

# 2025 B2B buyer benchmark report

Industry-specific friction, digital demands, and winning moves



# Table of Contents

Executive summary	3
Introduction: The ever-changing B2B landscape	4
How this information was gathered	5
Friction factors that slow B2B growth	6
The competitive divide: Modern tech capabilities vs. B2B reality	7
B2B buyers are ready for self-service tools	9
Mapping what matters most to buyers	14
The digital-first B2B buyer: creating a competitive edge	17





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# The 2025 B2B Buyer Benchmark Report includes the perspectives of 900 C-level, senior and middle management B2B buyers and decision-makers, spanning the UKI, DACH, BNL, and Nordics, to uncover trends, friction points, and digital imperatives shaping the future of business procurement.

Today's B2B buyers expect a purchasing experience that mirrors their personal consumer interactions: autonomy, transparency, and frictionless self-service. A striking 83% of survey respondents consider robust self-service tools "incredibly important" when choosing suppliers. Yet, pain points remain. Slow vendor response (24%), hidden pricing (39%), convoluted approval workflows (34%), hard-to-navigate portals (33%), and inefficient reordering (35%) top their frustrations issues compounded by 54% of respondents holding senior or C-level roles, making these challenges strategic as much as operational.

While digital maturity advances, the report reveals that region is less predictive of buyer needs than industry vertical. For example, Aerospace and Defence buyers operate in 6.7 product categories on average with high complexity and require multi-stage approval workflows and deep ERP integration. Packaging and Food Processing buyers cite transparency and real-time tracking as essential. Manufacturing and Electronics buyers want one-click reordering and technical configuration tools, while Energy Equipment and Infrastructure prioritise automated approvals and compliance dashboards.

B2B buyers show strong demand for advanced AI features, with 67% valuing AI-powered pricing, 56% wanting automated reordering, 40% seeking product recommendations, and 43% desiring API-driven procurement system integration - particularly among large enterprises. Despite this clear appetite for sophisticated capabilities, over half of buyers still rely on manual workflows or spreadsheets, underscoring the persistent divide between buyer expectations and current vendor capabilities.

Crucially, self-service is now considered “table stakes,” but human sales support remains vital for complex, high-value transactions. Larger companies (>€250M revenue) demand personalised service, seamless automation, account transparency, and integrated order tracking. Regional nuances exist, BNL shows advanced digital maturity but friction with reordering; UKI buyers have high expectations but persistent dissatisfaction, especially around invoice access; and the Nordics benefit from fast vendor responsiveness but continue to struggle with pricing clarity and usability.

To seize growth, B2B suppliers must modernise both customer-facing portals and back-office processes, eliminate friction with transparency and speed, and tailor their digital investments to specific industry needs. The next wave of competitive advantage lies in delivering unified, highly automated buying experiences, turning operational pain points into drivers of loyalty and revenue. Companies slow to adapt risk not only inefficiency but accelerated customer attrition in an increasingly digital-first market.

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#### INTRODUCTION: THE EVER-CHANGING B2B LANDSCAPE

## Today's B2B buyers **expect the same autonomy and ease in vendor relationships that they experience in their personal purchases.**

With 83% of respondents saying self-service tools are incredibly important when choosing a new vendor, the message is clear: buyers want to drive their own evaluation process rather than being guided through predetermined sales funnels.

The traditional buying experience has been characterised by lengthy sales cycles, multiple touchpoints, catalogue experiences, and a heavy reliance on sales representatives. But looking ahead, the buying experience is becoming more seamless: shaped by more independent, personalised, and easy purchasing processes, AI, and automation strategies.

This report will examine the perception and experience of today's B2B buyers, drawing on fresh survey insights to identify key trends, pain points, and opportunities for B2B businesses to tap into.



#### HOW THIS INFORMATION WAS GATHERED

**The insights from the report are based on survey results on B2B buyer trends, preferences and behaviours when doing business with vendors, and what you can do to adapt to the changing consumer behaviour and evolving technological landscape.**

Primarily the focus is on B2B buyers who purchase from any of the following sectors:

- **Aerospace and Defence Components**
- **Automotive Parts and Components**
- **Chemicals and Raw Materials**
- **Construction Materials and Equipment**
- **Food Ingredients and Processing Equipment**
- **Healthcare Equipment and Medical Devices**
- **Industrial Machinery and Equipment**
- **Manufacturing Tools and Components**
- **Electronic Components and Hardware**
- **Energy Equipment and Infrastructure**
- **Packaging Materials**
- **Safety and Industrial Supplies**

The research took place between May 30 and June 16 2025, and was conducted by Atomik Research, an independent creative market research agency that employs MRS-certified researchers and abides to the MRS code. The survey was formulated from 900 C-level, senior and middle management with decision-making responsibilities in purchasing and procurement in companies with annual revenues of between €25m and over €250m, across the UKI, DACH, BNL, and Nordic regions.

Q6: What are the main pain points you currently experience in your B2B purchasing process? Base: 853



Despite rising investment in B2B customer experiences, survey respondents report a persistent and frustrating set of friction points, regardless of region or company size. The data reveals a near-universal pattern: lack of pricing transparency (39%), time-consuming reordering (35%), complicated approval processes (34%), hard-to-navigate portals (33%) and slow vendor response times (24%) top the list of headaches holding businesses back.

