



DXC LEADING EDGE | INDUSTRIAL
E-COMMERCE

It's time for great industrial e-commerce

NO MORE EXCUSES

DXC Leading Edge explores why
deploying digital commerce at scale isn't
out of reach for industrial enterprises

In today's rapidly evolving business landscape, where digital business has become the norm, the importance of e-commerce cannot be overstated. While the consumer market has embraced the convenience and efficiency of online shopping, the realm of business-to-business (B2B) digital commerce has lagged behind. Industrial e-commerce, in particular, has been slow to adapt to the changing needs and expectations of digital-first customers.

The immense potential of B2B e-commerce is evident in its staggering \$17.9 trillion global market value, surpassing that of B2C e-commerce by a significant margin. Yet, when it comes to user experience and engagement, most B2B e-commerce efforts fall short of the standards set by their B2C counterparts. It is time to break free from the limitations of traditional B2B transactions and engineer industrial e-commerce for the digital age.

The demand for reimagined industrial e-commerce experiences is evident. Equally present is a new class of buyers who expect modern features and functions, as digital-first customers.

As before, DXC helps build and integrate the mission-critical (essential) technology that runs global complex businesses. Today, partnering with e-commerce and CRM platforms, we are enabling our customers' technology evolution by designing and integrating modern unified digital experiences

across the value chain. DXC brings the expertise to bridge traditional ERP applications, logistics and business insights into a comprehensive approach that encompasses the entire customer journey, to deliver a seamless experience across digital touchpoints. We help guide our customers — guide you — through the essential evolution of legacy technical challenges to modernize the tech estate and to engineer for the future.

Reading this perspective will help you with your onward journey, and we are ready to help you go further, faster. Your modern industrial e-commerce future starts now.



Brian Miller
Global lead of Applications for DXC Technology

Few markets are measured in trillions of dollars,

and are expected to have a **20% compound annual growth rate** up to 2030.ⁱ Yet business-to-business digital commerce (B2B e-comm) remains on the rise. Its **\$17.9 trillion global market value** amid the COVID-19 pandemic is five times larger than that of B2C.ⁱⁱ

Still, B2C e-comm sets the standard for how B2B transactions are managed. Comparatively, most B2B e-comm experiences lack the engaging features and ease of use we've come to expect from consumer e-comm.

In the online B2C market, **Amazon controls nearly 40% of all sales.**ⁱⁱⁱ No company has done more to reinvent the way we shop. Millennials have come of age with Amazon boxes peppering their doorsteps, and they comprise the majority of today's digital-savvy shoppers. They carry those high expectations of digital shopping experiences into B2B

e-comm. For dramatically underserved submarkets of B2B digital commerce, like industrial e-commerce, adapting to the needs of today's digital-first shoppers is a tall order. The route to a completed transaction is made all the more tortuous because most large B2B transactions are executed on credit using prenegotiated terms. Those rates and negotiations present an upfront acquisition hurdle and a barrier to switching. This has often added up to less-than-stellar B2B shopping experiences.

Already, 83% of all **B2B buyers prefer to order online**, and millennials expect even more capabilities beyond a digital shopping portal.^{iv} According to a **recent study by DemandGen and the MX Group**, 60% of millennials choose vendors based on their ability to specify and configure a solution, while 51% want to see detailed specs before they make a purchase.^v

Now that millennials are the organizational access point for **44% of B2B** purchases, it's become clear that the traditional sales model many industrial organizations use is outdated.^{vi} Self-navigating the purchase process has become the norm for 65% of B2B buyers, according to Gartner, and that number shows no sign of shrinking.^{vii} Modern e-commerce has laid the foundation for scalable, streamlined and traceable purchases. Now, industrial vendors must adapt if they expect to win deals.

Salesforce's State of the Connected Customer report shows that 88% of customers rank the experience a company provides as equally important as their products or services.^{viii} However, the further we move from selling simple products, like a box of paper or an office chair, the harder digital commerce becomes. This is especially true in the industrial marketplace, where information is scarce, the market is global and intellectual property must be protected.

B2B shoppers deserve a better digital commerce experience — one that matches the ways they do business throughout their organizations. The market is ready, but why aren't industrial companies?



The industrial business is complex — but that's no longer an excuse

There's no denying that the problems industrial organizations face in adopting digital commerce are complex.

Where do you go for replacement parts for a robotic surgery arm? What happens when you need a rotation gearbox for a restoration vehicle during a natural disaster? How do you compare connectivity and return speed options on satellite uplink for an ultra-low-latency application? Who offers specialized geolocation data for offshore wind provision?

