UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA
SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS

MASTER'S THESIS

THE IMPACT OF DIGITALIZATION ON B2B SALES PROCESSES: THE CASE OF DANFOSS

Ljubljana, May 2026 MARGARETA LISAK

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ABSTRACT

The growing trend of digitalization, together with changes in customer buying behavior and growing global competition, is forcing B2B companies to adapt their sales processes. Sales affects market positioning and other basic business operations, such as production, by determining which products are sold. This thesis examines the impact of digitalization on B2B sales processes, with a focus on Danfoss, a global leader in energy-efficient technologies. The case study explored the company's transition from traditional, paper-based methods to digital processes in B2B sales operations. Structured interviews with key Danfoss personnel provide insight into the company's emphasis on digital readiness, training and tool adoption. The research showed that digital tools such as SEO, SEM, SAP, Microsoft Meet and Salesforce are used daily at Danfoss. These technologies have simplified data management, marketing and communication, reduced paperwork, improved real-time operational visibility and improved product availability through platforms such as the Danfoss Product Store. Digital solutions have also strengthened Danfoss' B2B customer relationships by facilitating communication, sales and support processes. The company continues to prioritize innovation, with initiatives such as developing a design center, implementing a customer feedback system and incorporating predictive analytics to improve customer experience and align inventory with demand. The proposed solutions driven by artificial intelligence aim to optimize the customer journey, simplify decision-making, and improve sales performance and customer satisfaction.

KEY WORDS: digitalization, B2B, sales, Danfoss.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



POVZETEK

Naraščajoči trend digitalizacije, skupaj s spremembami v nakupovalnem vedenju strank in naraščajočo globalno konkurenco, sili podjetja B2B, da prilagodijo svoje prodajne procese. Prodaja vpliva na tržno pozicioniranje in druge osnovne poslovne operacije, kot je proizvodnja, saj določa, kateri izdelki so prodani. To magistarsko delo preučuje vpliv digitalizacije na prodajne procese B2B, s poudarkom na podjetju Danfoss, globalno vodilnem proizvajalcu energetsko učinkovitih tehnologij. Študija primera je raziskala prehod podjetja od tradicionalnih, papirnatih metod k digitalnim procesom v B2B prodajnih operacijah. Strukturirani intervjuji s ključnimi zaposlenimi pri Danfossu pa ponujajo vpogled v fokus podjetja na digitalno pripravljenost, usposabljanje in uporabo orodij. Raziskava je pokazala, da podjetje Danfoss vsakodnevno uporablja digitalna orodja, kot so SEO, SEM, SAP, Microsoft Meet in Salesforce. Te tehnologije so poenostavile management podatkov, trženje in komunikacijo, zmanjšale količino papirnega dela, izboljšale operativno preglednost v realnem času ter povečale dostopnost izdelkov prek platform, kot je Danfoss Product Store. Digitalne rešitve so prav tako okrepile odnose podjetja Danfoss s poslovnimi strankami z omogočanjem lažje komunikacije, prodajnih procesov in podpornih storitev. Podjetje še naprej daje prednost inovacijam z iniciativami, kot so razvoj oblikovalskega centra, uvedba sistema za povratne informacije strank in vključitev napovedne analitike za izboljšanje uporabniške izkušnje ter uskladitev zalog s povpraševanjem. Predlagane rešitve, ki temeljijo na umetni inteligenci, so usmerjene v optimizacijo poti strank, poenostavitev odločanja ter izboljšanje prodajne uspešnosti in zadovoljstva strank.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: Digitalizacija, B2B, prodaja, Danfoss.

CILJI TRAJNOSTNEGA AZVOJA



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AI – (sl. Umetna inteligenca); Artificial Intelligence

B2B – (sl. Poslovanje med podjetji); Business-to-Business

B2C – (sl. Poslovanje s potrošniki); Business-to-Consumer

CRM – (sl. Upravljanje odnosov s strankami); Customer Relationship Management

FMCG – (sl. Hitro gibajoče se potrošniško blago); Fast-Moving Consumer Goods

IoT – (sl. Internet stvari); Internet of Things

OEM – (sl. Originalni proizvajalec opreme); Original Equipment Manufacturer

PRM – (sl. Upravljanje odnosov s partnerji); Partner Relationship Management

R&D – (sl. Raziskave in razvoj); Research and Development

SAP – (sl. Sistemi, aplikacije in produkti v obdelavi podatkov); Systems, Applications, and Products in Data Processing

SEM – (sl. Marketing prek iskalnikov); Search Engine Marketing

SEO – (sl. Optimizacija za iskalnike); Search Engine Optimization

SFA – (sl. Avtomatizacija prodajnih sil); Sales Force Automation

1 INTRODUCTION

The growing trend of digitalization, coupled with shifts in customer buying behaviors and heightened global competition, compels business-to-business (B2B) companies to modify their sales processes. B2B sales and the associated processes are facing significant disruptions due to the emergence of advanced selling technologies, artificial intelligence, machine learning, and new digital working environments (Singh et al., 2019).

According to Cuevas (2018), these changes are essential for organizations to remain competitive and responsive in the market. The integration of digital tools not only streamlines sales operations but also aligns them with the evolving expectations and requirements of customers. As a result, B2B companies must adapt and innovate their sales strategies to thrive in this dynamic business environment.

Moreover, numerous research studies highlight that incorporating digital tools and technologies into B2B sales strategies can significantly enhance various aspects of business performance. According to Ahearne & Rapp (2010), the adoption of these digital solutions not only boosts revenue and profitability but also improves overall sales effectiveness. A recent survey indicated that companies that implemented digital media experienced a reduction in service costs by 40% to 60% (McKinsey & Company, 2018).

These tools provide deeper insights into customer preferences and requirements, thereby enabling businesses to better cater to their clients' needs. This technological integration facilitates a more nuanced and informed approach to B2B sales (Mattilaa et al., 2021).

This shift has made traditional models of understanding B2B sales processes, such as the seven-step linear model introduced by Dubinsky (1981), outdated. Modern B2B sales strategies need a transformation from being centered around the seller to focusing on the buyer, placing primary importance on the needs and preferences of the end-user. This involves mapping out the sales journey based on these user requirements (Blum, 2020).

Additionally, there has been a significant shift toward digital methods of communication between buyers and sellers, driven by technological advances (Paesbrugghe et al., 2017). In fact, Bages-Amat et al. (2020) reported that approximately 75% of B2B decision-makers now favor digital communication due to its speed and convenience.

Researching specific cases of how digitalization has impacted B2B sales processes is crucial. By examining specific instances, researchers can discern patterns and variations in how digital tools and strategies affect business performance. This thesis aims to delve into such a case by exploring how digitalization has transformed the sales processes at Danfoss, a global leader in energy-efficient solutions.

1.1 Subject and goal of the thesis

In this thesis, I will explore the impact of digitalization on B2B sales processes, focusing specifically on how Danfoss has integrated digital technologies into its sales. Danfoss is an exemplary choice for a case study due to its significant presence in various industries, including heating, cooling, drives, and power solutions. The company's proactive approach to integrating digital technologies into its operations provides a rich context for understanding the broader impacts of digitalization on B2B sales processes.

The objective is to critically assess the adoption and application of digital tools within Danfoss's sales processes, identifying key benefits, challenges, and areas for further enhancement. This analysis will include a detailed examination of Danfoss's electronic sales systems and their effectiveness in meeting the needs of business customers.

Additional goals of the thesis are:

1. To determine the importance of digitalization on B2B sales processes,
2. To identify B2B sales processes using examples from business practice,
3. To analyze and critically evaluate the application of digitalization in B2B sale processes on the example of Danfoss.

1.2 Data sources and collection methods

The research for this thesis will draw upon a diverse range of sources. This includes academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, reputable online resources, and proprietary internal documents from Danfoss. These methodologies include a literature review method, used to examine and synthesize existing theoretical and empirical knowledge regarding the digitalization of B2B sales processes; a case study approach, used to investigate the digital transformation process within Danfoss in a real-world organizational context; and a qualitative research method, implemented through structured interviews with relevant stakeholders. Additionally, comparative and analytical methods will be used to interpret findings and compare theoretical perspectives with empirical observations. This thesis will employ multiple scientific research methodologies to ensure objectivity, reliability, and precision. These methodologies will facilitate a comprehensive and structured approach to understanding existing theories related to the digitalization of B2B sales processes.

The empirical research component of the thesis will be conducted using the case study method. A case study approach will be utilized to trace the transition from paper based to digital within the complex B2B sales processes at Danfoss. Data collection will involve structured interviews with Danfoss sales personnel, conducted according to a predefined interview protocol (see Appendix 1), and discussions with colleagues from the Sales Excellence team. The interviewed employees will include the Digital Sales Director, Customer Service Specialist, and Area Sales Engineer.