These recurring barriers are not confined to any single market: 41% of buyers work with 11-20 regular vendors, and 27% evaluate new suppliers monthly, compounding frustrations from each inefficiency. Meanwhile, more than half of all buyers (52%) are in C-level roles, meaning friction impacts strategic priorities, not just day-to-day workflow.

For B2B vendors, this is both a warning and an opportunity: while digital maturity is advancing, the basics aren't fixed. Most buyers still experience the same fundamental pain points year after year, regardless of location.

“The findings in this report match what we see in the market first-hand. The headaches a lot of B2B buyers face such as the lack of transparency, frustrating reordering processes, and the clunky portals are not just a matter of poor design. In our experience, they are symptoms of outdated legacy technology and business processes that are fundamentally misaligned with modern buyer expectations.

There is an opportunity here for B2B companies, if they are prepared for a shift in strategy. By investing in modern, composable commerce platforms you can swiftly address the friction points we identified in this report. A superior customer experience - one with intuitive navigation and streamlined processes - drives increased conversion rates, larger order values, and new revenue streams. You can then reinvest this revenue to fund the necessary (and often critical) back-end system upgrades, effectively turning your cost centre into a new profit generator.”

**Joerg Wesiak**

Head of Consulting, NETCONOMY

## SPOTLIGHT: WHY SIZE MATTERS

Smaller companies often struggle with vendor account access, rating it “very difficult” at nearly five times the rate of large enterprises. To serve these firms, B2B vendors should offer simplified onboarding and instant-access dashboards. In contrast, larger organisations experience more friction integrating procurement systems and approvals, a pain point that calls for robust ERP integrations, process automation, and tailored workflow support. Matching these platform features to company size will reduce persistent friction and drive satisfaction at both ends of the market.

As we’ll show in coming sections, the way these friction points play out, and the digital features that matter most, vary far more by industry vertical than geography. These persistent friction points aren’t accidental; they’re symptoms of legacy technology and outdated business processes that still dominate much of B2B commerce. The next section explores how these legacy systems contribute to ongoing pain, and what’s possible when modern tech capabilities are fully embraced.

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## THE COMPETITIVE DIVIDE:

### Modern tech capabilities vs. B2B reality

While your competitors debate digital transformation, the B2B landscape is shifting beneath everyone’s feet. The organisations that recognise and act on what’s now technologically achievable will leave others scrambling to catch up.

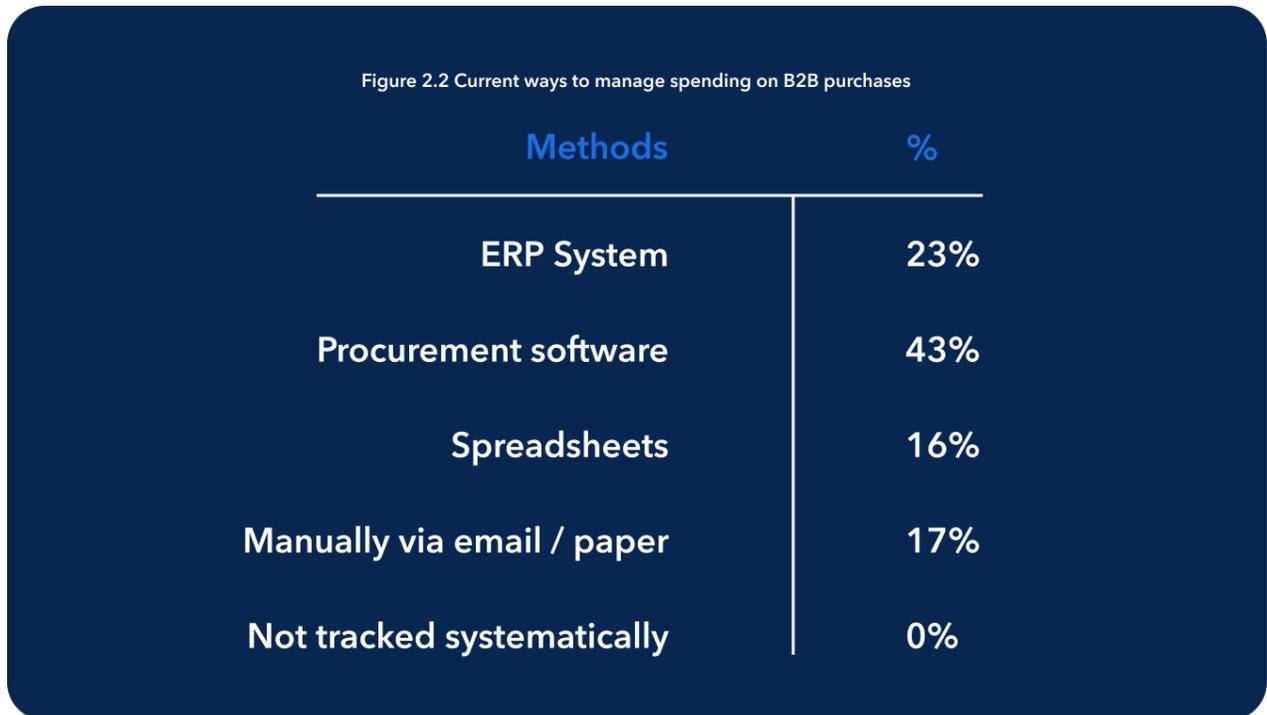
Your buyers are already experiencing frictionless experiences in their personal lives. They’re getting same-day delivery notifications, real-time order tracking, and AI-powered product recommendations. However, when they do business with you they encounter 2010-era experiences: manual quote requests, email-based order confirmations, and phone calls to check inventory levels.