These questions don't make for the easiest online searches. Traditional search engines aren't built for the complexity of B2B needs. The pandemic drove the shift to online purchasing and forced the market forward, and industrial customers have followed suit. It's no surprise that courier services provider DHL predicts that **80% of B2B transactions** will be processed through online platforms by 2025.^{ix}

However, effective industrial e-comm solutions go beyond buying and selling in online marketplaces. They must encompass all aspects of the customer journey, leveraging technology to provide a seamless customer experience across every touchpoint.

That has led complex product providers to believe only low-complexity goods can be sold online. That's not only wrong, but it's dangerous thinking, too. Thirty-five percent of buyers report they will **spend over \$500,000** in a single online transaction, and 97% of digital leaders predict online orders will become larger and more complex in the next 2 years.^{x,xi} That will make B2B digital commerce table stakes for industrial organizations to survive.

Deploying industrial e-comm at scale isn't out of reach for industrial organizations — but it does represent a shift in the target operating model, roles and practices they employ. Rather than treating an industrial e-comm platform as a single solution, companies must integrate systems across finance, service management, customer support and more to design a holistic digital commerce experience. Developing a comprehensive solution starts with examining business complexity, customer experience and modernization through a new lens.

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Platforms everywhere

Many industrial organizations struggle with translating the complexity and customization in their products and operations into codified business rules. It's daunting to develop an easy-to-use, engaging approach for online customers without overcomplicating the buying process. In fact, it often appears intractable when faced with myriad combinations of pricing strategy, product customization and contractual features. In the face of all those business rules, each quote is an exception, and validating online orders seems riskier than managing traditional sales channels.

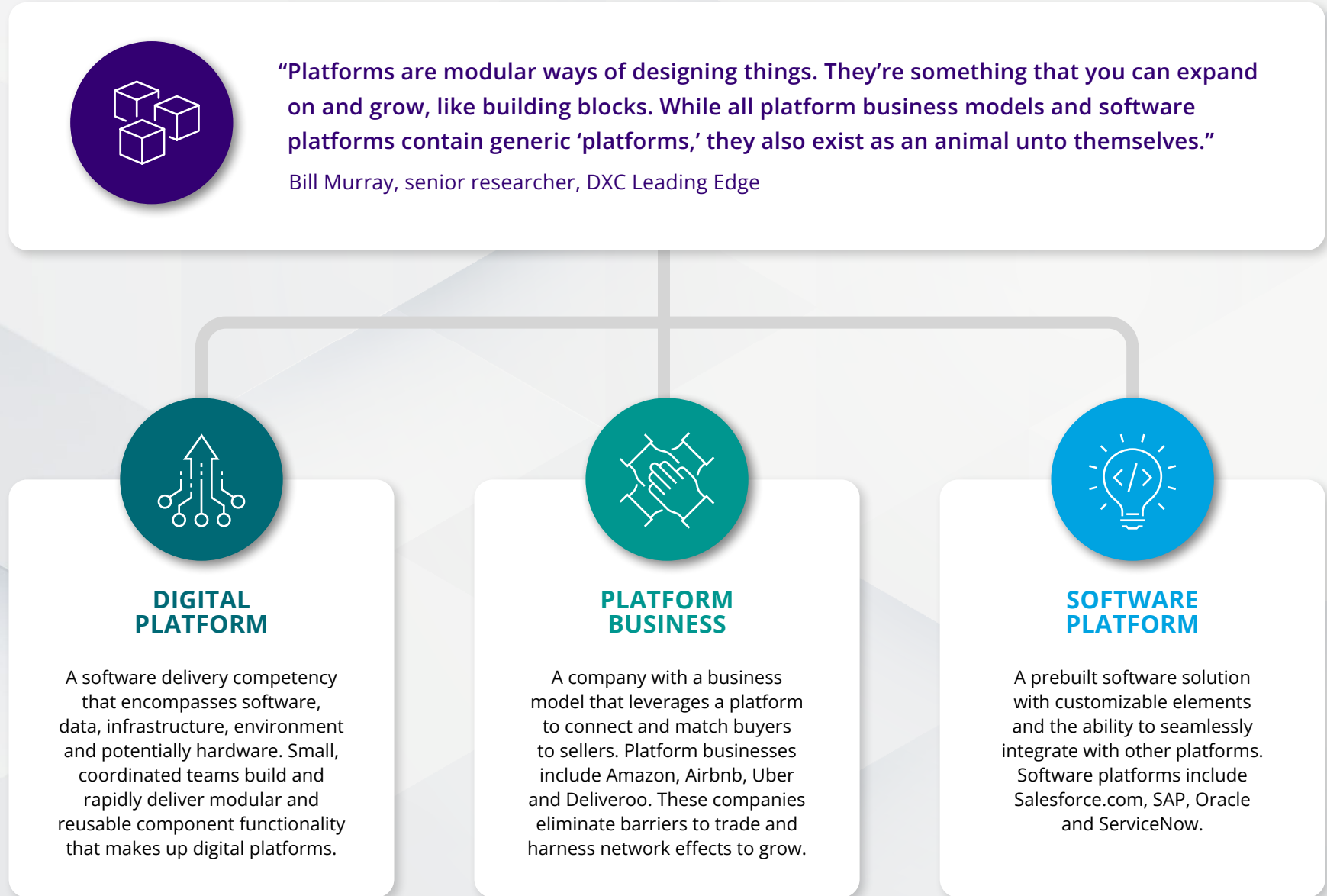
Part of the challenge also lies in navigating overlapping terminology to identify the appropriate solution. It can be helpful to set some distinctions (see **Figure 1**).