1.3 Content and structure of the thesis

The thesis is organized in five chapters. The Introduction outlines the subject and objectives of the thesis, detailing the data sources and collection methods, and offering an overview of the content and structure. The second chapter delves into the conceptual framework, critically examining the evolution of sales practices from traditional approaches to those driven by Internet technologies. This section is particularly detailed, covering topics such as the role of sales as an organizational function, the optimization of sales processes, and the transformative impact of the Internet on sales channels, including websites, web shops, and CRM systems. The third chapter focuses on the advantages and disadvantages of electronic wholesale trade, providing insights into the implications for both B2B sellers and buyers. The fourth chapter presents a case study analysis of Danfoss exploring its digital strategies and tools, such as the product store, digital documentation, service videos, and learning portals, and evaluating their effectiveness in enhancing sales. Finally, the Conclusion synthesizes the findings and offers final reflections on the implications of the digital transformation of sales processes.

2 CLASSIC AND MODERN APPROACHES TO SALES

Sales is one of the oldest human professions that has been developing and perfected over the centuries. Before money became the main means of exchange, people traded goods and services, negotiated and looked for ways to make the most profit with minimal investment. With the development of society and the introduction of money, sales took on new dimensions and adapted to the needs of the modern market (Ziglar, 2004).

Throughout history, from the exchange of goods to more complex forms of payment, sales have become an indispensable part of satisfying human needs and achieving business goals. Sales has become a fundamental function of every market, and this role has remained unchanged to this day. In the business world, organizations are forced to market their products or services in order to generate revenue and ensure survival (Kozák, 2019). Every business organization consists of different departments and processes, but the sales department often stands out as a key element because it directly generates revenue. It is this department that connects the business with the market, and its effectiveness often determines the success or failure of the organization (Signorelli, 2018).

This chapter explores the importance of sales as an organizational function and its key role in the success of modern businesses. Special attention is paid to understanding and optimizing the sales process and the impact of Internet technologies on the transformation of sales. The main types of sales and Internet-based sales channels are discussed, including websites and online stores. The role of CRM systems in managing relationships with private and business customers is also considered, as is the use of mobile applications to achieve sales goals.

2.1 The critical role of sales as an organizational function

The organizational function within a company encompasses a series of related activities that contribute to the achievement of general goals and the success of the organization. Sales, as one of the key functions, plays a crucial role in all business processes and changes within the company. In addition to being responsible for placing products and services on the market, sales greatly influences other business operations, such as production, because it determines which products will be manufactured. Simply put, a product that cannot be sold does not make sense to produce, which can result in unnecessary costs (Marolin, 2017).

Sales can be defined as the process by which a company delivers its products or services to consumers or other organizations in exchange for a certain fee (Mrvica Mađarac & Jelica, 2015). According to Žugaj et al. (2004), the main goal of sales in manufacturing companies is the timely and most favorable sale of goods and services. To achieve this, sales includes a series of specific activities, such as sales preparation, market research, advertising, preparing offers, and after-sales product care.

The sales function also plays a significant role in coordinating and synchronizing with other business function, such as research and development, procurement, manufacturing and distribution. The sales team provides valuable feedback from the market that can direct new product development to customer needs. Key decisions on procurement, planning and production scheduling are made based on sales data, thereby optimizing inventory and reducing waste. Cooperation between sales and marketing enables effective promotions and positioning in the market, while well-designed distribution strategies ensure product availability when and where it is needed (Marolin, 2017).

Although it does not seem so at first glance, one of the basic tasks of sales is to create demand for the company's products. This is primarily achieved by informing potential customers about the products and their features, thereby stimulating interest in purchasing. In this context, making offers plays a key role because it enables initial communication with the customer. A good offer should clearly and precisely contain information about product quality, price, delivery terms and any additional benefits such as free delivery, installation or commissioning of industrial machines (Tomić, 2018).

Sales are one of the most important links in the chain of business processes, as they enable the realization of products – their conversion into income or delivery to end users (Sikavica & Novak, 1999). Communication plays a key role in this process. The goals of sales communication are to inform customers, convince them of the value of the product and encourage them to buy (Mrvica Mađarac & Jelica, 2015). In this way, sales became not only a means of exchange, but also a key factor in building relationships with customers and creating long-term business sustainability.

2.2 Understanding and optimizing the sales process

Understanding the phases of the sales process is essential for successful implementation. Each phase represents a logical step that leads from the beginning to the end of the sales process. A well-structured sales process reduces the room for improvisation, which is extremely important for achieving goals and the efficiency of sales activities. When the process is implemented in a planned manner, the results are much better because the

activities are coordinated and focused on achieving the desired outcomes (Manning & Reece, 2008).

The literature mentions different models of the sales process, but the most common are eight basic phases: seller preparation, prospecting, customer approach, identifying customer needs, presentation, resolving complaints, closing the sale, and post-sales contact (Tomašević Lišanin, 2010).

Preparation is the foundation of every successful sale. A seller must know his company, its products or services, market trends, and the specific needs of potential customers well. The better prepared a seller is, the easier it will be for him to understand the needs of clients and offer appropriate solutions (Mihić, 2008). In this way, the seller not only builds trust with the buyer, but also becomes a credible partner who offers real value.

Modern sales approaches increasingly emphasize the importance of customer relationships. The focus is no longer just on a one-time transaction, but on building long-term relationships based on trust and mutual benefit. Sellers are increasingly focused on adding value through quality communication and a personalized approach. In this way, they not only increase customer satisfaction, but also strengthen their loyalty (Tomašević Lišanin, 2010).

Buyers and sellers today understand that cooperation brings strategic advantage. Buyers increasingly rarely see suppliers as replaceable parts of the supply chain, and manufacturers strive to develop close relationships with key customers. By exchanging confidential information, suppliers can adapt their products to specific customer needs, which ultimately increases end-user satisfaction. Such a partnership approach requires a special attitude and skills from the seller.

A successful seller must have certain characteristics that enable quality interaction with customers and the achievement of long-term goals. Key traits include:

- Focus on customer needs,
- Thinking about how to best serve the customer,
- Preparing a strategy for each sales meeting,
- Active listening and quality communication,
- Emphasizing the benefits of the product or service from the customer's perspective,
- Solving customer problems, rather than simply selling,
- Developing long-term relationships based on trust,
- Providing support and after-sales services to ensure loyalty,
- Collaborating with other team members involved in providing services.

All the above-mentioned salesperson’s characteristics are not only the foundation of successful sales, but also the key to long-term business sustainability. Satisfied and loyal customers are the result of continuous investment in a quality relationship, but this relationship begins in the next phase of the sales process – finding potential customers (Mihić, 2008).

For a company to market its products and ensure their visibility and recognition on the market, it is necessary to actively seek new customers. This phase is of key importance because, with intense competition, losing customers also means losing revenue. Companies that neglect this step risk stagnation and a decline in sales results. That is why continuous identification and inclusion of new potential customers is crucial for success (Mihić, 2008).

Gathering information about potential customers is the core of this phase. Information can be obtained from various sources, including direct field observations, recommendations from existing customers, publicly available databases, personal contacts and networking, promotional activities and events, and target group lists and directories (Tomašević Lišanin, 2010). The more relevant information is available, the greater the chances of precisely targeting sales efforts and adapting the approach to the specific needs of potential customers (Mihić, 2008). After potential customers have been identified, the contact-making phase follows. It is important to emphasize that there is no universal model that could be applied to every sales situation. The approach must be adapted to the specific circumstances, and key factors influencing the choice of method include (Mihić, 2008):

- Type of product or service offered,
- Communication style preferred by the customer,
- Whether it is the first or repeated contact with the same customer,
- Level of understanding of the customer's needs and desires,
- Available time for interaction,
- Awareness of the customer about their own problem or need.

According to Tomašević Lišanin (2010), there are several approach strategies that salespeople can use to arouse the buyer's interest. These methods are described in Table 1.

Table 1: Basic methods of increasing the customer's interest

Method	Description
Introduction or introductory approach	Professionally stating one's name and the company's name to the customer.
Product Highlighting	Immediately showing the product to the customer so they can see or handle it.
Highlighting Benefits	Offering appropriate benefits considered desirable by most customers in the industry where the customer operates.
Questioning Approach	Engaging and interesting the customer by asking suitable questions.
Referral Method	Mentioning the name of a mutual friend who introduced the potential customer.
Giving Compliments	Giving compliments to the customer personally or to their company.
Research Method	Asking for the customer's permission to investigate the needs of the company within the product category offered.
Sample Method	Providing samples to potential customers.
Agenda Method	Highlighting what is to be done at a certain time.
Combined Approach	Creatively using multiple methods in the same sales encounter.

Source: Tomašević-Lišanin (2010).

The salesperson should move from the approach phase to the discovery phase as spontaneously and naturally as possible to create an environment in which the buyer can freely express his or her opinion. This can be achieved by asking the buyer to answer a series of questions. Asking questions is an important part of identifying the buyer's needs, and is

best accomplished through direct questioning by the seller. The questions should be tailored to the specific situation and the unique needs of each buyer. The seller must determine in advance what information he or she wants to obtain and maintain control over the process, avoiding any deviations. Information should be collected in a logical sequence, which requires the seller to plan the order of the questions and prepare for all possible buyer responses. Therefore, sellers must be prepared for every situation and a variety of different responses to their questions. In addition to being prepared for different responses, the seller should move naturally and spontaneously from one question to another (Froböse, 2015).