The irony? The technology to eliminate these friction points already exists. Modern headless commerce platforms can deliver sub-second page loads while processing complex pricing rules and approval workflows. Real-time inventory APIs can show exact stock levels across your entire supply chain. Machine learning can predict when customers need to reorder before they even realise it themselves.

When we look at how B2B buyers currently manage their spending, a deeper disconnect emerges, not just in experiences, but in the tools themselves. According to our data, nearly a third of buyers (16% using spreadsheets, 17% tracking manually via email or paper) are relying on their own workflows, completely disconnected from the seller’s systems. Even those leveraging ERP systems (23%) or procurement software (43%) often lack true integration with sellers, leading to siloed data and inefficient processes. This clearly indicates that sellers are not providing the interfaces B2B buyers need.

If sellers were to provide a robust self-service interface, the opportunity is clear: up to 34% of buyers, those still tracking manually or with spreadsheets, stand ready to benefit from more modern, integrated solutions. And, enabling seamless integration capabilities for buyers through procurement systems or ERPs isn't just a technical upgrade, it's a driver of buyer satisfaction and a direct path to reduced operational costs for both sides.

Q7: How do you currently track or manage spending on B2B purchases? Base: 900



Yet most B2B organisations haven't made this leap: only 43% of buyers actually use a dedicated procurement platform, with nearly a third (17% manual, 16% spreadsheets) still tracking spend through emails and Excel. That disconnect is showing; 83% of buyers say strong self-service capabilities are essential when they choose vendors.

While most B2B companies are still debating whether to modernise their customer portals, early movers are already capturing market share with experiences that make B2B buying effortless. They're creating customer loyalty not just on product quality or price, but on the simple fact that they're easier to do business with. When a procurement manager can complete a complex multi-line order in minutes instead of days, it creates a distinct competitive advantage.

The gap between what's technologically possible and what most B2B organisations deliver won't exist forever. As buyer expectations continue rising and technology becomes more accessible, the companies that wait will find themselves not just behind, but obsolete.

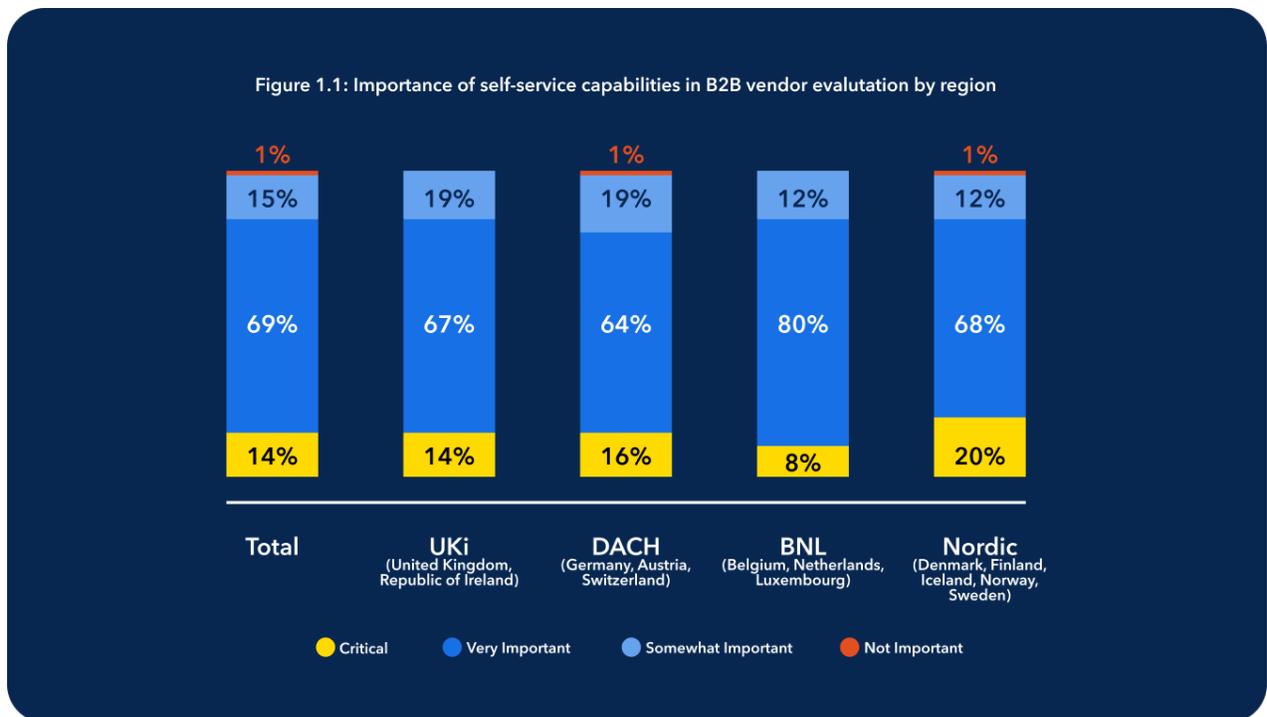
The question isn't whether this transformation will happen; it's whether you'll lead it or be forced to follow. As modern technologies redefine what's achievable in B2B commerce, buyer expectations are shifting just as quickly. Let's look at how today's B2B buyers are responding, and what self-service features they now consider baseline requirements for any vendor partnership.

