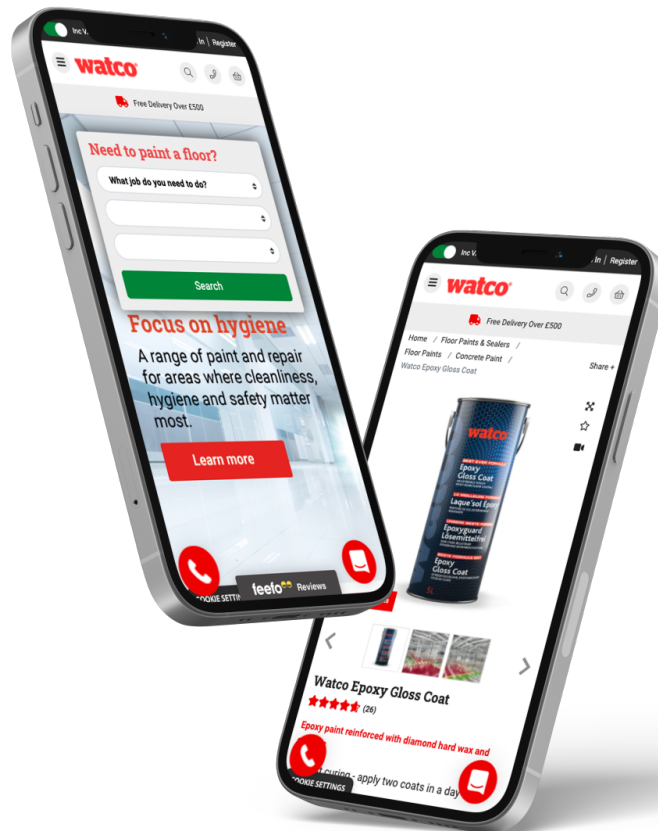
## **Retailer relationships**

Manufacturers traditionally sell goods to other businesses, such as end-users, wholesalers or retailers. The shift in buyer behaviour has driven the opportunity to explore new revenue streams. This includes trading direct-to-consumer (D2C), which gives manufacturers new sales channels and the potential to earn a higher margin.

Despite multiple business benefits, manufacturers have been deterred from selling D2C due to the risk of damaging existing trade relationships. When in reality, with a strong D2C strategy, manufacturers can strengthen their current retail relations and enjoy growth from new markets. Watco adopted an agile way of working, allowing them to deliver new commerce models at pace, taking a test, learn and pivot approach to gauge opportunity size and customer sentiment.

By developing and launching a new online-only brand, focused on broadening their appeal to DIY consumers, Watco were able to acquire a completely new customer segment without disrupting their core B2B audience. This has resulted in an established online D2C brand, driving significant ROI.

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watco.co.uk named B2B eCommerce Website of the Year – UK Digital Growth Awards 2021

## Obstacles to eCommerce integration

Providing customers with instant access to up-to-date information increases sales and underpins loyalty. However, legacy technology systems can be perceived to be a barrier due to cost, lack of expertise and concern over the business impact on legacy processes. Manufacturers should consider how web technologies can be used to connect multiple disparate IT systems together.

A scalable eCommerce platform will support multiple integrations to future proof their eCommerce strategy, streamline operations, automate the ordering process and deliver real-time information. Watco's website is built on the robust eCommerce platform Peracto which allows for seamless integration with

third-party systems and which has empowered Watco to sell securely and reliably 24/7/365. Through powerful integrations, Watco has been able to eliminate manual order entry, deliver accurate data & inventory and drive a smooth omnichannel experience for their buyers.

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9xb is a multi-award winning eCommerce agency, which builds and supports high-performing eCommerce websites for ambitious brands.

Specialising in complex business logic, 9xb provides technical, strategic and creative solutions that overcome barriers to growth.

More information: [www.9xb.com](http://www.9xb.com)

Source: [Overcoming barriers to B2B eCommerce](#)