There are two basic types of questions in the process of identifying buyer needs: closed and open questions. Closed questions require short answers, usually “yes” or “no”. These questions are useful at the beginning of a dialogue with a customer, they set the direction of the conversation, check for understanding, provide feedback on the customer’s interest, and allow the salesperson to determine his or her approach to the customer. Closed questions are also effective for encouraging communication with reserved customers who may be hesitant to answer open-ended questions. Open-ended questions, on the other hand, allow the customer to respond freely, expressing their opinions, feelings, attitudes, and preferences. These questions are valuable for gaining deeper insight into customer needs and encouraging conversation (Marks, 2006).

Product presentation is very important for achieving sales. Presentation can be an oral presentation of information and product features, and can also include a demonstration of the product's use and capabilities. During the previously explained phase, the salesperson collects information about the customer's needs and shapes his presentation based on this information. However, the salesperson must also be well-versed in the features and benefits of the offered products or services. Therefore, a quality presentation also implies prior preparation by the salesperson, because the salesperson must know the features and capabilities of the products he sells, as well as payment, delivery, return and other options in order to make a good presentation of the products or services (Majer, 2009).

In modern business environments, simply responding to explicit customer requests or wishes is often not enough, because these requests may be superficial or incomplete. Instead, knowledge of the customer's operational and procedural workflows is needed to uncover needs and opportunities for improvement that the customer may not have fully articulated or recognized. In a B2B context, it is useful to familiarize yourself with the processes of the company that purchases the products in order to gain a better understanding of the customer's needs (Majer, 2009).

Trkman et al. (2015) present a method that enables companies to do this in a systematic way. One proposal is to introduce a new role: ‘customer process owner’. These individuals would not only address the most obvious customer needs, but would also optimize the service provided to align with the customer’s processes. This approach requires a shift from reactive service models, which focus on delivering what is requested, to proactive models that anticipate and address more fundamental needs embedded in the customer’s processes. In this context, the role of ‘customer process owner’ serves as a link between the company and the customer, ensuring that service delivery is not only aligned with current needs, but is also continuously optimized to improve the long-term efficiency and effectiveness of the process.

Customer process owners would work closely with customers to map, analyze, and improve their processes, providing expert guidance on how services can be better integrated into

customer workflows. This role goes beyond the traditional customer service functions by focusing on co-creation of value through process innovation, enabling companies to offer more personalized, efficient, and strategic solutions. By integrating this role in organizational structures, companies can foster deeper, more sustainable relationships with their customers, positioning themselves as service providers, but also as partners in optimizing the customer's overall business performance (Trkman et al., 2015).

During sales presentations, salespeople's goal is to keep the customer's attention, so they must pay attention to making the presentation attractive. For this purpose, it is possible to use examples, stories, and anecdotes. Using these tools can help the customer identify with the product, imagine how they use it in their life, and better understand its capabilities. This also highlights the importance of understanding the customer's needs and processes so that the presentation can be placed in the context of the customer's need. Another useful tool in product presentations is highlighting unique advantages and differences compared to competing products or services. In this way, salespeople can clearly communicate the value proposition and why their solution is the best choice (Tomašević Lišanin et al., 2019).

After the product presentation, the customer makes a purchase decision. If the customer decides to buy, the sale is closed (Susac, 2005). According to Manning & Reece (2008), there are several methods for closing the sale:

- Tentative closing: In this phase, the salesperson is not sure whether the customer is truly interested in purchasing the product or service, so he asks the customer direct questions that provide more information about the purchase intention,
- Benefit processing closing: This method involves constantly emphasizing the advantages of the seller's offer in order to create a positive impression of the product or service and ultimately reach an agreement or cooperation,
- Assumed closing: This method requires the seller to have great trust and belief that the customer has made a final decision to purchase the product or service without the customer explicitly expressing it,
- Special concession closing: This involves offering an immediate benefit to the customer if he decides to buy immediately, such as a lower price, a discount on a certain quantity, or more flexible payment terms,
- Choice closing: This method presents several offers from which the customer can choose the one that gives him the most benefit. The buyer can also discuss the assumptions in the offer or adjust their own terms,
- Closing the balance sheet: This involves making a list of pros and cons of the purchase when the seller determines that the buyer is already interested in the offer. The buyer can look for negative aspects of the offer or reasons not to accept it, while the seller highlights the advantages in order to win the buyer over,
- Direct closing on promises: This simple and unambiguous approach involves directly addressing the buyer who is already interested in the offer,
- Combined closing: This closing approach uses a combination of several different methods, often including some of the techniques mentioned above.

In addition to acceptable closing methods, there are also manipulative methods that sellers use when they want to rush a purchase decision or are convinced that their solution is the right one. Manipulative methods include (Tomašević Lišanin, 2010):

- Self-initiated closing: The seller takes the initiative to close the sale without waiting for a signal from the buyer,

- Small-point closing: Focusing on smaller details to steer the conversation towards a final decision,
- Continuous yes closing: Asking a series of questions that the buyer will answer yes to, leading them to agree to the sale,
- Retreat Closing: using the tactic of appearing to withdraw an offer to pressure the buyer into making a decision,
- Closing back-up benefits: Holding back the final benefit for a last-minute reveal to convince the customer,
- Emotional Appeal Closing: Playing on the customer's emotions to lead them to a purchase decision.

Once the seller and buyer reach an agreement, the sales process does not end. Seller should continue to build long-term relationships and create new business opportunities. A salesperson should consistently attend to the needs, wants and preferences of his customers in order to retain them and foster loyalty. It is always easier to keep existing customers and adapt to their needs than to find completely new customers and keep them. In addition, if customers are not given enough attention, they will turn to competition that will meet their needs (Mihić, 2008). Establishing after-sales contact is a key objective of modern sales, which allows companies to build long-term relationships and develop partnerships with their customers (Manning & Reece, 2008).

After-sales services include several activities to ensure customer satisfaction and maintain a positive relationship. These activities include assisting customers with credit arrangements, checking deliveries, checking installations, ensuring proper operation and training users, modifying existing orders, checking satisfaction, and seeking referrals. Maintaining contact with customers can be achieved in a variety of ways, including personal visits, telephone calls, e-mails, letters, the Internet, and customer relationship management (CRM) systems, which focus on managing customer relationships (Tomašević Lišanin, 2010).

However, it is always possible for a customer to be dissatisfied with a purchased product or service, leading to a complaint. When a salesperson receives a complaint, it is crucial not to take it personally. Instead, they should view it as an opportunity to improve the product, presentation, or business (Tomašević Lišanin, 2010). When a customer expresses a complaint, it means that he is giving feedback and that he did not get what he imagined, deserved or paid for. Sometimes the customer makes a constructive complaint, while in other cases the complaint may lack logic.

It is necessary to offer a solution to the customer. Regardless of whether the complaint is justified, the seller must calmly and carefully listen to the customer before making any decision. A quality solution can only be achieved if the seller thoroughly understands the product or service he is offering (Majer, 2009). Everything that a salesperson promises to a customer in the earlier stages of the process must be fulfilled within a certain time frame. Every company aims to minimize the number of complaints about its products, services or salespeople. Therefore, it is important to regularly improve the offer and collect information about customer satisfaction (Manning & Reece, 2008).

2.3 The role of the Internet in the transformation of the sales process

Sales originated as an activity in which two or more people exchange certain goods or services through direct face-to-face interaction. The advent of the telephone has taken on a new dimension, providing salespeople with a medium for easier and faster access to customers and facilitating the conclusion of sales transactions. Similarly, the development of internet technologies has created new opportunities for further transforming sales and customer interactions. Moreover, technological advances, including the internet, social media and related innovations, have transformed the sales process (Kozák, 2019).

In the field of sales, digitalization is not something that is imposed from the outside and subsequently transferred to the sector; rather, it should be viewed as a continuous internal process (Hagberg et al., 2016). Although digitalization has a long history in the sales sector, significant transformational effects have only become visible with the advent of the internet. From a customer perspective, convenience is undoubtedly the most important aspect of shopping, and the ability to buy products from the comfort of one's own home and have them delivered to the doorstep is very attractive to many (Azab & Pernebrink, 2018).

Therefore, one of the prominent transformations of sales is the emergence of electronic commerce. E-commerce encompasses the process of selling and buying electronically, primarily via the Internet (Kotler et al., 2006). Online commerce is a form of business that involves the use of information technology and Internet technology. Namely, e-commerce replaces the existence of physical stores because it offers the possibility of searching, selecting and ordering products online. The emergence of e-commerce has also stimulated the delivery industry because ordered products are mostly delivered to the customer's address. Therefore, the Internet has become an economical and very accessible means of doing business (Bezić et al., 2009).

Azab & Pernebrink (2018) highlight several ways in which online commerce has changed the sales sector:

1. removing barriers to market entry for many small businesses,
2. increasing demand for specific goods mainly by overcoming the problem of geographical distance,
3. reducing the need for inventory storage in response to customer requests,
4. improving customer relationships through new technologies, thereby creating added value.

The Internet has provided retailers with new spaces and ways to publish marketing content and advertising. The digitalization of marketing efforts significantly reduces the costs of promoting products, which is especially evident in advertising via social networks, which are the most widely used media for promotion in the modern world. On the other hand, new forms of communication have also begun to be used: email. Email has enabled retailers to

reach customers faster, more widely, and more personally, as well as increase creativity in presenting products or services (Anđelinović & Validžić, 2019).