“Companies should eliminate any closed platforms in their B2B stack that do not or can not provide integration APIs. Today’s digital architecture consists of one or more front-end applications leveraging an integration layer to interact with multiple back-end systems. This decoupled, micro-services approach makes it easier to deliver information to the customer in the format that best fits how and where they consume it. On top of that, these services can be leveraged by the front-end application to streamline business operations where back-end integrations may not be possible, such as applying a purchase order number from your procurement system to an order in your ERP system with the click of a button, saving customers time and reducing the chance of errors. If you add the advances in server-side rendering and caching to that, you have a highly performant, highly personalised customer experience.”

**Mike Reynolds**

Senior Solution Architect, Contentful

## B2B BUYERS ARE READY FOR SELF-SERVICE TOOLS



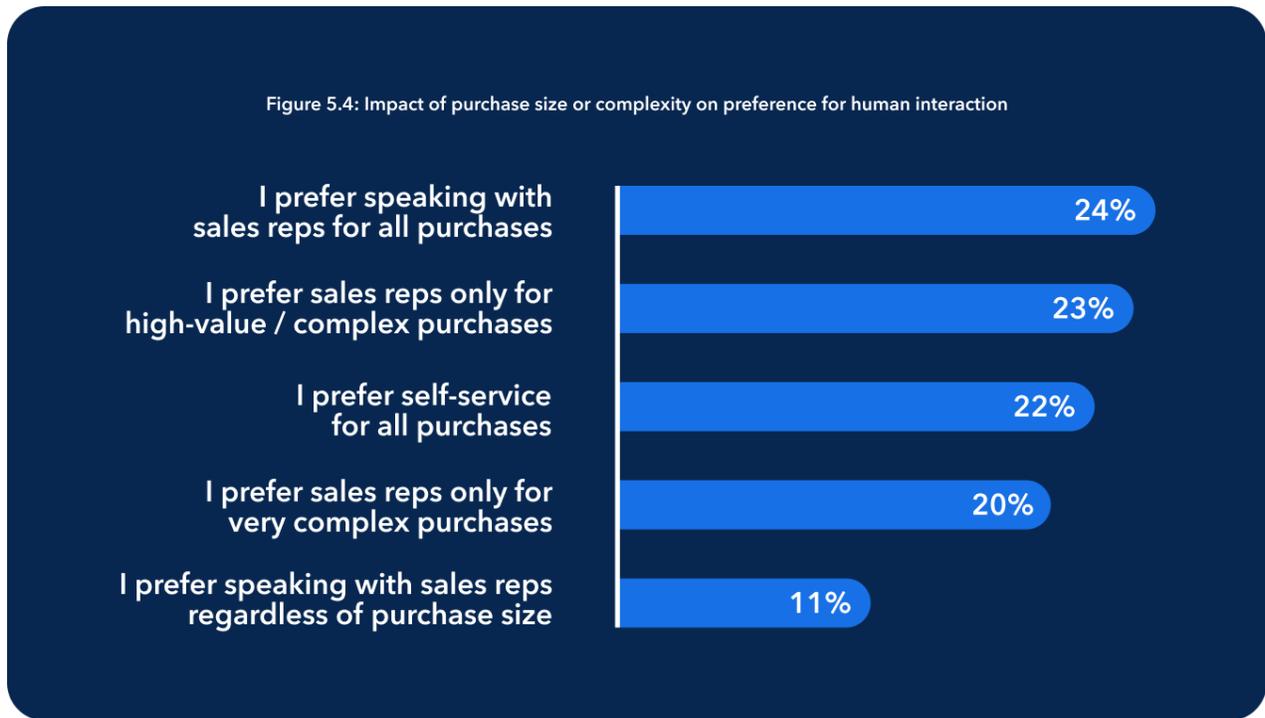
Question: q13: How would you rate the importance of self-service capabilities when selecting new B2B vendors?

Base: Total (900), UKi (225), DACH (225), BNL (225), Nordic (225)

The message from B2B buyers is clear: smarter self-service capabilities have become the benchmark for their needs. What was once an added convenience is now woven into the criteria for partnership and growth.

Across the board, there’s a clear preference for features such as mobile accessibility, instant order status updates, and intelligent search capabilities. 84% percent of respondents say they value a seamless digital-first experience, and this rises to 92% in the UKi. If one supplier requires back-and-forth emails or phone calls to place orders, while another offers one-click reordering and real-time stock visibility, the choice is clear.

