



B2B Buyer Preferences in the eCommerce Marketplace Economy

Buyers' Challenges, Preferences, and Hopes for
the Future of B2B Marketplace Purchasing

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Executive Summary

Online marketplaces have become ubiquitous tools for consumers to buy products for pickup or home delivery, and they've been refined over the years to be fast, convenient, and easy to use. B2B buyers, being consumers themselves, are now looking for the same level of quality and convenience on B2B marketplaces.

According to one study, 57% of B2B buyers said they were purchasing more from marketplaces during the pandemic. Moreover, 52% of those respondents began using B2B marketplaces more frequently during the pandemic because eCommerce sites "have more selection."

Still, many B2B marketplaces lack the UX features that make consumer marketplaces so effective, and some B2B buyers still prefer traditional purchasing arrangements with suppliers.

This report explores how B2B buyers are using marketplaces to access a better buying experience and streamline procurement processes. It also provides readers with insights directly from B2B buyers about their challenges, preferences, and hopes for the future of B2B marketplaces.

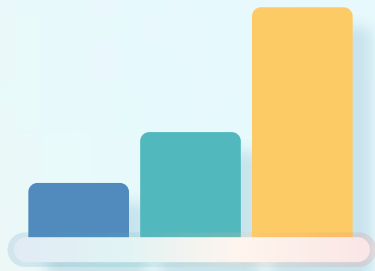
¹ Brohan, Mark and Smith, Jason. "B2B marketplaces are shaping the future of B2B ecommerce." DigitalCommerce360. October 18th, 2022. <https://www.digitalcommerce360.com/article/future-of-b2b-marketplaces/>



About the Respondents

The WBR Insights research team surveyed 100 managers and senior managers in buying-oriented roles at companies across the U.S. and Canada to generate the results featured in this report.

What is your company's annual revenue?



- 17% \$10 million – \$100 million
- 28% \$100 million - \$500 million
- 55% More than \$500 million

At 55%, most of the companies represented in the study make more than \$500 million in annual revenue. The remaining companies make \$100 million to \$500 million (28%) and \$10 million to \$100 million (17%).

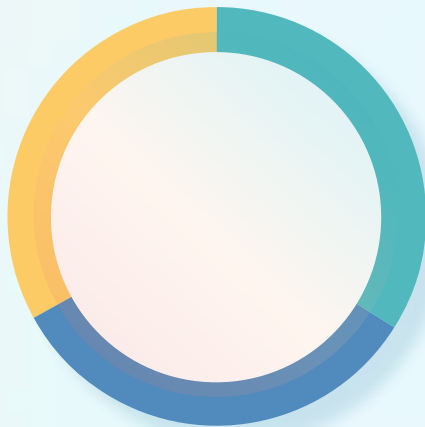
The respondents represent a variety of industries, including chemicals, plastics, and polymers (10%); consumer products (9%); manufactured goods (9%), telecommunications, electronics, and technology (9%), and industrial manufacturing (9%).

In which vertical does your company operate?



- 10% Chemicals, plastics, & polymers
- 9% Consumer products
- 9% Manufactured goods
- 9% Telecom, electronics, & high-tech
- 9% Industrial manufacturing
- 9% Pharmaceutical
- 9% Medical devices
- 9% Energy, oil, & gas
- 9% Aerospace & defense
- 9% Automotive
- 9% Building & Construction

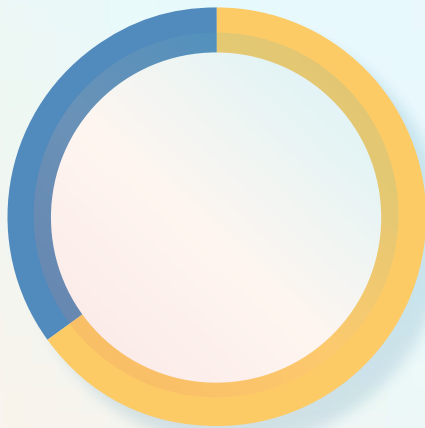
What best describes your department or team?



- 34% Procurement
- 33% Finance
- 33% Operations

The respondents are almost evenly split into the types of departments they represent. In each case, about one-third of the respondents represent procurement, finance, and operations.

What is your seniority?



- 65% Manager
- 35% Senior Manager

Most of the respondents are managers (65%) and 35% are senior managers.