The Internet has also had a major impact on the transformation of the B2B sales process. The Internet has provided a flexible platform that enables instant and constant connectivity between participants in the sales process. The Internet enables various forms of communication, including one-way communication, such as users searching for information on websites, and two-way communication, such as email exchanges between individuals (Saeed, 2023). This connectivity is revolutionizing the way information is collected and shared, increasing both the speed and efficiency of communication.

It also supports multi-way communication through platforms such as LinkedIn, enabling one-to-many or many-to-many interactions. This multi-channel communication capability allows companies to communicate with customers and partners in synchronous and asynchronous formats using text, audio, and video (Biemans, 2023). As a result, B2B sales teams can more effectively reach and communicate with potential customers, simplify the sales process, and improve relationship-building efforts. This digital shift enables sales professionals to access real-time data, respond promptly to inquiries and adapt their sales strategies to meet the evolving needs of their customers. The integration of the Internet into B2B sales processes empowers companies to use digital tools to improve their competitiveness and drive business growth (Koponen et al., 2019).

The Internet enables rapid and extensive data collection, allowing companies to access up-to-date and detailed information. In the sales process, information is an important resource for the buyer that ultimately leads to a purchase decision. Therefore, the impact of the Internet on greater availability of information facilitates decision-making and, on the other hand, allows sellers to more easily share information about their products. Modern Internet communication technologies have dramatically changed the landscape of marketing information in B2B markets, providing significant improvements in the quantity, quality, currency and verifiability of information available to both buyers and sellers (Enyinda et al., 2021).

In addition, the Internet has expanded the geographical scope of available information. Thanks to the Internet, buyers can search and sellers can place information in a global context. Therefore, the Internet facilitates access to new markets, which is especially important for B2B transactions. Given that the Internet enables the exchange of a huge amount of information, it is important to note that such an environment sometimes calls into question the reliability of this information. Also, processing large amounts of data is a demanding task for companies. However, in line with the development of the Internet, digital tools have also been developed that enable data analytics and facilitate market research activities. The development of the Internet and the related development of digital tools empowers B2B actors to better understand market trends, customer preferences and

competitive dynamics, ultimately increasing their ability to meet their customers' needs and drive business success (Rodriguez et al., 2020).

Internet-based changes in the attributes of information available to B2B buyers and sellers have significantly impacted various aspects of the sales and procurement process. First, the complexity of shopping centers has increased as access to rich information enables more stakeholders to be involved in decision-making, requiring sales teams to address different perspectives and needs. Second, the buying process has evolved, with a shift away from dependence on the salesperson to a more Internet-dependent approach, as buyers can now independently access detailed product and market information online (Wirtz & Kowalkowski, 2023).

This change allows customers to make more informed decisions without relying solely on sales representatives for information. Third, the sales process is increasingly becoming customer-driven, rather than salesperson-driven, as customers initiate more interactions and dictate the pace and content of communication based on their research and needs. Finally, the nature of customer-seller interactions has shifted from a product-dominated focus to a service-dominated focus, emphasizing value-added services and solutions rather than products alone (Wirtz & Kowalkowski, 2023).

The effects of these changes are moderated by factors such as the nature of the product, the type of purchase, and the dynamics of the customer-seller exchange. For example, complex or high-value purchases may still require more personal interaction and support from salespeople. These Internet-induced changes have significant implications for the size and structure of salespeople. Companies may need to adapt their sales strategies to accommodate a more informed and proactive customer base, potentially reducing the size of traditional sales teams while increasing the need for professionals who can provide value-added services and support. Overall, the digital transformation of information availability is reshaping the roles and strategies of B2B sales forces, requiring adaptation to meet growing market demands (Lundin & Kindstrom, 2023).

When addressing customer complaints, sales representatives can use the Internet and related digital tools to support their claims with relevant documentation, such as product warranty texts or other content. If a potential customer raises a complaint about quality and the sales representative does not have the necessary materials at hand, they can access their files in the cloud or look up product reviews on specialized websites or mobile apps. Recent research highlights that product reviews are becoming increasingly important in the purchasing decision-making process, especially for the millennial generation and online shoppers (Tomašević Lišanin, 2010).

In the final stage of sales, instead of signing traditional printed contracts or agreements, customers can electronically sign the necessary documents. Furthermore, the sales representative can confirm the order via a specialized application or web interface and

simultaneously notify the company's office sales staff about the sale's outcome to quickly initiate the delivery process. After reaching an agreement and obtaining the customer's consent to purchase, the sales representative can direct the potential customer to the company's online store to complete the order (Tomašević Lišanin, 2010).

Moreover, there has been a blending of traditional roles between sellers and buyers, as many traditional seller functions are now performed by buyers and vice versa. For example, buyers enhance products by reviewing them and providing suggestions for improvements, as well as seeking product information themselves. Thus, the Internet not only poses a threat to the traditional sales model but also offers an opportunity for its revitalization (Stein & Ramaseshan, 2016).

2.4 Sales methods

The two primary sales methods are B2C and B2B. B2C or "business to consumer" is a sales model in which companies offer their products or services to individual consumers. B2B or "business to business", on the other hand, involves companies that sell their products or services to other companies, or legal entities. B2B and B2C sales differ in several aspects, most notably in the decision-making and purchasing processes. The B2C sales process was presented earlier, and when it comes to decision-making, the buyer makes a purchase decision primarily based on his personal circumstances and priority needs (Joko Purnomo, 2023).

In contrast, in B2B transactions, the purchase decision is much more complex. Since in this case the buyer is another company, the price or cost of purchase is one of the main factors influencing the purchase decision. The company must care about making a profit, so many more considerations are included in assessing the cost-effectiveness of the purchase, while an individual buyer may purchase products, for example, to achieve a certain status, market trends, and similar emotional factors. Also, in the B2B model, the involvement of additional actors such as creditors, investors, legal entities, and the like is more common. An individual buyer also buys products and services for personal use, while companies buy products to perform work and achieve positive business results (Joko Purnomo, 2023).

An additional sales model is the B2B2C or "Business to Business to Consumer" model. This model includes a third party who is essentially an intermediary in sales. A classic example of this model is a manufacturing company that sells products to a distribution company that then sells products to end consumers. Similarly, the C2B2C or "Consumer to Business to Consumer" sales method is based on individuals selling to companies, after which the companies sell these products to other individuals, with the company acting as an intermediary (Joko Purnomo, 2023).

In modern markets, specialized platforms or websites have developed that allow users to sell their products to other individuals through the intermediary of companies. Companies such

as eBay and Amazon are prime examples of this model. On these platforms, sellers offer their products to end consumers, and the platform serves as an intermediary that makes it easier for both parties to agree. This model simplifies the transaction process and expands the market for both sellers and buyers (Dunković, 2015).

Moreover, all of the above methods can use the Internet and related technologies to simplify traditional sales processes and reach a larger customer base (Dunković, 2015). According to Hart et al. (2000), the development of online sales facilitates the sales process in three phases. In the first phase, companies use their websites exclusively to convey information about the company and its offerings. The second phase is characterized by a more proactive approach, where companies attract visitors to their websites and use the information presented to influence their purchasing decisions. In this phase, companies begin to value the data about potential customers that can be collected via the Internet. Finally, in the third phase, companies implement solutions for online transactions, making the Internet a new sales channel.

2.5 Website as a sales channel

An online store can be defined as a virtual place on the Internet where desired and sought-after products can be found and purchased from anywhere, at any time (Marker, 2014). Kotler et al., (2014) state that online shopping means that an organization or its website includes the ability to conduct transactions or sell products and services over the Internet. Today, the term "website" is often used synonymously with "online store", "online store" and "web store" (Marker, 2014). Online shopping is considered the most profitable form of commerce because it involves low costs and ease of use, which makes it an increasingly significant and lucrative component of overall commerce (Krajnović, Sikirič & Hordov, 2019).

Compared to shopping in physical stores, online shopping removes many barriers such as time constraints and physical barriers. Customers can go through the entire sales process anytime, from anywhere (assuming they have access to the Internet). All processes in online shopping are carried out electronically, which significantly speeds up all business activities and drastically reduces costs. Consequently, this leads to increased efficiency (Babić et al., 2011).

Factors that positively influence online shopping decisions include (Katawetawaraks & Wang, 2011):

• Convenience: Customers can shop online 24/7 from the comfort of their home, every day of the year. Traditional store opening hours limit shopping to a certain time. In addition, customers can order products from different parts of the world, often at more competitive prices, and have these products delivered to their addresses. Customers can study information that is relevant to their purchasing decision over a certain period of time, which

is much more difficult in physical stores. The Internet also makes it easier to compare products from different manufacturers.