Digital platform capabilities are at the heart of platform businesses and software platforms. They are, as DXC Leading Edge defined them in a **recent report**, change agents. Those digital platforms are turning up in every organization in the world. What's needed is a great way to orchestrate these capabilities into elegant customer experiences — delivered via a custom platform business, a software platform or even across ecosystem partners.

The challenge is in how you do it. Creating your own platform business model can be expensive, and maintaining it can be difficult without guaranteed large volume orders to cover fixed overhead costs. Does your organization have the discipline and the bench strength to build a solution that demands continuous evolution? Often, organizations attempt a segregation of duties, where IT has some responsibilities, and marketing, inventory

Figure 1 ►

DIGITAL PLATFORM VS. PLATFORM BUSINESS VS. SOFTWARE PLATFORM



and credit management all have their own tasks. It's considered risk mitigation. However, it has a downside as well: It can lead to inefficiencies in the operations of buying and selling. That's one of the places where software platforms managed by a digital platform team in the business can help.

These software platforms offer faster time to market, proven functionality and customer support. And the digital platform teams focus on certain experiences organizations want to develop. Industrial organizations must see the writing on the wall and recognize that their future relies on the successful adoption of platforms to facilitate digital commerce.



Answering complexity with codification

The transition from viewing platform complexity as an obstacle to seeing it as a feature requires a mental shift. Luckily, codifying rules in applications is becoming easier with tighter software integrations, AI and even new **generative AI** potential. Rule set management capabilities streamline interactions across the enterprise and decrease potential pricing errors that industrial organizations view as inevitable.

For instance, while sales teams may still occasionally need to call customers to validate online product orders, they will ultimately spend less time than they currently do accepting and facilitating orders entirely by phone. This decreases the amount organizations spend on sales and customer service operations. Alternatively, when customers can complete orders quickly with self-service

industrial e-comm platforms, the customer service team can enrich the buying process with high-touch concierge support that builds loyalty and facilitates a personal connection.

These online orders also close the order-to-cash gap, giving organizations faster access to payments made and processed online. This facilitates better financial health as the industrial e-comm business grows by eliminating errors from accepting credit card information over the phone or issues with waiting for mailed checks to arrive.

A comprehensive strategy to address digital commerce adoption incrementally — starting with the least complex orders and slowly defining codified rules to support more complex use cases — is a critical step to removing complexity. Moving all reorders to industrial e-comm channels is a great place to start, allowing technology and automation to deliver early wins without addressing the complexity of new orders. Repeat orders can solidify the necessary business rules that support the online ordering platform, while human resources in sales and customer support can focus on the highest needs and provide hands-on support for new orders.

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Customer centricity

Industrial companies play small when they view industrial e-comm as solely a revenue opportunity and not a profit driver. Digital commerce has a critical role in today's B2B growth equation. According to McKinsey, **modern B2B growth depends on shifting the focus to the customer**, understanding their needs and helping them find the right solutions with a proactive approach.^{xii}

Currently, customers use as many as **10 channels to complete a B2B transaction**.^{xiii} Compare that experience to more seamless B2C shopping solutions, like a person going grocery shopping. This person can view the nutritional value of eggplant, find a recipe for ratatouille, locate the ingredients needed for the recipe, scan their products and check out within the same app. This “headless” commerce solution — where no channel is primary and each interaction contributes to the customer journey — gives customers the information they need, when they need it, through multiple moments that resonate organically with them.

One of the best reference points here is to go back to basics, or at least process basics — the lead-to-cash cycle (see **Figure 2**).

