

5 Tips to Get the Most from Your eCommerce

By Dean Mueller



Forrester estimates the B2B ecommerce market to be \$3 trillion by 2027 – that opportunity will continue to grow.

We spoke with several distribution leaders in ecommerce about their experiences and what they have learned as their companies continue to scale the technology.

Participants in our [Technology Leader Panel: An Executive Perspective on eCommerce](#) (available to listen on-demand) were:

- **Brad Rosenthal**, Vice President of Marketing at Bostwick-Braun
- **Coburn Flannery**, Director of E-Business at The Granite Group
- **Gail Soliani**, Digital Marketing and Creative Manager of 2J Supply HVAC Distributors
- **Steven Javor**, Global E-Commerce Director of Schneider Electric's Energy Management Division

Tips to Get the Most from eCommerce

It is often said that a wise person learns from the experience of others. Our panelists shared these tips to help distributors leverage ecommerce to work for their businesses.

1. Get personal with your customers.

Advancements in technology allow distributors to more easily personalize the customer experience. This may include everything from simply having the customer's name in emails to recommendations tailored to a customer's purchasing history and industry.



"When implemented, we see a return of about \$10 for every dollar we spend on personalization."

– Steven Javor

Javor reflected on Schneider Electric's use of a third-party personalization platform:

"We support our (distribution) partners by creating experiences for their customers to have a personalized experience when they land on the webpage. Our efforts also have made it possible for us to identify potential clients during campaigns with our partners and reach out to them using social media – all through our distributor. When implemented, we see a return of about \$10 for every dollar we spend on personalization."

The more personal you make the ecommerce experience, the more connected your customers will feel. Customer personalization can be done in user-friendly software, such as HubSpot, making it possible for smaller teams to reach this level of experience. AI has also made it easier to automate personalization online, as well.

2. Get the sales team onboard.

It's important to understand that your ecommerce site is not just for your customer, but also for your sales team. And without their support, you won't get the ROI you're looking for. Do not roll out a top-of-the-line system and still let outside salespeople write customer notes on paper, take a picture of the notes and then send the picture to the inside sales team to input into the system.

eCommerce sites improve the customer experience and make your sales team more efficient. "We absolutely encourage sales reps to use the site," said Flannery. "It's how the sales team gets familiar with it so that they can show the value to customers. The efficiencies gained are just phenomenal."

In this way, once the sales team is onboard with the ecommerce site, they also can take on the role of "trainer" with the customers on how to best use the functionality.

This shows customers two things:

1. That they can shop for their tasks 24/7.
2. They can make job lists right in their accounts.

All jobs become more straightforward with ecommerce adoption. The ideal: Customers start reaching out to their sales representatives only for more complicated requests.

"(Using the website) is how the sales team gets familiar so they can show the value to customers. The efficiencies gained are just phenomenal."

– Coburn Flannery



3. Don't just collect and store data – use it to enhance your website and sales team's performance.

Everyone has data. However, few businesses organize it in a usable way and implement changes based on the results. Leverage AI-enabled tools to drive better use of your data. It's especially powerful for driving greater wallet share through upselling and cross-selling.

As Rosenthal points out: "When we can begin to learn from other customers that have bought this item is powerful and lends itself to suggestive selling. If they're going to buy peanut butter, maybe we ought to try and sell them the jelly and the bread, too. This is a major emphasis for us going into 2023."

But when it comes to B2B, you need to provide relevant suggestions, according to Flannery. For example, when a customer happens to order an air vent and a faucet on the same invoice – that doesn't mean that an air vent should always be suggested to customers who add a faucet to their order. The right tools, backed by the right technology, will drive better recommendations based on your total data set.



"If they're going to buy peanut butter, maybe we ought to try and sell them the jelly and the bread, too. This (cross-selling) is a major emphasis for us."

– Brad Rosenthal

4. Know what metrics you need to measure the ecommerce assist.

When it comes to ecommerce sites, a transaction is not the only function distributors need to be concerned with.

To tell the success story of your ecommerce site, you need to collect multiple data points. Some data points, such as the number of users and the length of time they are on the site can be gathered via Google Analytics, said Soliani. “We also utilize the tool Crazy Egg, which you can see a heat map of where people are clicking on the website. It helps us figure out how customers are navigating the site and where they exit our site.”

In addition to tracking user behavior on the site and conversions (ie, a purchase made through the shopping cart), make sure you also give weight to the sales assist.

Buyers use the site for research, or to find or select a product – only to pick up the phone and place the order, or email it in. If you are only measuring the volume of transactions from your site, then you are missing out on how often the site assists a sale offline.

Think in terms of basketball. Great point guards in the NBA are rated on a statistic called “point creation.” They are credited with creating points not only for directly scoring a basket but by passing to the player who does score the basket – called an “assist.” Sometimes, your website will score directly through the shopping cart, and sometimes it will get an assist by generating a transaction that comes through another channel.

5. Product content matters.

You can have a top-selling product in stock on the shelves, but if it’s not listed on the website with a picture, availability and all the relevant specs a customer would need to make that decision, then it won’t get purchased. Not only will customers not be adding it to their virtual shopping carts, they also won’t be calling the sales desk to give the site a chance for a sales assist.