Regarding self-service demands, 83% of respondents feel self-service is incredibly important, possibly even non-negotiable for optimal productivity. A buyer who oversees multiple procurement teams across Europe needs access to dashboards that show spend across regions. They need the ability to generate reports or approve purchases from their mobile, without chasing emails or navigating outdated systems.



q15: How does the size or complexity of a purchase affect your preference for human interaction? Base: Total (900)

It's true that buyers lean towards self-service tools because of the independence and efficiency they provide. However, if the purchase is complex or high value, a total of 43% of respondents said they'd prefer to speak to sales reps. For example, it makes sense for buyers to use self-service tools when restocking office supplies, but procuring electronic hardware to be installed across multiple sites might need tailored approaches that require human intervention.

“As a consumer, I can book a flight, reserve a hotel room, renew my passport, order delivery, and refill a prescription without needing to speak with a person and at a time when it is most convenient for me. Self-service is no longer seen as a value add, it's table stakes and today's B2B buyers are comparing the capabilities of their vendors with the businesses they interact with in their everyday lives.”

**Mike Reynolds**

Senior Solution Architect, Contentful

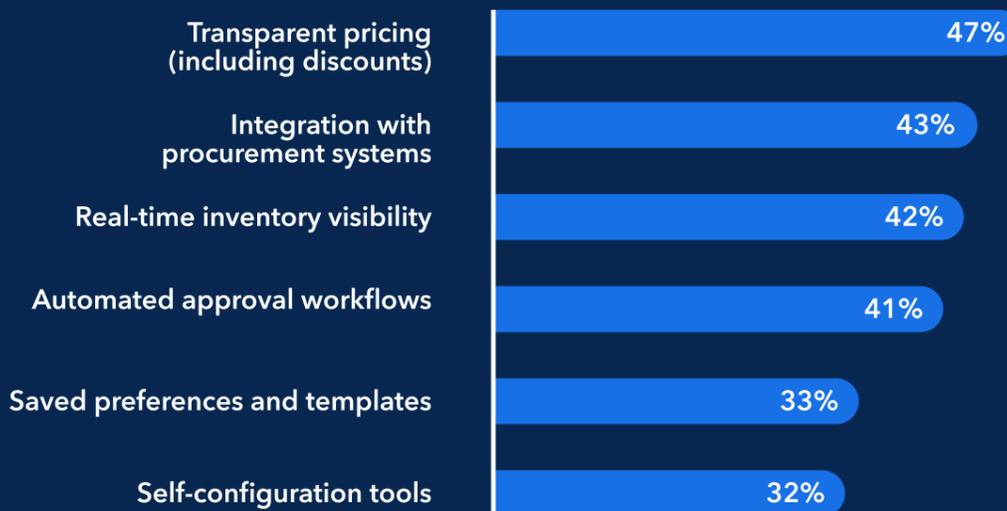


## WHICH SELF-SERVICE FEATURES DO B2B BUYERS VALUE MOST?

### B2B buyers want to see:

- **Transparency:** Data shows transparent pricing is the fastest way for suppliers to stand out, with nearly half of buyers rating it as a critical improvement. Vendors should stop hiding costs behind web forms or emails and make pricing instantly visible.
- **Real-time updates:** With 42% of buyers demanding real-time inventory updates, connected order tracking should be a standard, not a premium add-on.
- **Integration:** Integration with procurement systems is now a mainstream expectation, with 43% of buyers identifying it as a top feature for improving their digital journey. It's not just about digitising for efficiency; enterprise buyers increasingly expect seamless, API-driven workflows between supplier platforms and their internal procurement tools. Enabling this level of integration removes data silos, shortens approval cycles, and lets supply chain teams operate with real agility.

Figure 1.2: Most valuable self-service features in B2B buying



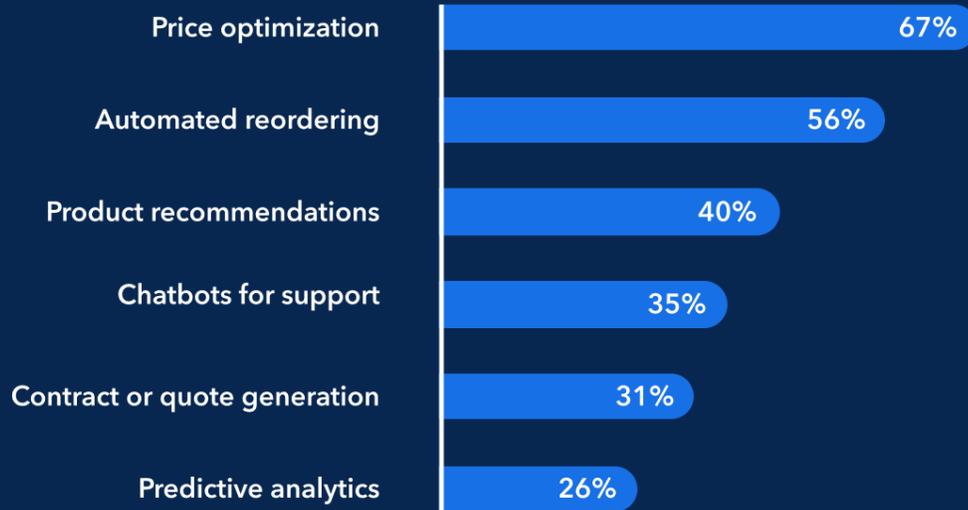
q14: Which self-service features would most improve your B2B buying experience? Base: Total (900)

AI and automation are also increasingly factoring into B2B buyer preferences:

- **Automation:** Price optimisation (67%) and automated reordering (56%) top the list of desirable AI-powered features for B2B buyers. There's clear demand for platforms that use automation to respond instantly to market changes, helping buyers lock in the best deals and keep inventory at optimal levels without constant monitoring. Investing in smart pricing tools and predictive reorder models isn't just a tech upgrade, it's foundational for meeting buyer expectations of speed, accuracy, and effortless procurement in 2025.