THE LEAD-TO-CASH CYCLE: How industrial vendors stay focused on customers and drive growth with industrial e-commerce for the platform-driven world



Figure 2 ▲

It provides a way to organize thinking around people, processes and technology. There are innovations — including connectors and integrations with apps and data. However, the cycle represents a touchstone to follow the customer journey.

To get there, industrial organizations not only need to track customers and their orders across both digital and physical environments; they must also record customer equipment and asset location, services, maintenance schedules, warranties, parts replacements, upgrades, refurbishment and more to provide the end-to-end experience customers expect.

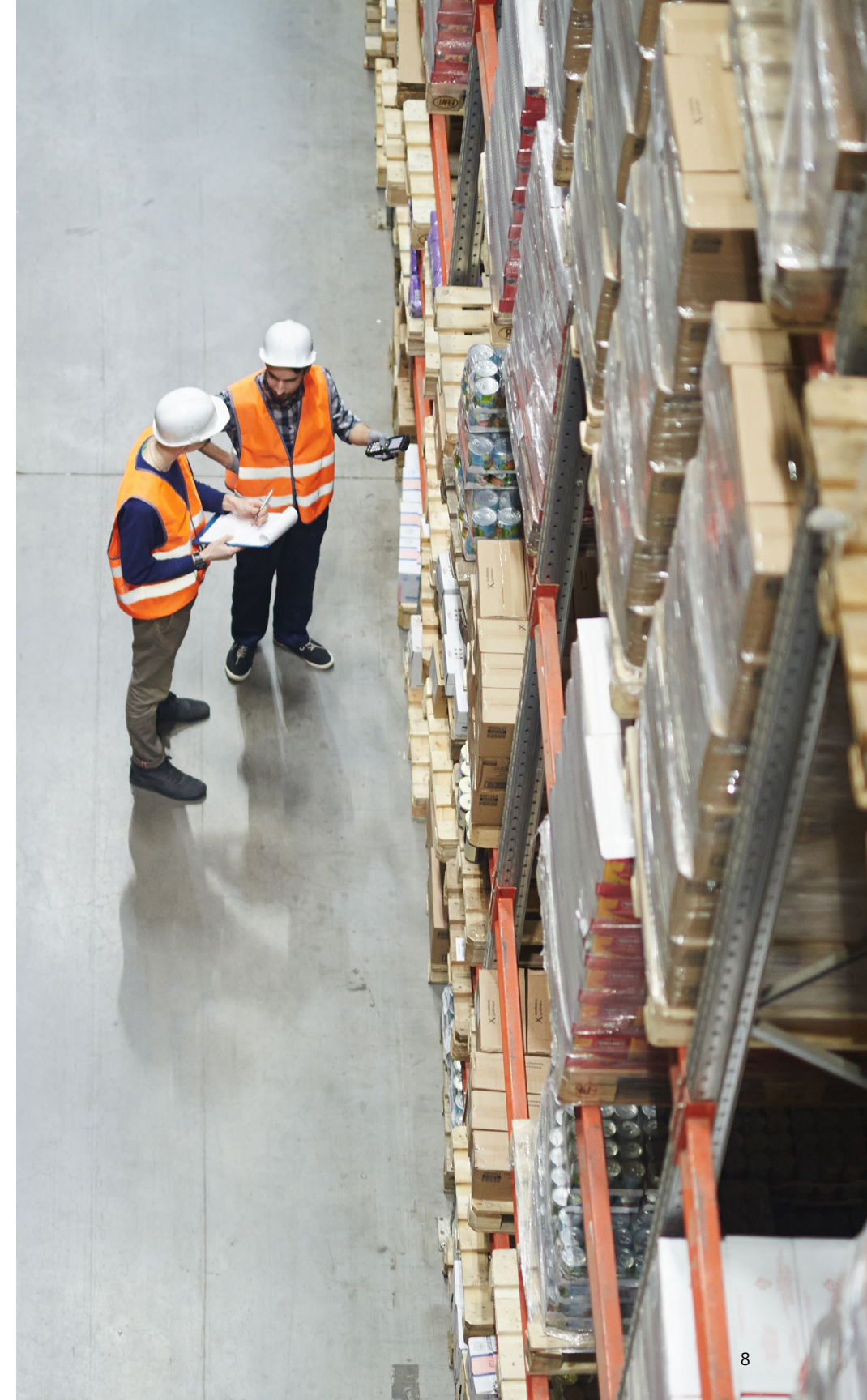
Take, for example, a customer trying to order shelving for their warehouse. Comparing options online is difficult without accurate and readily available product specs. Even as they consider their options, they may not know which pieces work together and whether they must order them a la carte or as a system. Plus, different vendor jargon can further muddy the waters and lead to confusion as customers compare products. If the customer has more constraints, like a deadline by which they need the shelving, they may not have the information they need about delivery options and timing to make a decision before checkout. Since many of these deliveries involve third-party logistics, there are even more elements to consider and coordinate before the product reaches the customer's door.

