

CASE STUDY

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# Improving the Buyer Experience with B2B eCommerce

Why three retailers prefer to order from their suppliers through an online B2B eCommerce portal powered by Handshake.

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# 24/7 online ordering is a key enhancement of the overall buyer experience.

## Introduction

Manufacturers and distributors are adopting B2B eCommerce at a rapid rate, recognizing a key opportunity to boost revenue and reduce costs through greater operational efficiency. But while suppliers tend to focus on these more visible impacts of B2B eCommerce technology, one cannot overlook how 24/7 online ordering can enhance the overall buyer experience. By offering a more convenient ordering process, better order accuracy, and greater information access, B2B eCommerce can make it much easier for retailers to do business with a supplier.

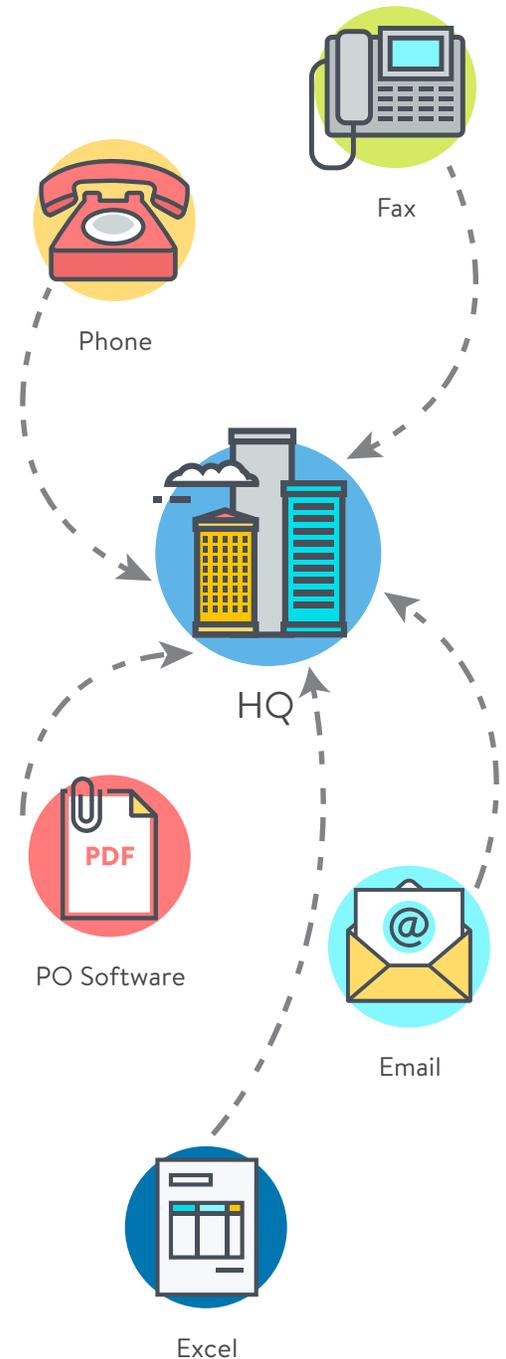
This case study provides real-life examples of retailers who have benefitted from placing orders from online portals powered by Handshake, and how they've become more loyal customers as a result.

## The Challenges of Manual Order Submission

When it comes to inbound B2B orders, there are often no set rules. Order submission may be dictated by customer preference, leaving your back office team to field orders coming in by phone, fax, email, or text message. In other cases, your customers are subjected to your order submission policies, ones that may require filling out cumbersome spreadsheets or waiting on your business hours to get what they need. While these submission methods are diverse in practice, they have one thing in common: they are all highly undesirable for the customer.

Before having access to one footwear distributor's online ordering portal, Kelli Grady from Grady's Feet Essentials, an independent shoe store in Ontario, Canada, was calling in orders twice a week. While for Grady, calling in the order wasn't a huge inconvenience, the challenge was in a lack of visibility with respect to product inventory. And while order transcription mistakes were infrequent and her supplier was quick to resolve any issues, she would sometimes receive inaccurate shipments.

## Pre-B2B eCommerce Ordering Methods



# Buyers find that the self-service nature of a B2B eCommerce portal leads to better order accuracy.

In another example, Stephanie Robinson, owner of The Red Pair Shoe Store in British Columbia, once used basic software that would build out POs based on store stock levels that she would then send to her supplier. Because she wasn't interacting directly with a supplier representative, however, she would often unknowingly place orders for backordered items, and the supplier would occasionally choose to fill the order with alternative items without checking in with her.

For Jonathan Lee from Toot Toot Toys in Melbourne, Australia, ordering from one toy manufacturer involved filling out a long Excel product spreadsheet without any images. Items were difficult to find, and the potential for human error was high.

Needless to say, these retailers' pre-B2B eCommerce ordering processes were less than ideal. When presented with the option of placing orders through an online portal powered by Handshake, the decision was easy. They immediately jumped on board.