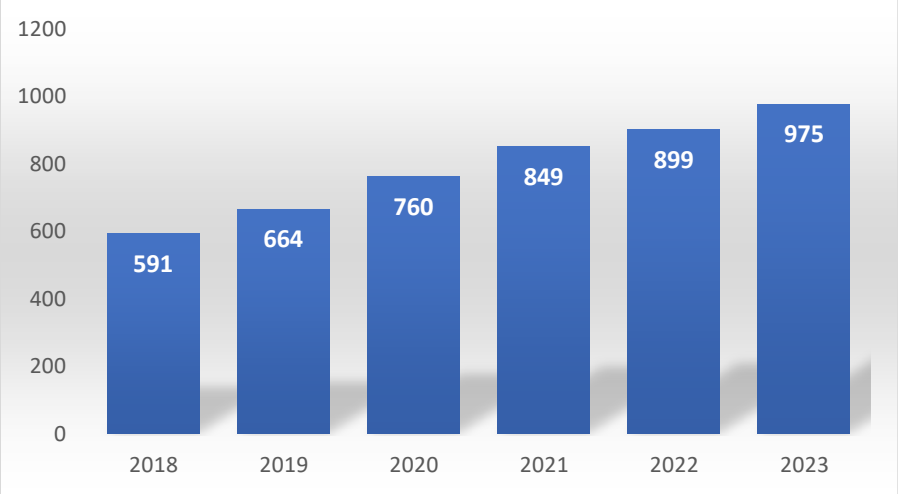
• Time and cost savings: In the case of online shopping, customers do not have to spend time or money traveling to physical stores, interacting with sales staff, or comparing offers from multiple stores. They can also access stores from mobile devices at any time, which means they can shop while performing another activity, such as while traveling on public transportation, waiting in line, etc.

• Access to information: In addition to basic features and details about individual products or services, consumers can find out all the information about payment and return options. They can also access reviews, experiences, and opinions of other customers to make a final purchase decision.

• Availability of products and services: in online stores, it is possible to 'display' an almost unlimited number of products, while physical stores are limited by the size of the space. The global reach of online stores also provides access to some products and services that are not available in the market where the customer is located or can be purchased at lower prices.

E-commerce turnover has shown continuous and consistent growth for years, and online sales channels are constantly evolving and gaining in importance. Therefore, more and more companies are adapting their strategies and implementing web stores in their offerings to remain competitive. Figure 1 shows the growth of B2C e-commerce traffic from 2018 to 2023 in Europe, measured in billions of euros (€ billion), illustrating the growth of just one sales model in the online environment.

Figure 1: The growth of B2C e-commerce turnover from 2018 to 2023 in Europe



Source: ECommerce Europe (2023).

In 2018, turnover amounted to 591 billion euros. By 2019, turnover increased to 664 billion euros with a growth rate of 11%. The turnover further increased to 760 billion euros in 2020 with a growth rate of 14%. The year 2020 records the highest growth rate, which can be attributed to the global increase in online shopping due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, turnover reached 849 billion euros, with a growth rate of 12%. Furthermore, in 2022, turnover amounted to 899 billion euros, which reflects a lower growth rate of 6%. The forecast for 2023 foresees a turnover of 975 billion euros, with an estimated growth rate of 8%.

To improve sales efficiency, reduce costs, and increase customer value, business-to-business (B2B) companies are increasingly embracing digital sales channels. These companies are supplementing their traditional sales teams with online channels that facilitate interactions without the need for face-to-face meetings (Thaichon et al. 2018). At the same time, these improvements are creating new opportunities for innovation and creativity in sales practices and research (Grove et al. 2018).

2.6 CRM systems for managing relationships with private and business clients

The development of sales has also resulted in the development of customer relationship approaches. Müller & Srića (2005) state that the development of mass production, trade and mass retailing in the second half of the 20th century has influenced the weakening of personal relationships with customers. However, the concept of customer relationship management is an important part of the sales process and is continuously adapting to market demands.

Customer relationship management (CRM) is a set of methods that help companies organize their business more efficiently and maintain a continuous overview of all clients, customers, transactions and other business activities related to the sales process. The CRM concept is closely related to all business departments/functions that are in direct contact with customers (front-office operations). Therefore, the departments responsible for implementing this concept within the company should be marketing, sales and customer service (Anderson & Kerr, 2001).

The CRM concept essentially integrates all these functions and channels of contact with customers into a single and consistent approach to achieving better relationships and greater customer satisfaction. Due to the involvement of numerous business functions/departments in CRM, each often has its own perspective on strategy and approach, reflecting the priorities of that particular function. Consequently, CRM must serve as a comprehensive approach and business strategy for the entire company, determined and coordinated by top management (Müller & Srića, 2005).

Furthermore, CRM is a business strategy that involves selecting and managing customer relationships to optimize their long-term value to the company. CRM requires a customer-

centric business philosophy and culture to support sales, marketing, and customer service processes. CRM software applications can provide a company with high-quality and effective customer relationship management, provided that the company has appropriate leadership, strategy, and culture focused on achieving maximum customer satisfaction (Müller & Srića, 2005).

Müller & Srića (2005) add that the goals of CRM include also:

- Utilizing existing relationships to increase revenue: This includes cross-selling, up-selling, and increasing profitability by identifying, attracting, and retaining the best customers,
- Using integrated customer information to provide excellent service: Leverage integrated information about each individual customer, gathered through all interaction channels, to better meet their needs,
- Introducing sales procedures and processes that ensure consistency in sales and customer relationships,
- Developing and offering new value for customers to increase their loyalty,
- Implementing strategies that offer proactive solutions: This includes proactively offering new solutions and resolving issues before they manifest.

The advantages of implementing a customer relationship management system can include (Vranešević, 2000):

- Transparency of customer information and data,
- Importance of understanding customers,
- Comprehensive customer data,
- Systematization and processing of customer requests through all communication channels,
- Sales efficiency,
- Improved internal communication,
- Support for sales staff in fulfilling customer requests,
- Adequate knowledge base,
- Increased productivity,
- Discovery of new customers,
- With long-term use, potential customers become actual and loyal customers,
- Possibility of achieving higher revenues through customer segmentation and defining a clear strategy for the target market,
- Strengthening profitability.

Today, CRM is characterized by the use of information technology systems to collect and measure consumer needs. Moreover, in modern markets, companies use different platforms, software, and programs for customer relationship management, depending on the size, number of customers, and business needs of the organization. Digital tools enable easy updating of customer data, transaction tracking, and analytics that enable a better understanding of customer needs, preferences, and achieving better relationships. The use of CRM is also important for carrying out post-sales activities such as warranty insurance, installation, packaging returns, etc. Digital tools also enable easier communication at lower costs. Communication via e-mail or websites enables fast two-way communication between the company and the customer and facilitates the provision of customer support (Anderson & Kerr, 2001).

CRM primarily deals with the collection and analysis of data on customer transactions and interactions with the company. Most businesses aim to attract and retain as many customers

and service users as possible. To achieve this goal, businesses must know their customers, understand their preferences, and know how to interact with them in the most appropriate way. CRM systems facilitate the easier collection of customer data. Data is gathered through various channels, including phone calls, mail, email, and personal contact. CRM systems provide companies with the means to easily collect, store, and analyze data. These systems perform all these operations today, whereas in the past, employees had to manually enter customer data into various programs and tables and then analyze them individually (Beltman & Peelen, 2013).

Modern CRM systems autonomously sort, and store collected customer data, ranging from initial interactions to information on purchased products, transactions, and customer impressions. The previous method of analyzing customer preferences and needs was a laborious task that consumed a lot of time. Today, when companies use CRM systems, employees can utilize the time that would otherwise be spent on manual data collection and analysis in more efficient ways. Instead of routine tasks, employees can focus on creating strong emotional connections with customers and enhancing the quality of services and products (Beltman & Peelen, 2013).

CRM encompasses the entire sales process, with its strength manifesting at the touchpoints between the company's offerings and the individual consumer. CRM involves not only presence in sales activities but also plays a significant role in pre-sales and post-sales activities (Dukić & Gale, 2015). Companies recognize that attracting customers is not sufficient; retaining them is also of utmost importance. The costs of acquiring customers in mature markets are high, and dissatisfied customers rarely complain—they simply turn to another company with a similar or identical product/service offering. Implementing CRM increases sales per customer, enhances customer loyalty, and improves customer relationships by addressing their needs and desires. Communication becomes bidirectional rather than unidirectional (Vučemilović, 2015).

Through new technologies, a large amount of useful information is collected, but unnecessary information is also gathered, which can complicate business operations if the company fails to distinguish between essential and less important data. Therefore, it is crucial for a company to have a quality and adequate information system and trained personnel in specific positions to discern the difference between these types of data (Uzialko, 2023).

This vast amount of data is also known as "big data," and companies collect it through various websites, social networks, and mobile devices that customers use daily. CRM systems assist companies in storing, sorting, and analyzing big data to gain insights about existing and potential customers. Ultimately, by analyzing and studying big data, companies obtain valuable information about their customers and thus adjust their operations to retain as many customers as possible while also attracting new ones (Uzialko, 2023).

The development of technology greatly aids in implementing a quality CRM system. There is no doubt that technology will continue to evolve, and methods of personalization and attracting new customers will further develop in the future. CRM will become even more integrated with new technologies, enabling companies to compete for a competitive advantage in a market where many providers offer the same or similar products and services (Dobrinić, 2023).