There's no doubt that complexity abounds with all these factors, and customizable products introduce even more challenges. Yet, an **experience-driven industrial digital commerce platform** can address all these factors for a more comprehensive user experience. A solution that shares information across sales, manufacturing, logistics and warehouse management can

offer customers the product information, order constraints and shipping information they need to make informed decisions. This solution can also instantly connect shoppers to the support they need to resolve their questions so they can order online with confidence. Once the customer places their order, the connected systems can provide consistent follow-up messaging to keep shoppers informed, too.

Ultimately, the right industrial e-comm solution empowers enterprises to seamlessly support and fulfill customer orders for large, complex products and services with a fully integrated, end-to-end solution. On the foundation of a trusted software platform, industrial organizations can build a scalable digital commerce solution featuring modular digital platforms for ordering, logistics and shipping, customer support, financial management, extensive reporting and more. It has one additional and very vital benefit: It focuses on creating a framework that includes operating costs and margin. And doing that also enables decision making that helps assess the profit impacts of potential options.

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Enabling modernization to adjust to evolving expectations

Digital commerce goes beyond a single solution. For industrial e-comm to be effective, IT updates across the enterprise are essential. Industrial customers are concerned that industrial e-comm won't work within their current workflows and systems, and that concern isn't misplaced; trying to integrate a shiny new e-commerce application into an outdated ERP solution poses a significant concern.

In addition, according to DXC Leading Edge's 2023 research on modernization and technical debt, 75% of global CIOs and IT executives are struggling to find skilled resources to support these older systems, and 68% are pursuing external vendors to create workaround solutions.^{xiv} Creating workaround solutions to integrate new systems and features that older solutions aren't designed to support is often more time-consuming, costlier and riskier than implementing upgraded solutions — even if the initial implementation cost gives industrial organizations sticker shock.

But the risks of putting off modernization aren't just an IT problem; they affect the entire organization. Supporting procurement, production and distribution at a global level calls for a forward-thinking approach. Companies must develop strategies to address pressing

Designing an effective industrial e-comm platform starts with developing a cross-functional team for optimal information flow and management.

technical debt, upgrade or abandon older systems, and recover funds to apply to technology that supports revenue generation.

Modernization is a fundamental part of any digital commerce strategy, and organizations need the right support to make a scalable industrial e-comm platform a reality. If an industrial organization introduces digital commerce on top of excessive technical debt, it sets itself up for failure when the solution isn't integrated into global operations. External support can help these organizations develop a comprehensive industrial e-comm strategy and compatible infrastructure that supports it. Companies also turn to external resources for:

- Defining the technical and functional architecture
- Specifying new connected processes for digital life-cycle management and IT life-cycle management
- Configuring, developing and implementing solutions
- Architecting data migration
- Supporting pilot marketing tasks
- Developing analytics and reporting standards
- Supporting solution deployment and providing local support
- Managing tools and licenses

That starts with understanding who owns industrial e-comm in your organization. Designing an effective industrial e-comm platform starts with developing a cross-functional team for optimal information flow and management. A new approach, which DXC Leading Edge recently explored in "**Platform culture: a field guide to mastering the art of information flow**," can help industrial organizations define who controls the experience, who contributes budget and who has final decision authority for digital commerce solutions.^{xv}

Industrial e-comm must start now to preserve customer relationships

Industrial organizations that have transitioned to digital commerce already have access to the higher profits and better customer service these integrated solutions enable. Now, the gap is widening between companies that offer end-to-end digital commerce and those that don't. Industrial organizations that don't act now face one of two inevitable futures:

- Adopt a higher-priced, less flexible, customized but externally managed e-commerce solution later
- Lose their existing customers to competitors or market aggregators

Both scenarios disguise the key opportunity: expand digital experience now and build industrial e-comm solutions that support the organization's needs. While some organizations find the IT back end of this approach daunting, it's far from insurmountable with the right delivery support. Partnerships give industrial organizations access to the right resources to design comprehensive digital commerce strategies and platforms from the get-go. Plus, the right partner can focus on all the integrations, data management and modernization necessary to support an end-to-end industrial e-comm solution, freeing up internal teams to focus on the customer experience.