Key Insights

Among the respondents:

74% use Global Sources as a B2B marketplace and 61% use eWorldTrade.

65% make 1% to 24% of their B2B purchases through B2B marketplaces.

69% will make 1% to 24% of their B2B purchases through B2B marketplaces 12 months from now.

63% prefer traditional purchasing arrangements, such as contract-based purchases or direct purchases, to B2B marketplaces.

72% say discovering new products or services has been a **very significant benefit** of purchasing through B2B marketplace.

55% say faster purchasing and delivery has been a very significant benefit.

52% say **greater vendor choice** has been a very significant benefit.

Their top-three pain points while buying on B2B marketplaces recently are:

- A lack of real-time stock information **(58%)**
- A lack of searchable information about products or services **(58%)**
- Few or no digital interactions between buyers and sellers **(51%)**

In each case, they have experienced:

- CSV-upload ordering **(97%)**
- The ability to save multiple shopping lists when using a B2B marketplace recently **(97%)**
- Integrated promotions, coupons, and/or discounts when using a B2B marketplace recently **(94%)**
- The ability to research and manage vetted suppliers using a B2B marketplace **(88%)**
- Managing corporate accounts with unique experiences for each department **(62%)**



Build and Scale Your Marketplace With the Only B2B-First Marketplace Solution

When building a marketplace, you need robust functionality for three parties with different needs: the marketplace operator, the vendors, and the buyers. Operators need tools to scale and manage the marketplace, vendors need functionality to create engaging customer experiences, and buyers want a frictionless journey.

Meet the needs of all the three parties with the only marketplace solution built from the ground up for B2B buyers, B2B sellers, and B2B marketplace operators.

What Makes OroMarketplace the Ultimate Marketplace Management Platform?

- It gets you to market and ROI faster
- Supports B2C and B2B marketplaces out-of-the-box
- Includes natively integrated CRM, eCommerce, and content management system
- Supports any revenue model, including transactional, subscription, or freemium
- Automates processes such as RFQs, and seller onboarding with its powerful workflow engine
- Gives you the freedom to deploy on your premise, on a private cloud, or on OroCloud
- Provides 24/7 customer service and a rich ecosystem of partners, and integrators
- Transparent software license fees keep your costs predictable as you scale.

Trusted by Top Brands

"A huge part of PartsBase's success is in the ability to listen to our customers and their needs and continuously invest into features and functionality that are being requested by them."

"In Oro, we found a platform and a partner that truly understands this customer-first approach and provides us not only with native features and capabilities necessary to launch a B2B marketplace but also with the flexibility to keep on iterating and improving our offering further."



Rodrigo Garcia

VP, Chief Technology and Transformation Officer at PartsBase Inc.



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Most Companies Are Already Using B2B Marketplaces

B2B marketplaces are still a relatively new phenomenon, but they are quickly becoming a standard part of the procurement process at many companies. There is still some relative fragmentation in the B2B eCommerce marketplace, with many companies creating platforms instead of using unified ecosystems or standardized eCommerce solutions.

B2B marketplaces will become more popular in the future due to several factors. The continued adoption of eCommerce in the B2B sector and the advancement of technology such as machine learning and artificial intelligence will reduce the complexity of buying processes.

This will make it easier for procurement leaders to access a wider variety of suppliers, get real-time quotes, and benefit from improved inventory management features.

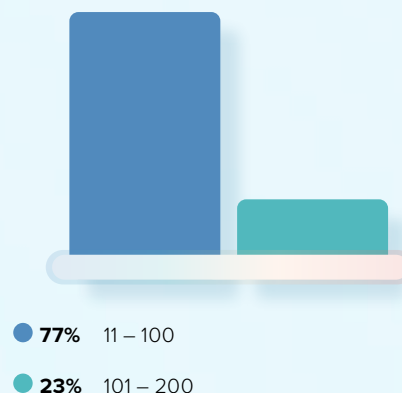
Currently, the respondents use a relatively small number of suppliers and, based on the survey, most of their relationships with those suppliers are based on traditional purchasing agreements like contracts and one-on-one interactions.

Specifically, 77% use 11 to 100 suppliers, while 23% use 101 to 200 suppliers.