While CRM focuses on a company's relationships with customers, partner relationship management (PRM) focuses on managing relationships with their partners' indirect sales teams and customers. An artificial intelligence (AI)-enhanced partner relationship management (PRM) system offers significant advantages over traditional PRM systems due to the efficiency and effectiveness of AI-driven automation. AI algorithms enable automated decision-making and provide intelligent recommendations, which optimize partner-related processes. This leads to several improvements, such as more effective partner learning, improved partner planning capabilities, streamlined partner operations, and improved knowledge sharing between partners and suppliers. In addition, AI-driven PRM systems deliver personalized partner services by anticipating partner needs and streamlining service delivery, which helps drive partner engagement and adoption (Chatterjee et al., 2020).

AI-PRM systems also play a key role in anticipating customer needs by analyzing data from various sources, making it valuable to multiple departments such as communications, marketing, inventory management, IT, and sales (Oukes & von Raesfeld, 2016). In the sales domain, AI-PRM improves the sales process by offering greater visibility into each lead within a partner's sales channel, helping sales teams track and manage leads more effectively. In marketing, AI-PRM enables marketing executives to better manage relationships with third-party influencers and communication champions, improving external partnerships and communication strategies (Seifzadeh et al., 2021).

Overall, AI-PRM systems contribute to improved efficiency and effectiveness across business units by automating and optimizing key processes. Sales technology has generally led to greater efficiency by providing tools that streamline processes and improve the storage of market and customer knowledge. Digitalization and artificial intelligence have the potential to offer significant benefits to retailers by freeing them from mundane tasks such as order processing and coding, and the transmission of customer and market information. This allows sales professionals to focus more on in-depth interaction with customers (Baker & Delpechitre, 2013).

2.7 Digitalization of sales and customer processes

Digitalization refers to the use of digital technologies to transform business processes, organizational activities, and customer interactions in order to improve efficiency, generate customer insights, facilitate data-driven decision-making, and create business value (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2018). It should be distinguished from digitization, which refers specifically to the conversion of analog information into digital form.

The digitalization of sales represents an advance in sales force automation (SFA). SFA includes technological tools (hardware and software) aimed at increasing the productivity of sales staff by automating various processes. These processes include customer relationship management, routine and simple sales, and other administrative tasks (Hunter & Perreault, 2007). By automating these functions, SFA helps sales teams focus on more strategic activities, ultimately improving overall efficiency and effectiveness.

The digitalization of sales expands the scope of technology to include digital assets such as digital marketplaces, the Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI), and digital products and services (Ross 2017). Artificial intelligence technologies include learning (either supervised or unsupervised) that enables sales tools (including software, hardware, and sales protocols) to autonomously perform some or all aspects of the sales role (Syam &

Sharma 2018). These digital assets can include a variety of tools, from mobile apps to online ordering sites.

Research by the McKinsey Global Institute revealed that 40% of sales functions can currently be automated, and this figure is expected to rise to 50% due to advances in high technology such as artificial intelligence (AI) (Valdivieso de Uster 2018). This significant potential for automation encompasses a wide range of sales tasks previously considered too complex for computerization. For example, attracting potential customers in the traditional form of sales is often seen as a time-consuming and complex task. Today, AI systems analyze vast amounts of data to identify potential customers, freeing sales teams to focus on higher-value activities. The capabilities of AI extend beyond prospect discovery to making personalized recommendations that facilitate improved sales-customer relationships (Roe 2017).

By analyzing customer data, AI can suggest products or services that are most likely to meet the specific needs of individual customers, thereby increasing the efficiency of sales interactions and increasing customer satisfaction. Moreover, AI-based chatbots have revolutionized customer service by providing instant and accurate answers to customer queries at any time of the day (Melas 2018). These chatbots can answer a wide range of questions, from simple product availability queries to more complex issues related to troubleshooting and customer support. This ability to respond instantly not only improves the user's experience experience and saves time for sales staff.

In addition to these benefits, the use of artificial intelligence in sales has been shown to have a significant impact on customer retention. In one study, 80% of sales teams using AI reported improvements in their ability to retain customers (Colon 2018). This is due to AI's ability to provide more personalized and timely interactions, as well as its ability to identify and resolve potential issues before they lead to user dissatisfaction.

Sales technology has generally led to increased efficiency by providing tools that streamline processes and improve the storage of market and customer knowledge. Digitalization and artificial intelligence have the potential to offer significant benefits to retailers by freeing them from routine tasks such as order processing and coding, and the transmission of customer and market information. This allows sales professionals to focus more on meaningful customer interactions (Baker & Delpechitre, 2013).

Furthermore, revenue planning is a method for setting and achieving precise company revenue generation goals. As B2B sales become increasingly data-driven, creating a scalable and technology-integrated revenue plan has gone from a strategic advantage to a critical need for sustainable growth (Firmbase, 2024). A well-designed revenue plan serves as a roadmap for achieving growth by leveraging historical data, market trends, and predictive analytics. This enables companies to accurately forecast future revenue streams, offering a clear and actionable view of expected revenue. Such predictions empower organizations to optimize revenue generation strategies, whether by identifying new market opportunities, refining pricing models, or increasing customer acquisition and retention efforts. .

Moreover, revenue planning supports strategic resource alignment, ensuring the effective deployment of personnel, financial assets, and operational tools to achieve revenue goals. The structured nature of this approach allows organizations to adjust plans based on real-time data, fostering agility in response to market fluctuations and unexpected challenges. By incorporating advanced data analytics and automation into the planning process, companies

gain a competitive advantage through accurate revenue forecasting, simplified operations, and alignment with long-term strategic goals. This allows them to not only meet immediate financial goals, but also establish a foundation for sustainable growth (Firmbase, 2024).

From a technological perspective, digitalization in retail is likely to lead to increased robotization and automation in warehouses, distribution centers, delivery systems, and retail stores. Store security will improve with advanced computer vision systems. Technologies such as virtual and augmented reality will open new possibilities for showcasing product features and benefits during sales interactions. Finally, personalized pricing models will improve, offering customers customized prices for goods at checkout. via smartphones (Zhu & Gao, 2019).

3 ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF ELECTRONIC WHOLESALE TRADE

Business-to-Business (B2B) transactions are deals or interactions that happen between businesses, unlike Business-to-Consumer (B2C) transactions, which involve businesses selling directly to individual customers. Thanks to the internet, businesses now have an easy way to discover products and services, making it a powerful tool for building the foundation of these transactions. A company's website plays a key role in this process by allowing other businesses to browse what's on offer and reach out if they're interested.

B2B e-commerce specifically refers to businesses buying and selling goods or services online, typically through dedicated sales platforms. For example, wholesale distributors often use B2B e-commerce to supply products to retail businesses. This type of commerce usually involves a longer sales process and higher initial costs, but it comes with significant benefits, like larger order sizes and frequent repeat purchases (Babić et al., 2011).

3.1 Advantages and disadvantages for B2B sellers

Many companies have recognized the benefits of trading using Internet-oriented technologies. A significant advantage of B2B electronic trade for sellers is cost reduction. With the support of e-commerce, B2B companies can significantly reduce their costs, especially within the supply chain. First of all, e-commerce allows for easy comparison of products and offers, which makes it easier for companies to purchase raw materials, equipment and other work supplies at the best prices. The ability to easily compare suppliers also allows for the acquisition of specialized solutions for specific company needs. (Teece, 2010).

A common option for e-commerce is subscriptions for regular supplies. This option allows for the automation of procurement, reducing procurement time and associated administration. Therefore, e-commerce simplifies procurement processes, reduces administrative costs and minimizes errors through automated systems (Love, 2001). Also, companies can purchase products from almost all over the world without having to go to physical stores, which expands opportunities, reduces costs and saves time. In addition to stores, companies can use B2B trading networks, auction sites, stock exchanges, online product catalogs, product exchange sites, and other online resources to reach new suppliers, partners, and achieve the best possible prices when buying and selling (Babić et al., 2011).

Furthermore, B2B e-commerce improves business efficiency by enabling negotiations, transactions, and payments online. Digital tools enable remote meetings, facilitate communication, and quickly exchange information, which helps maintain relationships with partners and customers. All of the above simplifies processes, so B2B e-commerce increases profitability by encouraging repeat purchases and strengthening customer loyalty, as it provides a simplified and efficient shopping experience (Zhou et al., 2020).

In addition to sourcing from global markets, companies can expand into national and international markets with minimal capital investment, using online platforms to reach new customers. This expansion potential is complemented by the ability to reduce or eliminate marketing and distribution channel costs, thereby lowering costs (Babić et.al., 2011). B2B online sellers benefit significantly from the use of digital marketing, which includes online channels such as mobile phones, display advertising, social media marketing, e-commerce marketing, and search engine marketing. The use of digital tools allows for more detailed market research and identification of potential customers, and then tailoring marketing strategies to attract and retain them (Yasmin et al., 2015).

Another advantage for sellers is the ability to sell 24/7 every day of the year. In a physical form, such working hours are very demanding and expensive to achieve. In addition, sales are automated and require a minimal number of staff to carry out the sales process. Customer support is also made easier because communication with multiple users is possible at the same time, users can see the most frequently asked questions and find answers themselves, and with certain tools that use AI, responses to simpler queries can be automated (Yasmin et al., 2015).