Imagine a world of large industrial companies, where reducing complexity is a game-changer. Imagine a seamless process where all customer data, product catalogs, pricing details and order history come together in one central hub. With automation tools, sales processes become streamlined, errors diminish and efficiency skyrockets. Personalized customer experiences become the norm, thanks to targeted marketing and customized pricing. Collaboration among teams and partners enables a synchronized sales process. Valuable insights from data analytics fuel confident decision making. Integration with existing systems enables smooth operations, unlocking the full potential of industrial e-commerce. Complexity fades away, making room for growth and success (see **Figure 3**).

Many organizations forgo complex custom builds in favor of existing, trusted platforms. While these may seem more expensive up front, lower operating expenses often lead to faster return on investment and a lower total cost of ownership over time. Plus, building on a trusted platform makes it easier to find expert support to design and develop your industrial e-comm solution.

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SEAMLESS INTEGRATION UNLOCKS THE POTENTIAL OF INDUSTRIAL E-COMMERCE



Figure 3 ▶

When all elements of industrial commerce work together, complexity gives way to seamless operations and growth.

E-COMMERCE PLATFORM REQUIREMENTS

Still, the process begins with creating an effective strategy, which involves three key steps: defining your requirements, determining your model and establishing your team.

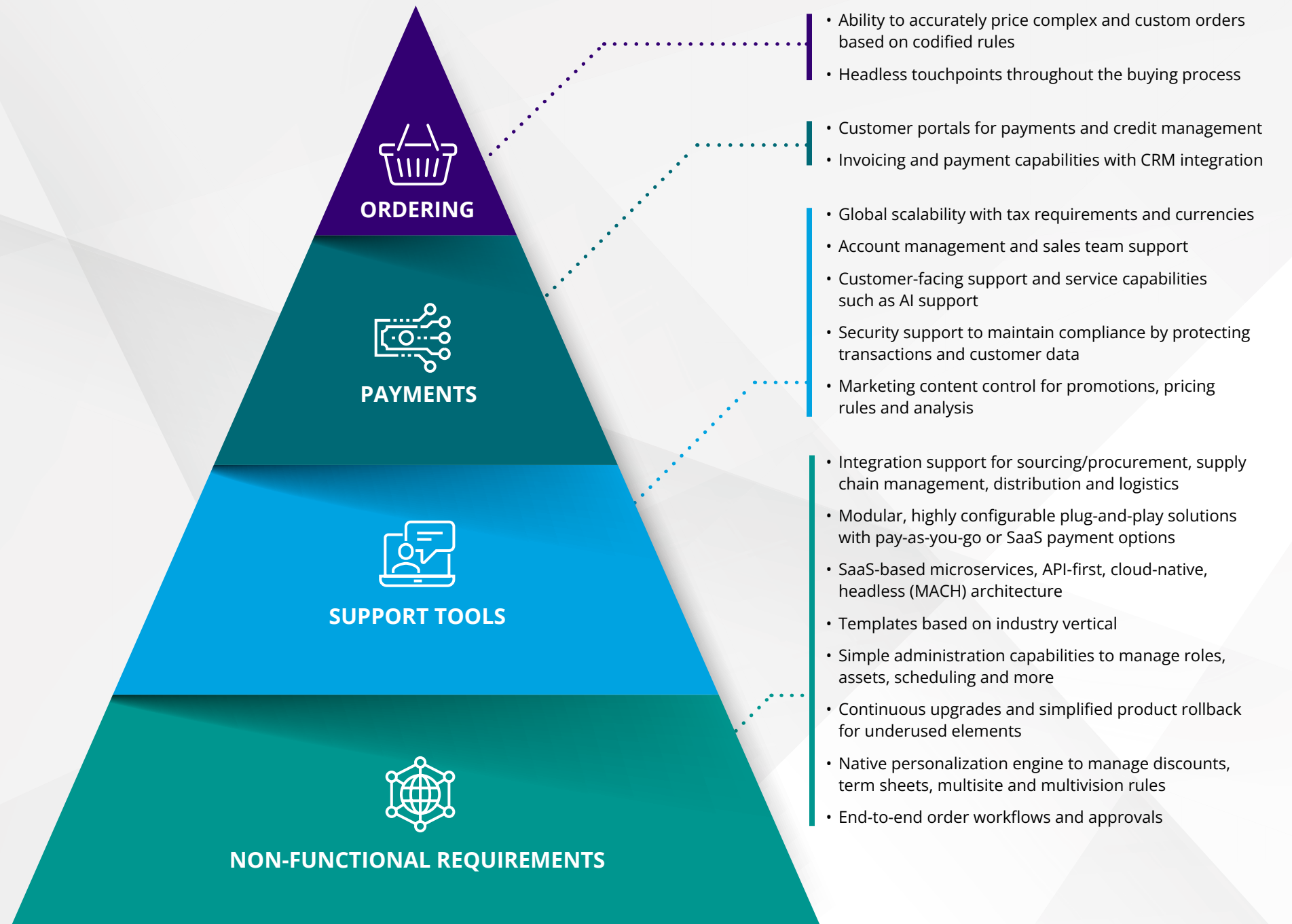
Define your requirements

Working toward a cohesive, well-defined goal starts with understanding your needs; only then can you find the right support. However, if e-commerce has been off your radar, it's difficult to assess which requirements your solution should address. A few common requirements to consider for an e-commerce platform are shown in **Figure 4**.