## The Buyer Benefits of B2B eCommerce

Buyers who place orders via a B2B eCommerce portal typically experience the following benefits:

### 1. More accurate orders

Orders that have been submitted to the supplier via fax, phone, email, and Excel almost always have to be re-entered by the back office team into an ERP or accounting system. This second, redundant step introduces a higher risk for error, and since most brands do not re-confirm an order with their buyer at the time of processing, incorrect orders are often shipped out.

Buyers find the self-service nature of a B2B eCommerce portal reassuring. They are choosing the exact products they want in the exact quantities they expect, and because pricing is tied to their login credentials, it is less likely that they'll be quoted incorrect pricing. The



*“Sometimes if my supplier ran out-of-stock, they wouldn't contact me, they would just send me what they had.”*

Stephanie Robinson  
Owner,  
The Red Pair Shoe Store

# When placing orders online, buyers are fully aware of any backordered items and can plan accordingly.

buyer can also review their shopping cart to ensure the order is 100% accurate before final submission to the supplier.

According to Grady, “The thing I like most about using my supplier’s eCommerce portal is that I can review that the order is accurate and whether anything is out-of-stock before I submit. To me, that’s the best part of doing it online.”

For Robinson at Red Pair Shoe Store, the ability to view inventory levels as she places orders has made all the difference when it comes to improving order accuracy. Even in the rare scenario where she orders a particular item that went out of stock before the order was processed, she gets a call from the supplier’s team to determine the right alternative.

According to Robinson, “Now, orders are more accurate because I know what’s coming. Previously, about 1 of every 5 orders wouldn’t be accurate. Now, the last 10 orders I’ve placed have been error-free.”

## 2. Better management of backorders

Closely related to order accuracy improvements is the ability for retailers to find alternatives when a certain product is out of stock. Even if an alternative product can’t be found, the buyer is fully aware of any backordered items and can plan accordingly.

For Robinson, a store owner who prides herself on strong relationships with store patrons, knowing a particular item is on backorder allows her to manage her own customers’ expectations. She can let them know when a product has been backordered, and add them to a special list that allows her to notify them as soon as it’s available.

Says Robinson, “For me, the bottom line is that I’d rather keep them updated than piss them off and have them go somewhere else.”



*“I really like to have a company that carries good inventory - that they get it in and out quickly, and their orders are accurate. This makes me feel like they appreciate our business.”*

**Kelli Grady**  
Grady’s Feet Essentials

# A far cry from manual ordering, B2B eCommerce involves clicking on digital images that are immediately added to a cart.

### 3. Easier, more convenient ordering

A B2B eCommerce portal houses a brand’s entire digital catalog, provides a personalized browsing experience with customer specific catalogs and pricing, and allows buyers to place orders at any time that works with their schedule. This stands in sharp contrast to the cumbersome, scattered order submission processes retailers used to have to adhere to (and still do for suppliers that remain stubbornly attached to manual methods).

For buyers like Lee at Toot Toot Toys, quick clicks on digital catalog images that can be added immediately to a cart is a night and day difference from his previous ordering process, which involved having to search for and find his desired items from a list of product names and numbers on an unwieldy Excel spreadsheet.

Additionally, top online ordering portals come with an “Order Notes” feature that buyers utilize to communicate any important order information or requests that fall outside the scope of the regular order details. This can include special requests for things like merchandising guides on specific products or questions that might require follow-up by the supplier. Grady has found that using the notes feature alongside a final order confirmation in the Cart view has saved her time and effort. Says Grady of her supplier:

“Now, I rarely call. I usually don’t find it necessary, especially because they seem to be using the notes section.”

### 4. Better access to order history

In addition to providing 24/7 access to product information and a simple ordering interface, B2B eCommerce portals also allow buyers to view their past orders in one place.

This order information is helpful to a retailer in multiple ways, allowing them to quickly duplicate past orders and view their most frequently ordered items to find similar or complementary products.

## Online Ordering: Buyer Benefits



More Accurate Orders



Better management of backorders



Easier, more convenient ordering



Better access to order history

# Retailers order more--and favor products from--the companies that treat them well.

Additionally, order history can be key to allowing buyers to reconcile accounts. For Lee, settling his records used to require a very manual process of searching through spreadsheets and past emails and matching them up with invoices. Now, having this data in one central place has drastically reduced his time spent on accounting.

## A Focus on the Buyer Experience

In a competitive marketplace where suppliers are vying for limited space on their buyers' shelves, it is critical to consider how you are serving your retailers. As buyer expectations rise in the wake of the B2B eCommerce boom, brands that prioritize a convenient online ordering process, reliable inventory data, and quick order fulfillment will be in a position to win business from competitors.

According to Grady, "A lot companies forget that treating their retailers well is important, and we have honestly stopped carrying products if they don't. You really have to think about whether the aggravation is worth it. If they treat you really well, keep products in stock, and get orders out accurately and quickly, we order from them more and start favoring their products."

If you want to improve the way you serve your buyers by implementing a B2B eCommerce portal, contact Handshake today.

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