In an online store, it is possible to display a large number of products without the need for physical space to house these products. This reduces the costs of display and warehouse space. Furthermore, digital tools update inventory based on actual orders, which reduces the costs of overstocking or downtime unrelated to insufficient inventory. Updating information in real time helps all departments in the company to plan further processes. All of the above factors also contribute to reducing employee costs and administrative costs. Since the entire purchasing and sales process is automated, the need for employment costs is eliminated. In addition, e-commerce allows certain companies to sell their goods directly to customers without involving intermediaries or third parties, which results in lower product prices and greater competitiveness in the market (Bhatti & Rehman, 2019).

In addition to the advantages of B2B e-commerce, its disadvantages can also be identified, which pose significant challenges in doing business via the Internet. One of the biggest problems that sellers face is ensuring the security of transactions during online shopping. In the context of increasingly frequent criminal activities related to online shopping, such as identity theft and credit card fraud, companies are forced to continuously work on improving security measures to protect their customers and maintain trust in their digital platforms (Kovač et al., 2017).

Theft of personal data is particularly worrisome because, in addition to financial losses, it can lead to significant damage to a company's reputation. In addition to security challenges, e-commerce also has other operational shortcomings, such as the need for constant investment in new technologies. These investments include not only the acquisition of advanced software solutions and infrastructure, but also continuous training of employees to keep up with the latest trends and practices in digital business (Jurković Majić et al., 2015). This need for constant adaptation and innovation can significantly strain the financial and

human resources of companies, especially smaller ones, and pose a long-term challenge to their sustainability and competitiveness in the market.

3.2 Advantages and disadvantages for B2B buyers

Like sellers, buyers also benefit from B2B e-commerce. First, buyers have access to a large amount of information about products and services, so they can make informed purchasing decisions. Buyers can also compare offers without pressure from sales staff and choose the offer that best suits their needs and requirements. Also, in the case of physical wholesale contracting, buyers often opt for multiple products from one manufacturer, even though the same products are available at a lower price, but it is practical to buy everything from the same manufacturer. In the case of online sales, the buyer does not have to physically go from store to store, so they can buy goods from multiple manufacturers to achieve the best prices. Online shopping reduces the need for staff involved in purchasing because the process is much simpler and faster compared to traditional purchasing methods (Terpoorten et al., 2024).

The buyer does not have to travel to the store, wait in line or look for parking, but all products are available for viewing and purchasing at the same time. E-commerce stores can carry significantly more products than physical stores, and more can be viewed online than in physical stores. Online shopping also provides fewer distractions than physical shopping and allows for targeted product search and filtering (Kovač et al., 2017).

When ordering products, online stores automatically calculate shipping costs, which allows customers to plan their costs and reduce the need for their own transportation and personnel to operate these vehicles. Like sellers, buyers also have access to foreign markets and products that may not be available in their location, thus opening up more options and choices for products to purchase (Terpoorten et al., 2024). Online stores often offer feedback and review options, so customers can find information about previous experiences of other customers (Overby & Jap, 2009).

Another significant advantage is the ability to access online stores around the clock. Customers do not have to adjust their schedules to the opening hours and closing days of the stores but can shop 24/7 from anywhere where they have access to the Internet. Online stores also offer different payment options from which the customer can choose without waiting in a checkout line (Overby & Jap, 2009).

However, online B2B shopping also has disadvantages for customers. First of all, some customers prefer to see, try on, and pick up the product in person, in physical form. Online stores can only provide images, text, and video descriptions of the product, but the customer may still be concerned about whether they will receive what is shown in these materials. Therefore, it can be concluded that e-commerce cannot completely replace physical stores for all customers. Similarly, some customers prefer face-to-face interaction with sales staff, have many questions, and want to negotiate the terms of sale, which is quite difficult in an online environment (Rahman & Islam, 2018).

Another disadvantage for customers is the cost of delivery. If they are in remote areas from the product warehouse, delivery costs can reach high prices to the point that the purchase is unprofitable. A disadvantage related to delivery is delivery times. Delivery can take a long time or be delayed, which can affect the customer's processes and not have the products they

need on time. Delivery times can also vary greatly depending on demand, so the customer is never really sure how long the delivery will take before ordering the product. In physical stores, the customer takes the product after the purchase, so in some cases they may prefer the traditional form of purchase (Rahman & Islam, 2018).

Another disadvantage is the often complicated return procedure. In the case of wholesale, product complaints are not as simple as returning an individual product. Most often, these involve shipments of entire trucks, etc., which represent a high return cost as well as the accompanying administration to determine the reason and justification for the return. It is also a major financial transaction for purchasing goods from wholesalers, so refunds are a very important aspect for customers, who want to be sure that they will be refunded for what they spent (Zhou et al., 2017). A related shortcoming is the security of personal data and online payments. It is not uncommon for customer data to be compromised and used for the wrong purposes, especially when it comes to payment data. The risk of data theft such as credit card information is greater in an online environment than in physical stores (Zhou et al., 2017).

4 ANALYSIS OF DANFOSS CASE

The research method used was a case study (Yin, 2018). The case study investigated the transition from paper-based to digital processes within Danfoss' B2B sales operations. This method was chosen because it allows for a real-life case context, which also provides insights into the challenges and strategies involved in digital transformation. Method employed to perform case study was structured interviews with key personnel at Danfoss. The individuals interviewed included the Digital Sales Director, Customer Service Specialist, and Sales Engineer. Secondary data, i.e. data collected from the official Danfoss website, was also used.

Danfoss is a global company specializing in the design and production of energy-efficient technologies. Danfoss was founded on September 1, 1933, by Mads Clausen in his parents' home in Nordborg, Denmark. Over the past 90 years, the company has grown from a small one-person company to one of the world's leading providers of innovative and energy-efficient solutions.

Today, the company is managed by a two-tier management system consisting of a Board of Directors and a Group Executive Team, which includes the CEO and CFO. The Board of Directors sets the overall strategic direction of the company, while the Group's executive team is responsible for implementing these strategies and managing day-to-day operations.

4.1 Potential business customers

Danfoss offers a wide range of products in several key categories, including power solutions, climate solutions, drives and other specialized activities. Each of these categories is intended for different market segments, i.e. different industrial, commercial and residential needs. This chapter provides an overview of potential customers for each product category and how Danfoss products meet their specific requirements. Table 2 shows the categorization of Danfoss products and related potential customers.

Table 2: Range of solutions from Danfoss and the associated potential customers

Product category	Potential industries
Power solutions	• Autonomous and Industrial Systems: Solutions for robotics, logistics, agriculture, mining, and heavy machinery applications, • Energy and Electrification: Technologies for electric vehicles, renewable energy, HVAC systems, and industrial automation, • Fluid and Power Systems: Hydraulic systems, pumps, valves, clutches, brakes, and related industrial applications, • Electronics and Digital Solutions: Electronic controls, software, IoT technologies, and smart building systems, • Specialized Applications: Tailored solutions for marine, military, and aerospace industries.
Climate Solutions	• Flow and Thermal Management Systems: Solutions for valves, controls, cooling technologies, and heat transfer applications, • Monitoring and Safety Technologies: Sensors, transmitters, switches, filtration systems, and energy metering solutions, • Heating Solutions: Smart heating systems, thermostats, burner components, and electric heating technologies, • Specialized Applications: Tailored solutions for renewable energy and agricultural sectors.
Drives	• Drive and Motor Solutions: Drive services, diagnostics tools, and motor control systems for automation and robotics, • Power and Motion Technologies: Motion control, gear motors, and enclosed drives for reliable industrial operations, • Energy Efficiency Solutions: Medium-voltage drives and soft starters for optimized power management, • Heavy Industry and Renewable Applications: Power solutions for large-scale industrial and renewable energy sectors.
Other	• Emission Monitoring & Environmental Compliance: For energy, manufacturing, and transportation sectors to meet regulations and reduce carbon footprints, • Fire Safety Solutions: Protect lives and property in building management, industrial facilities, and residential developments, • High-Pressure Pumps: Efficient fluid handling for oil and gas, chemical processing, and water treatment industries, • Advanced Sensing Solutions: Accurate environmental monitoring for industrial automation, HVAC, and smart building applications, • Silicon Power Solutions: Reliable power for semiconductor, renewable energy, and electronic equipment manufacturers. •

Source: Danfoss (2024a).

In general, the sales process at Danfoss consists of several key phases. The first phase is the identification of potential sales opportunities. This phase begins with customer inquiries,

market research or proactive identification of needs in target markets. This is followed by initial planning, where the scope of the project is defined. This step involves understanding the customers' requirements, the context of their needs and a preliminary discussion of possible solutions.

After the initial planning comes the solution specification phase. In this phase, the sales team, in collaboration with the customer, defines a specific solution that best meets the identified needs. This phase involves detailed discussions, technical specifications and aligning Danfoss' offering with customer expectations. Solution specification is followed by the solution evaluation, where both parties assess the feasibility, effectiveness and value of the proposed solution. Solution evaluation is a mandatory step because it is extremely important to ensure that the solution meets the technical requirements and is aligned with the customer's budget, timeline and strategic goals.

After the evaluation is complete, the customer makes the final decision on the solution and supplier. This phase includes formalizing the contract, finalizing the terms of sale, and ensuring that all aspects of the solution are agreed upon. The last step in the sales process is the closing of the sale, where the deal is officially confirmed, and the solution is ready for delivery. This phase is called "Closed Won", which signifies the successful completion of the sales process.