Grounding your strategy in your requirements allows you to create a modular platform that evolves and scales with your organization. Understanding which requirements are fundamental from go-live and developing a strategy to build in more functionality will help you and a trusted partner introduce a solution faster. As organizations introduce new platforms, they should prioritize training to boost adoption, deliver faster return on investment and collect feedback for ongoing development.

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Figure 4 ▶



TRADITIONAL INDUSTRIAL SOLUTION VS. INDUSTRIAL E-COMM SOLUTION

TRADITIONAL INDUSTRIAL SOLUTION

- Poor track-and-trace data leads to compliance risks, added costs and poor reputation
- Unreliable manufacturing and delivery timelines

C-SUITE PRIORITIES



INDUSTRIAL E-COMM SOLUTION

- Better traceability for parts, assemblies and finished goods
- Reliable manufacturing and delivery estimates
- Enhanced customer experience with notifications throughout the order process

- Incomplete understanding of product benefits leads to fewer sales
- Unexpected benefits or challenges with new products
- Unrecognized issues during the purchase process



- Give customers a better understanding of how a product will affect their business
- Model throughput or project tasks effectively
- Bring to light unconsidered challenges in the purchase process
- Leverage machine learning and Industry 4.0 benefits

- Manufacturing slow-downs when orders are placed only after purchase
- Limited data to forecast manufacturing needs
- Reduced reporting and analytical capabilities



- More accurate forecasting for manufacturing
- Guidance on where and when to manufacture products
- Capture more revenue through optimized manufacturing practices
- Tie manufacturing activities to sales outcomes

- Inconsistent order-tracking capabilities increase customer support tasks
- Warehouse and inventory management inaccessible across the organization
- Lack of clarity around delivery timelines and distribution delays
- Difficulty authenticating and transporting certain items



- Allow customers to reliably track orders, including delays
- Use blockchain to provide proof of payment, transportation and authentication
- Establish accurate and predictable customer service expectations
- Reduce customer service calls
- Leverage RFID technology for better warehouse and distribution management

- Customer service handled entirely by human resources
- Customers struggling to reach support and get questions answered
- Constant support needed for all orders
- Limited support available during off-hours



- AI-driven product guidance to support customers throughout the digital purchase process
- Human support reserved for advisory capabilities
- AI capabilities speed up live sales support and enhance support quality
- Recorded support conversations for easy reference
- Rapid training times deliver fast return on investment

Determine your model

E-commerce solutions run the gamut from full in-house management to a hands-off managed services solution, and every organization requires a different degree of in-house versus external management. The end-to-end supply chain digitization that began with the pandemic is powering industrial e-comm, but managing that digitization transition requires dedicated resources that only some organizations have in-house.

Since the pandemic, there's been progressive advancement to address both customer and industrial organizations' pain points with product ordering and fulfillment. The technology and technical know-how are there, but companies must examine what support they need to fully leverage the technology. Choosing the right model can deliver significant top- and bottom-line benefits. For example, while in-house ongoing support may save companies subscription costs in the long run, managed services may enable internal teams to focus more on technical debt and deploy more robust digital commerce solutions faster.

Consider which areas in your organization need the most improvement to direct your industrial e-comm strategy and quickly drive profit through online sales. This can help inform which model — and which partner, if you choose to work with one — is right for your deployment (see **Figure 5**).

◀ Figure 5

Establish your team

Effective digital commerce teams are cross-functional, combining capabilities and addressing needs from leaders across sales, marketing, manufacturing, logistics, operations, finance and more. However, everyone who has worked on a project team knows that making decisions by committee presents its own challenges — ones that can significantly delay or halt production if not handled correctly.

Designing a team for your industrial e-comm implementation starts with defining who is responsible for what within the project. Assessing your requirements can help you determine whether you have the in-house capabilities and bandwidth to address these needs. From there, your requirements and model will help determine what technical capabilities are needed to develop a robust digital commerce solution. Then, you'll need to decide whose input is valuable and necessary to define the strategy around deployment, training and development priorities.

