

While business-to-business buyers expect features found on consumer-facing websites, such as real-time product inventory and online support forums, on supplier's websites, they still expect suppliers to provide the additional features that purchasing agents require.

A B2B buyer's unique needs include being shown only products she buys and needs, as opposed to the entire catalog, product pricing specific to her company's contract, one click re-ordering and available payment and shipping options.

As a condition of doing business with the supplier, some B2B buyers require the ability to initiate a purchase order using a Punchout catalog, which links a buyer's ERP and procurement software to a supplier's catalog and integrate it with the buyer's internal workflow and approval processes. In addition, Punchout catalogs include current product information and configurations and real-time pricing and availability.

When purchasing products not covered under an existing contract or in a quantity that exceeds the previously negotiated bulk pricing agreement, B2B buyers expect to be able to quickly negotiate a price with the supplier online and convert the quote into a sales order with one click. This capability eliminates the paper work involved with negotiating a purchase price and submitting a sales order, which speeds both processes.

Private e-commerce portals are another way B2B suppliers can serve their customers. Private portals show products and pricing specific to the buyer. For example, a distributor of teacher, classroom and school office supplies can create a private portal that lets school districts set up preapproved product lists for purchase by teachers, department and administrative staff. Suppliers can also displays ads specifically on the portal targeted at the buyer and offer other perks through it, such as a loyalty program.

“The challenge of B2B e-commerce is that every B2B buyer has different needs, which is why suppliers need an e-commerce platform that is flexible enough to meet whatever buyer's needs may be” says Bachir Kassir, founder and president of the WebJaguar Commerce, Mobile, Search and Marketing Platform.

On the supplier side, e-commerce platforms that equip sales representatives with the tools to place an order on a buyer's behalf, provide notification when a buyer initiates an order or requests a price quote, and to show buyers real-time inventory information, including how long an item is on back order, can strengthen the relationship between the sales representative and the buyer.

With the emergence of B2B marketplaces, many suppliers are enabling third-party sellers on their sites. "Marketplaces are uncharted territory for B2B companies," says Kassir. "At WebJaguar, we took the leadership position in B2B marketplaces when we launched myTradeZone.com, a B2B trade, search and networking portal. This technology enabled our client ViaTrading.com to launch their liquidatenow.com portal."

WebJaguar's Variable Print technology allows buyers to order business cards or forms. For example, quick-service restaurant franchisees can launch a template to design coupons featuring offers specific to their location, then submit the order to the supplier for printing. Buyers can also collaborate to make purchases together to receive bulk pricing.

"At WebJaguar we saw a need from our customers, and addressed this need," says Kassir. "The features within our platform can help B2B vendors grow their business and automate their processes."

As the needs of online B2B buyers grow, so too will their expectations that suppliers can meet their needs. "B2B buyers expect suppliers to provide the tools they need to conduct business online in the manner they want," says Kassir. "WebJaguar gives manufacturers, distributors and wholesalers the tools and flexibility they need to meet their customers' needs."