- **Intelligence:** Product recommendations are the most in-demand AI feature among B2B buyers (40%). As decision-makers face greater product complexity, especially in larger enterprises, buyers value platforms that use AI to simplify reordering and surface relevant suggestions. Interest in predictive analytics (up to 45% in the largest firms) and chatbots (41%) is also rising among high-revenue companies—pointing to a growing appetite for digital tools that automate routine queries and spot purchasing needs faster at scale.

Figure 3.6. Most valuable AI/automation features in a B2B buying platform



q16: Which AI/automation features would you find most valuable in a B2B buying platform? Base: 900

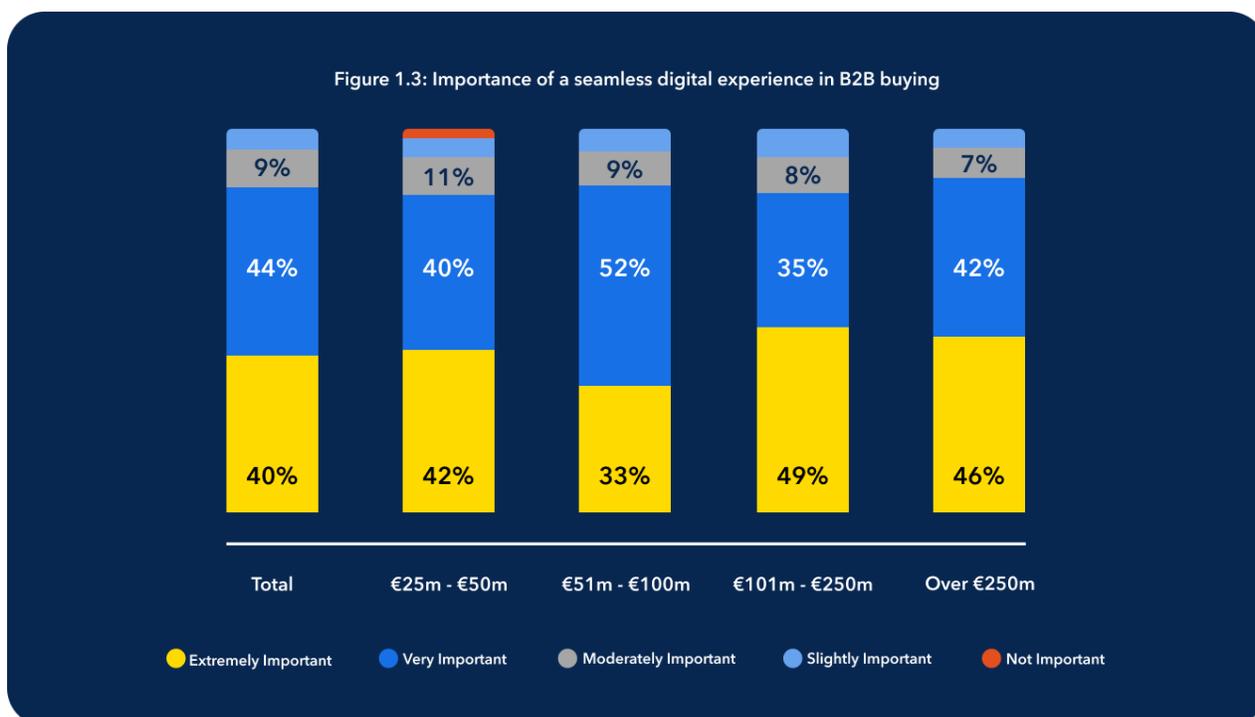
“In my experience working with procurement teams, B2B buyers face a critical visibility gap that directly impacts their ordering strategy. When forecasting shows potential stock-outs, buyers typically increase order quantities significantly as a hedge - a sometimes costly but necessary buffer given the unpredictable nature of supplier communication.

Oftentimes, this process still relies on outdated touchpoints: buyers send inventory inquiries via email, wait days for responses, then often need to follow up with phone calls to confirm actual availability. This creates a procurement bottleneck that can derail time-sensitive projects, especially in manufacturing environments where component shortages can halt or delay entire production lines.

Real-time inventory integration eliminates this friction entirely. When buyers can see live stock levels during the ordering process, they can right-size their purchases based on actual availability rather than worst-case scenarios, reducing excess inventory costs while maintaining project timelines.”

**Mike Reynolds**

Senior Solution Architect, Contentful



q10: How important is a seamless digital experience (e.g., mobile access, real-time updates, chat support) in your B2B buying journey? Base: Total(900), €25m - €50m (185), €51m - €100m (392), €101m - €250m (210), Over €250m (113)

## Midsized enterprises (€101–€250M):

49% say seamless digital experiences are crucial; persistent friction comes from manual reordering and follow-up with sales teams.