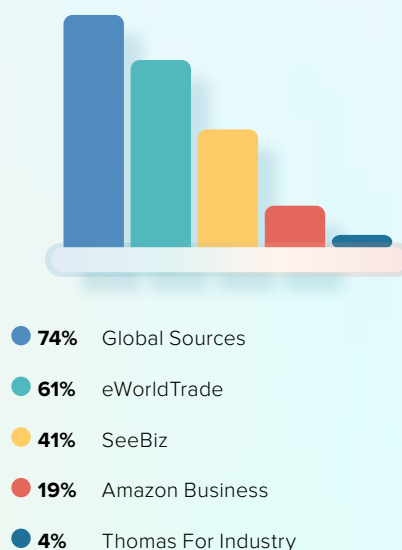
However, the companies surveyed do use a variety of marketplaces to obtain products and services. The two most popular B2B marketplaces among those presented to the respondents are Global Sources (74%) and eWorldTrade (61%).

Global Sources boasts that it has 10 million global buyers in more than 250 countries. Meanwhile, eWorldTrade calls itself “one of the fastest growing online wholesale B2B marketplaces” in the world.

How many suppliers is your company buying from?



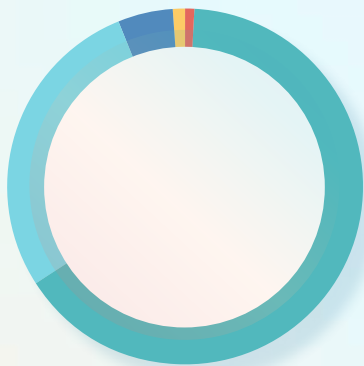
Which B2B marketplaces are you using to find and purchase supplies?



Fewer respondents are using SeeBiz (41%), and only 4% use Thomas for Industry. This is likely because Thomas for Industry is a specialized marketplace for industrial buyers.

Only 19% of the respondents currently use Amazon Business for marketing purchases. This is notable because Amazon is such a dominant eCommerce force in the consumer market.

What percentage of your B2B purchases do you currently make through B2B marketplaces?



| | |
|-----|-------------|
| 1% | 0% |
| 65% | 1% – 24% |
| 28% | 25% – 49% |
| 5% | Roughly 50% |
| 1% | 51% – 74% |

Currently, most of the respondents (65%) make 1% to 24% of their B2B purchases through B2B marketplaces. Only 1% say they make most of their B2B purchases through marketplaces.

Notably, the respondents plan to continue making a portion of their B2B purchases through marketplaces 12 months from the time of the survey. Only 2% say they plan to make none of their purchases through marketplaces.

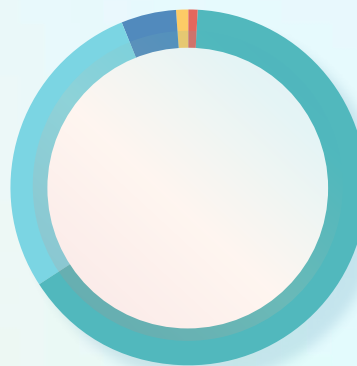
However, only 5% plan to make most of their purchases through B2B marketplaces.

Most of the respondents (69%) will make 1% to 24% of their purchases through B2B marketplaces, while 17% will make 25% to 49% of their purchases through marketplaces.

These numbers could change depending on how B2B marketplaces adapt to customer input over the year. More organizations could launch proprietary marketplaces, and those that are already active may seek to implement improvements. If they gather and leverage customer insights and implement their marketplaces using the comprehensive software, they could deliver much-needed capabilities, such as easier supplier vetting and research, personalized product recommendations and buying configurations, and streamlined price negotiation tools.

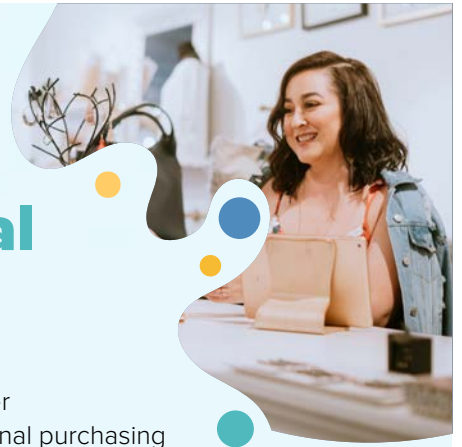
As we will learn, many B2B buyers are seeking more transparency, personalization, and interactivity in their marketplace experiences.