Many industrial organizations choose to augment their teams with support from external partners. In complex environments, it can be difficult to see the forest for the trees when establishing strategy, defining the architecture, connecting different integrations and systems, and encouraging adoption after deployment. Agility is often more essential than customization, and a dedicated partner can provide a platform and templates that help your organization get started with digital commerce, without getting bogged down in the details.

Vendor partners can provide extra experience and insight from working on similar deployments. They can be a vital addition to your project team and set your organization up for digital commerce success.

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Action items: Moving toward a digital-first future in industrial markets

Shifting into the inevitable future of digital commerce is critical, but that doesn't mean you should rush in without a plan. A sustainable industrial e-comm solution is a must for reaping the benefits of online ordering. The return on investment of digital commerce for industrial organizations is as inevitable as its adoption, but organizations must start with some key actions to adapt to the digital-first future (see **Figure 6**).

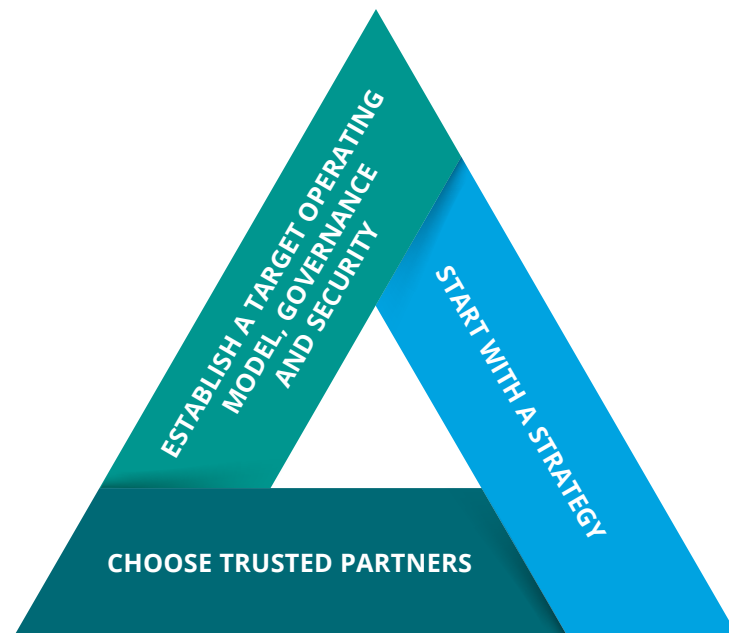


Figure 6 ▲

Embracing the digital-first future: key actions to get started

Start with a strategy

Organizations often make the mistake of diving into new implementations without a clear development strategy, which results in excessive investment. That's where taking an agile + platform development approach (similar to what DXC Leading Edge described in **"Platform culture: A field guide to mastering the art of information flow"**^{xvi}) can offer significant advantages. Agile development promotes a modular and incremental system design that can grow alongside your digital commerce business. By breaking down the solution into smaller modules, you prioritize crucial functionalities, ensuring a functional system from the outset. This incremental strategy not only minimizes the learning curve for users but also allows for valuable feedback to improve the system with each new component.

Understanding what your finance organization would like moving forward, and how your IT organization would like to manage ongoing solution delivery and support are both relevant executive considerations.

You can efficiently develop and integrate components, leverage third-party services and adapt to emerging technologies without over-architecting the solution. This provides a path to deliver value early and frequently, achieve faster return on investment and ensure that your solution remains adaptable to evolving needs. Instead of a monolithic implementation, consider adopting an iterative and modular approach to maximize the benefits of agility and platform development.

Choose trusted partners

Your in-house support is likely capable of much more than they expect. Still, most teams can benefit from expert guidance when establishing strategy, architecture and connectivity. Choose a partner that understands your mission-critical systems first and foremost. They can support you in designing, building and running solutions that align with your existing workflows and your desired e-commerce strategy. The right partner can also help you make the most of the latest technology, like AI capabilities, that will simplify your workflows and reduce complexity in ordering.

Establish a target operating model, governance and security

Defining how effective e-commerce will look through a target operating model is crucial to developing the project plan and strategy for deployment. Understanding the ideal state of your e-commerce platform allows everyone on your team to work toward a common vision and prioritize the work that will help you reach that point. From there, establishing governance and security controls to manage data and compliance requirements can help you reach that target operating model systematically and comprehensively.

One key consideration here is whether the organization is more accepting of CAPEX- and OPEX-style solutions. Understanding what your finance organization would like moving forward, and how your IT organization would like to manage ongoing solution delivery and support are both relevant executive considerations.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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