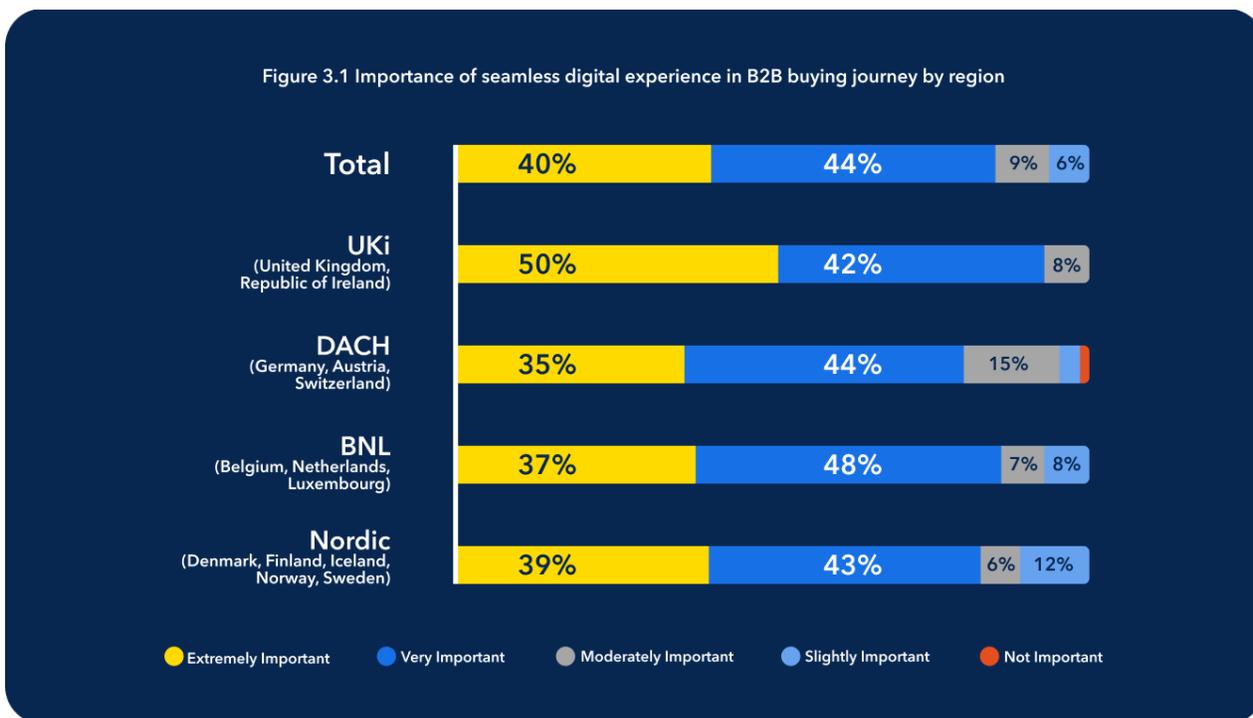
## Large firms (over €250M):

46% prioritise seamless digital journeys, with top features including automation, account transparency, and integrated order tracking (53%). Dedicated account managers (41%) and effortless reordering (35%) are essential for managing high-volume, multi-category orders. Integration with ERP and procurement systems is common—and increasingly expected.

Across the board, companies face mounting inefficiency from outdated manual processes. Platforms that deliver instant visibility, automation, and personalised service help convert recurring pain points into growth opportunities.

If you sell to large and multinational firms, prioritise automation, integrated portals, and hands-on account management. These features directly address buyers’ top operational bottlenecks. For those targeting midsized enterprises, streamline workflows and reduce manual tasks to keep pace with scale. By investing in digital visibility alongside responsive, personalised service, you make every transaction effortless and differentiate yourself from less agile competitors.

While some needs, like transparency and easy reordering, are universal, the specific priorities and pain points vary dramatically across buyer segments. The next section maps out which features and services matter most, revealing how priorities shift by industry vertical and organisational structure.



q10: How important is a seamless digital experience (e.g., mobile access, real-time updates, chat support) in your B2B buying journey? Base: Total (900), UKi (225), DACH (225), BNL (225), Nordic (225)

Across all regions and segments, two themes dominate: B2B buyers expect digital buying experiences that are as seamless, transparent, and self-service as their consumer lives—and most suppliers are not yet delivering.

But while these priorities are broadly shared, how they translate into growth or frustration depends most on the buyer’s industry. For example, real-time tracking and order history are deal-breakers in Packaging, while Aerospace and Defence buyers demand integrated approval workflows and user management for complex, highly regulated purchases.

If you’re translating buyer insight into strategy, recognise that region is now a secondary lens, and industry vertical is where major priorities and opportunity gaps are found. Having identified the universal priorities shared by B2B buyers, the real point of differentiation emerges at the industry level. The next section provides a deep dive into these sector-specific insights, breaking down the distinct friction points and growth levers each vertical faces, with clear benchmarks to drive better-informed product, CX, and GTM decisions.