What percentage of your B2B purchases do you anticipate you'll make through B2B marketplaces 12 months from now?



| | |
|-----|-------------|
| 2% | 0% |
| 69% | 1% – 24% |
| 17% | 25% – 49% |
| 7% | Roughly 50% |
| 5% | 51% – 74% |

B2B Businesses Still Generally Prefer Traditional Purchasing Arrangements



B2B marketplaces are becoming popular among procurement leaders because they enable them to access a wider variety of suppliers, enjoy real-time quotes and faster order processing times, and benefit from automated features such as intelligent search options. However, not every marketplace lives up to the robust needs and expectations of today's procurement experts.

Most procurement teams are now leveraging automated software as well as robust communication and reporting tools in their traditional purchasing arrangements. They expect the same level of visibility and control in their marketplace experience.

Currently, most of the respondents either prefer purchasing through B2B marketplaces much less (45%) or somewhat less (18%) than traditional purchasing arrangements like contract-based purchases and direct purchases. One-quarter of the respondents say they prefer purchasing through marketplaces about the same.

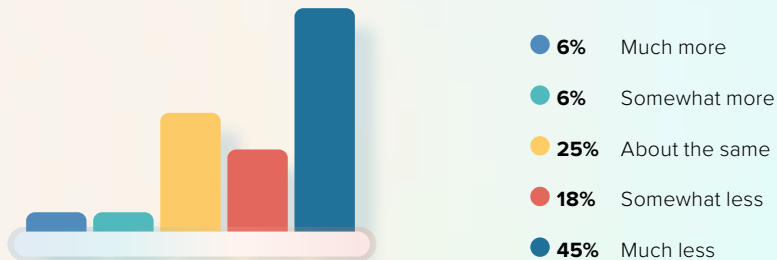
Only 12% say they prefer marketplaces to traditional purchasing arrangements—however, these respondents say they value the convenience and flexibility of purchasing through marketplaces.

“It’s because of the speed and variety available,” According to one procurement manager from an industrial manufacturing firm. Those aspects “can support the flexibility of our supply chain and procurement.”

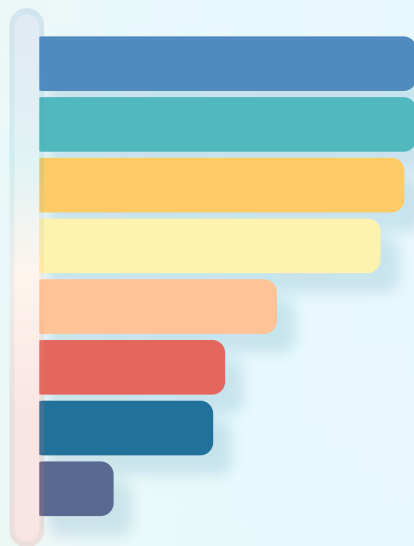
One senior manager of operations at a consumer products company says, “I believe [marketplaces] will be the future of B2B procurement, and we want to be ahead in the game.”

If this is to be the case, B2B marketplaces need to make significant improvements to encourage adoption. As we will learn, B2B buyers need a better user experience, including searchable information about products and services, real-time stock information, and better communication between themselves and sellers.

To what degree do you prefer making purchases through B2B marketplaces over traditional purchasing arrangements (e.g., contract-based purchases, direct purchases)?



Which of the following features have you experienced when using a B2B marketplace recently?



- **97%** The ability to save multiple shopping lists
- **97%** CSV-upload ordering
- **94%** Integrated promotions, coupons, and/or discounts
- **88%** The ability to research and manage vetted suppliers
- **62%** Managed corporate accounts with unique experiences for each department of the business
- **49%** Robust access controls, including roles and permissions for users
- **46%** Personalized catalogs and configurations for each user or corporate account
- **21%** Digitized price negotiations and quote requests

Still, today's B2B marketplaces do include helpful features that allow companies to streamline purchases and better manage their marketplace buying strategies.

Almost all the respondents say they've recently experienced CSV-upload ordering (97%) and the ability to save multiple shopping lists (97%) through B2B marketplaces. Both these features make it easier for different departments within the business to curate lists of needed items and purchase them via a single upload.