If customers cannot find your product, they cannot buy it. In addition to having robust search capabilities on your internal ecommerce site, you also need to show up in Google – where most B2B shopping searches begin. To do this, panelists prioritize:

- Thoughtful product descriptions tailored to their target industries

- Search Engine Optimization (SEO) for relevant keywords
- Leveraging paid ads and staying on top of managing them

Our panel reflected that to do this correctly and consistently, many contracted knowledgeable, outside firms.

What's next?

eCommerce isn't just plug and play. Distributors must continually be improving and innovating their customer experience online. So, what's next on these leaders' lists? A few include:

- using and transforming data into information that provides value
- implementing an omnichannel experience for customers
- creating a marketplace strategy
- researching more functionality that will add value to the customer experience

Watch our on-demand [Technology Leader Panel](#) on ecommerce for the full no-holds-barred discussion.

Thank you to Epicor for sponsoring this event.





About the Author

Dean Mueller is an Independent Consultant at Distribution Strategy Group. He has more than 30 years of experience in sales and marketing and helps distributors build holistic digital strategies that drive a significant shift to online sales, improve profitability and grow customer satisfaction. Take your digital strategy to the next level.

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Distribution Strategy Group offers strategic guidance for distributors in the face of disruption, including:

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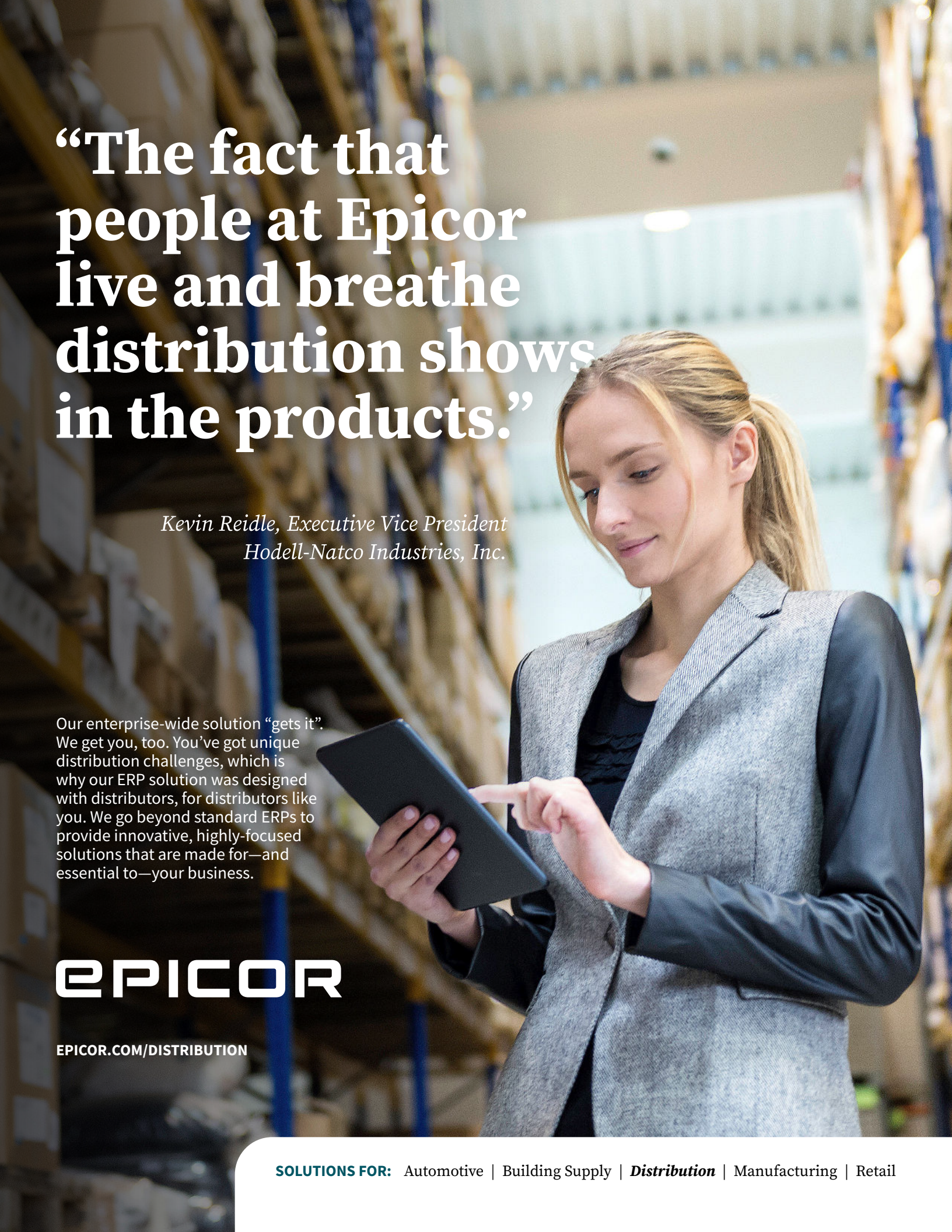
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A woman with blonde hair in a ponytail, wearing a grey blazer over a black top, is looking down at a tablet computer she is holding. She is standing in a warehouse or industrial setting with metal shelving units in the background. The lighting is bright and even.

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people at Epicor
live and breathe
distribution shows
in the products.”

*Kevin Reidle, Executive Vice President
Hodell-Natco Industries, Inc.*

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