## Industry matters more: Key vertical insights

In B2B buying, the biggest differences in needs, pain points, and digital maturity are found between industries. Each product category faces its own buying complexity, compliance pressures, and feature expectations. That means the smartest digital strategies, platform investments, and customer experiences must be tailored to the realities of your specific sector, or sectors.

Whether you operate a multi-industry business or focus only on a single vertical, this section gives benchmarks and recommendations tailored to your market. Use the data below to see how B2B leaders are tackling the barriers to growth, and where you can differentiate further.

## AT-A-GLANCE: INDUSTRY-BY-INDUSTRY BREAKDOWN

Industry category	Top reported friction / complexity	Most-valued digital features	What B2B leaders are prioritising
Aerospace & Defence	Highest complexity: buyers active in ~6.7 categories. Frequent issues with slow vendor response (38%), portal navigation (42%), and limited invoice access (39%).	Fast, centralised portals; multi-stage approval workflows; real-time analytics	Advanced user management for complex orders, integration with major ERP/procurement suites
Food Ingredients & Processing Equipment	Need for reordering speed (33%) and supply chain transparency	Effortless self-service reorders; real-time order status and tracking; easy returns	Automation of regular orders; transparent logistics updates
Packaging Materials	Transparency/traceability is everything (53% want pricing clarity; 48% demand full order histories)	Real-time pricing and inventory, granular invoice/order archive, self-service returns	Building digital trust with supply chain visibility and flexible documentation
Ind. Machinery & Equipment	High rates of ERP/system use (46%+); multi-vendor, multi-step workflows create friction	Advanced ERP integrations; automated contract/quote generation; procurement dashboarding	Digitalising "manual hand-offs" and approvals for speed and audit
Energy Equip. & Infrastructure	Approval workflow bottlenecks and compliance burden lead to delays	Automated, multi-stage approval flows; compliance and risk dashboards	Streamlining audit/compliance reporting; end-to-end platform integration
Manufacturing Tools & Comp.	Many vendors, frequent re-orders, managing templates	Saved purchase preferences; multi-vendor carts; rapid reordering; self-service order tracking	Making bulk and template purchases seamless and error-proof
Electronic Components & Hardware	Demand for technical configuration and inventory transparency	Product configurators; real-time technical data; inventory visibility	Speeding up specifying and validation with integrated tools and live data

If you work in **Aerospace and Defence**, your buyers manage complex procurement across nearly twice as many product categories as the average of those in other industries (6.7 vs. 3.4), and frequently name slow vendor response and portal navigation as their biggest friction points. To stay competitive, prioritise advanced user permissions, multi-stage approval workflows, and integration with platforms like SAP, so your solution can handle the compliance and speed these high-volume organisations require.

For those in **Packaging Materials or Food Ingredients and Processing Equipment**, transparency and traceability are true differentiators. More than half of buyers in these segments say that transparent pricing and easy access to their order history are non-negotiable. Leaders in this sector are investing in real-time tracking tools and searchable digital archives, knowing that a lack of transparency is a direct barrier to repeat business.

**Manufacturing and electronics providers** should take note: your buyers face unusually high friction from juggling multiple suppliers and complex configurations. The winning approach here is to enable rapid reordering, provide flexible configuration capabilities, and make procurement-system integration a required standard. If your solution doesn't make buying "one click simple," competitors will.

If you operate in **Energy Equipment and Infrastructure**, compliance is the pain point that matters. These buyers cite approval workflow bottlenecks as a top challenge, so leading solutions are automating approvals and consolidating compliance data into dashboards that minimise risk and accelerate purchasing without endless manual chasing.

**For single-vertical businesses:** Get a calibrated view on how your offering compares to your industry's specific digital benchmarks, pain points, and feature demands.

**For multi-vertical firms/service providers:** See how and why each sector's "growth unlock" looks different. Use these contrasts to inform go-to-market, product, and support strategies.

## One-size-fits-all? Not anymore

This data makes clear that industry context is now the key to B2B digital advantage. Whether you serve one sector or many, focus your next investment where your buyers, by segment, feel the most pain and where best-in-class competitors are already raising the bar.

View these sector spotlights as both a mirror and a map, showing where you excel, where to double down, and where to run your own "vertical-first" innovation sprints.



THE DIGITAL-FIRST B2B BUYER:

## Creating a competitive edge

It is clear that B2B buyers have consumer-level expectations and make professional purchasing decisions that demand intuitive interfaces, personalised experiences, and 24/7 access to information and services.

They know these experiences exist, so when buying processes fall short, their frustration increases. For vendors, the emergence of sophisticated e-commerce platforms, AI-powered recommendation engines, and automated procurement systems have created new possibilities for streamlining the B2B buying journey. This enables greater efficiency, transparency, and cost-effectiveness throughout the purchasing process, from initial research to final transaction and beyond.

Vendors who hesitate in adopting AI tools are ultimately delaying meeting modern B2B buyers' expectations; they will become stuck with outdated customer service processes, content operations, and rising costs due to rigid technologies. As a result, they increase the risk of losing customers to competition.

In theory, the solution is simple: embrace AI, automation and composable architectures to develop a competitive edge that attracts and retains strategic B2B buyers. To find out more about making it a reality, contact us today

## Learn more about ways **Contentful and SAP** can help drive revenue for your business:

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