Furthermore, 94% of the respondents have experienced integrated promotions, coupons, and discounts to help them save money, while 88% have researched and managed vetted suppliers through marketplaces. These are two areas of B2B purchasing that have been more common in traditional purchasing arrangements.

Fewer respondents say they have benefited from robust access controls like roles and permissions (49%). This is an important feature for companies that are concerned about rogue spending.

Despite these capabilities, marketplaces also have opportunities to add more personalization and interaction between buyers and sellers. Only 46% of the respondents have been able to use personalized catalogs and configurations for each user or corporate account, while just 21% have been able to engage in digitized negotiations over quote requests through a marketplace.



Companies See Clear Benefits and Pain Points in the Marketplace Experience



A good B2B marketplace experience should include several key elements. It should be easy to use, with a user-friendly interface and clear category navigation. Additionally, it should provide detailed product information so buyers can make informed decisions.

However, B2B marketplaces also need advanced features to provide the same level of value companies can get through traditional contract negotiations with suppliers. A marketplace should offer value-added services such as secure payments, customer support, logistics assistance, and access to financing. Furthermore, buyers should be able to compare prices and get real-time quotes from multiple suppliers, and the marketplace should leverage technology such as machine learning and artificial intelligence to optimize the buying experience for customers.

The respondents are experiencing some significant pain points with their current marketplaces. At 58% in each case, most of the respondents struggle with a lack of real-time stock information and a lack of searchable information about products and services.

Companies can't be sure products will be available when they purchase them. They may also struggle to find accurate information about the specific products they need: a must for industrial and manufacturing companies that require highly specialized materials and components.

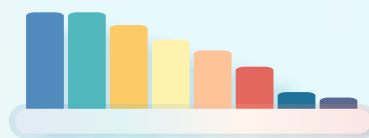
About half of the respondents (51%) also say they've experienced few or no digital interactions with sellers.

The marketplace acts as a buffer between the two parties, limiting their ability to communicate and negotiate.

This arrangement can be beneficial in consumer eCommerce, as many consumers wouldn't want to interact directly with sellers unless they needed to address a problem with their purchase. In a B2B setting, this can limit the company's ability to negotiate on price or form more prosperous partnerships with key suppliers through the marketplace.

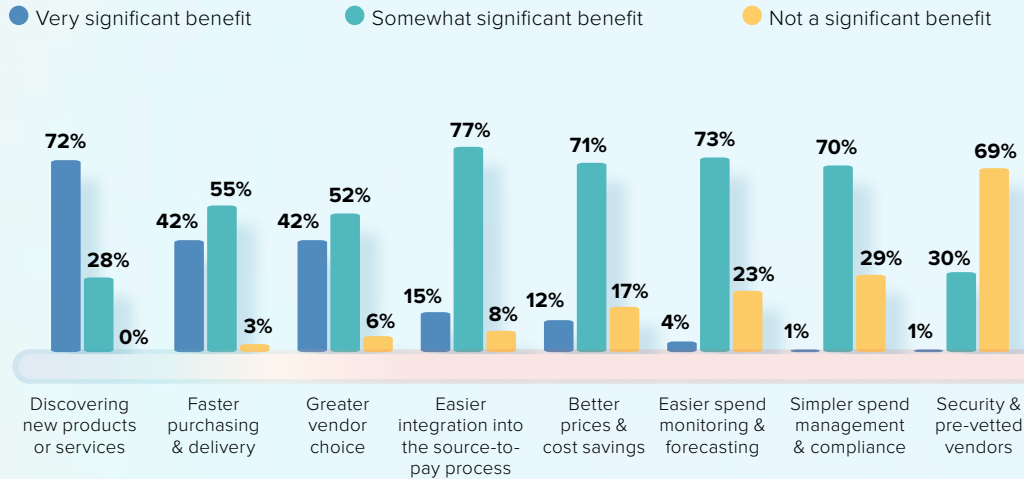
Significant portions of the respondents also say they struggle to differentiate between suppliers in the marketplace (43%), experience user experience issues like long loading times (37%), and experience a lack of localization or personalization (28%).

Which of the following are the top three pain points you've experienced while buying on B2B marketplaces recently?



- **58%** Lack of searchable information about products or services
- **58%** Lack of real-time stock information
- **51%** Few or no digital interactions between buyers and sellers
- **43%** Inability to differentiate between suppliers
- **37%** UX issues (e.g., long loading times, unintuitive interfaces)
- **28%** Lack of localization and/or personalization
- **14%** Missing features that are standard in consumer eCommerce
- **11%** Missing or difficult mobile experience

Which of the following are the most significant benefits you've realized from purchasing through B2B marketplaces?



Despite these pain points, the respondents recognize that B2B marketplaces offer some significant benefits to their businesses.

At 72%, most of the respondents consider the ability to discover new products and services a significant benefit of marketplaces. A B2B buyer can rarely see a comprehensive list of products on offer in a single location—this was typically achieved through catalogs in the past, and those catalogs didn't always offer a comprehensive look at the marketplace.

In each case, 42% say it's a significant benefit that they can get faster purchasing and delivery through marketplaces and that they have greater vendor choice.

Most of the respondents also agree that marketplaces offer somewhat significant benefits, including easier integration into the source-to-pay process (77%), better prices and cost savings (71%), easier spend monitoring and forecasting (73%), and simpler spend management and compliance (70%).

B2B marketplaces have much to offer businesses in terms of streamlined purchasing, vendor variety, and cost savings. But based on the results of the survey, many marketplaces could significantly improve the user experience by offering more personalization, easily searchable features, and more ways for buyers to communicate directly with the suppliers that list products online.

Conclusion: Improving the B2B Marketplace Environment

In their final line of questioning, researchers asked the respondents to describe one thing they'd like to see improved about the B2B marketplaces they've used. Many of the respondents say they would like to see some of the complexities in their buying processes addressed.

"There is a certain level of buying complexity," says an operations manager at an aerospace and defense company. "Further improvement in the buying process will reduce that complexity."

Similarly, a finance manager at a medical devices company says, "The whole buying process needs to change as it requires more compliance and security procedures to be involved."

Other respondents say the marketplaces they use need better information about suppliers and more stringent supplier vetting. Multiple respondents also say the marketplaces they use don't host any "mainstream" suppliers, instead listing products from suppliers they haven't heard of.

"I would like to see it become less cumbersome as there are countless participants and few verified ones," says an operations manager at a telecom company.

"Lack of participation of more authentic suppliers has been a critical observation made and which needs to improve," says a procurement manager from a pharma company.

Other respondents in this category also voiced concerns about security and compliance, as well as a lack of supplier details. These concerns are critical in many industries, as issues with suppliers can expose the company to risk, even if the companies are only purchasing from the suppliers through a marketplace.

Companies that operate proprietary B2B marketplaces must make it easier for buyers to obtain information about suppliers and facilitate seamless communications for purposes like compliance and negotiations. Based on the results of the study, buyers also need more search capabilities to find the products they need, and they need real-time stock information to determine how quickly they can obtain products.

With digital B2B purchasing continuing to heat up, companies that pursue these goals will be in a better position to grow their marketplaces.



Key Suggestions

Among the respondents:

01. Include real-time stock information about the products listed on your marketplace.

The lack of real-time stock information was one of the most significant pain points mentioned by buyers.

02. Ensure each vendor and product listing has searchable information.

These include important keywords as well as detailed information about the vendor, including information buyers might need for compliance concerns.

03. Facilitate streamlined digital communication between buyers and sellers.

Many buyers say they struggle to communicate directly with vendors through marketplace platforms. This makes it difficult for them to vet the vendor or negotiate.

04. Improve the buyer-seller relationship with built-in request-for-quote capabilities, automation, and a native CRM.

This will make it easier for vendors to manage regular buyers and can help to streamline the purchasing process—something many buyers want to improve.

05. Seek out more verified, well-known suppliers for your marketplace.

Some buyers are concerned about purchasing on marketplaces because they can't find vendors they recognize onboard.



About the Sponsor



At Oro, we're on a mission to create an ecosystem where manufacturers, distributors, wholesalers, and B2B businesses can thrive and unlock their full potential. Oro's suite of digital commerce products enables merchants to break free of outdated technology and build a business ready for the future.

OroCommerce, our key product, is a cloud-based Digital Commerce platform with native CRM capabilities focused on B2B, B2B2C, and B2B marketplace use cases for mid-sized and enterprise businesses across all geographies. Oro stands out due to our turnkey, end-to-end approach that provides rapid time-to-value that is particularly valued by mid-size B2B enterprises.

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About the Authors



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