So, the sales process at Danfoss consists of the sales process phases presented in the literature. However, when selling its solutions, Danfoss requires the participation of numerous actors to ensure that both parties meet the conditions necessary to close the sale. Therefore, investors, consultants, and solution installers also participate in the sales process. After the sale is closed, the process moves to the implementation and evaluation phase. Here, Danfoss ensures that the solution has been delivered as promised and is functioning effectively in the customer's environment. This phase is crucial for maintaining customer satisfaction and for identifying areas where additional support or optimization may be needed.

4.2 Accessibility of digital documentation

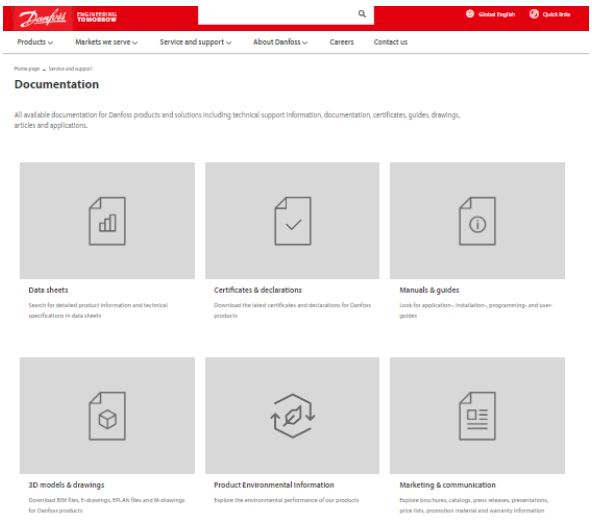
As sales processes become digital, the first noticeable feature is the availability of product documentation on the official website. Simon Tholstrup, Director of Digital Sales, highlights that Danfoss places a strong emphasis on improving the user's experience and describes several key innovations and features designed to make product documentation easy to search. To this end, Danfoss has developed a dedicated documentation search engine.

Danfoss has dedicated a 'Documentation' section on its website where all relevant documents are available to customers. This section is organized to ensure easy navigation and quick access to vital information. As shown in Figure 2, the 'Documentation' section is a tool designed to efficiently locate warranties, data sheets and various other documents. By

simplifying the search process, Danfoss ensures that customers spend less time searching and more time engaging with the product details they need.

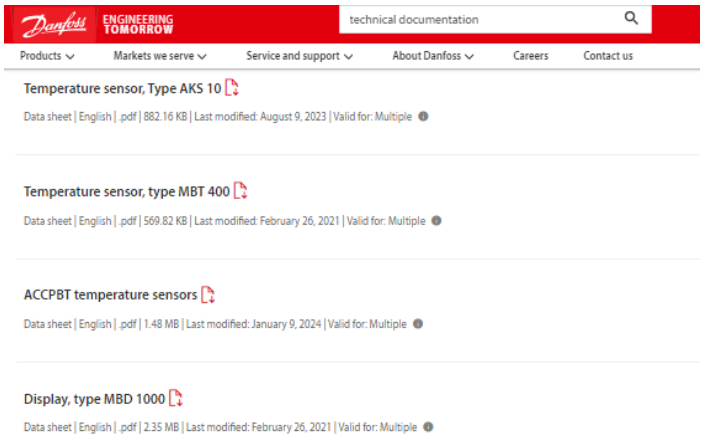
In addition to the accompanying sales documentation, technical documentation is also available for each product (Figure 3). Technical documentation provides information on all product characteristics, which makes it easier for customers to make a purchasing decision and assess whether the solutions offered are suitable for their needs. Danfoss also updates its product image gallery on its website. The product gallery contains high-resolution images, detailed views and interactive elements, making it easier for users to explore and understand products and reducing the need to physically evaluate the product.

Figure 2: Downloading digital documentation



Source: Danfoss (2024b).

Figure 3: Technical documentation

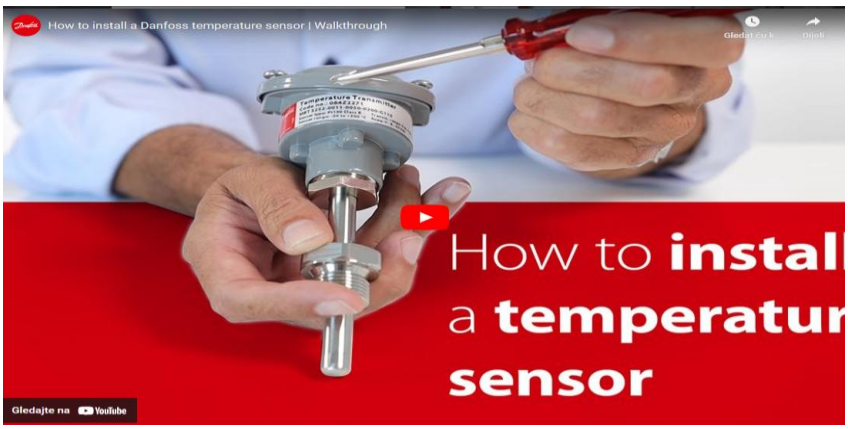


Source: Danfoss (2024c).

4.3 Service and installation videos

In addition to the availability of technical information and images, Danfoss complements its customer support and product usability by offering a comprehensive database of instructional videos on its website. As shown in Figure 4, these videos provide step-by-step instructions on how to install or troubleshoot the use and installation of the product. The videos allow customers to assess whether they can install the solutions themselves, but also eliminate much of the need for personnel to install the solutions and troubleshoot potential problems. However, it is important to note that certain products, which require specialized knowledge and skills, must be installed by authorized Danfoss technicians and are excluded from this video database.

Figure 4: Installation videos



Source: Danfoss (2024d).

4.4 Danfoss' Learning portal

Danfoss also offers extensive educational and training programs for a wide range of users on their Learning Portal. The programs cover the training required to work with Danfoss products and solutions, and key curricula and programs include:

• Programmable Controllers: Programmable Controllers training program, key personnel for automation and efficient system management,
• Cold Room Program: Focused on the chiller segment, this program provides insight into the design, installation and maintenance of cold room systems,
• DEVIreg™ Basic and DEVIreg™ Room Thermostats Training: Covers the basics and advanced features of DEVIreg™ thermostats, an integral part of smart heating solutions,
• Natural Refrigerants Training Program: Educates users on the use of natural refrigerants, promoting environmentally friendly and energy-efficient cooling solutions.

The training programs can be completed through several learning models: webinars, e-lessons and face-to-face courses. This flexibility ensures that users can access the programs

in a way that suits their schedules and learning styles. To enroll in the platform, users need to create a free account, choose a program and a course delivery method, and get started. A personal dashboard integrated into personal accounts allows users to track their progress and manage their activities. Face-to-face training is mandatory for solutions that require hands-on experience and direct interaction with experts. For example, courses such as the VLT® AutomationDrive FC 300 series and VACON® NXP focus on developing a deeper understanding and practical skills needed to manage and troubleshoot these advanced drive systems.

4.5 Analysis of the Danfoss Product Store

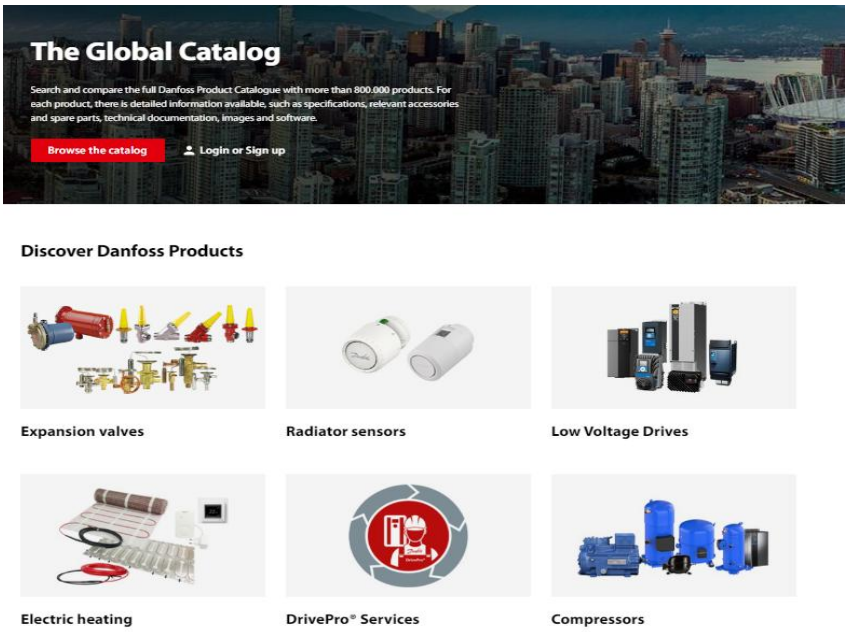
The Danfoss Product Store is a digital catalog that allows users to view the entire range of Danfoss products. In the store, it is possible to view and order more than 800,000 products divided into the previously shown product categories (Figure 5). This volume of products is practical only in online form, because customers can relatively quickly search for the desired product categories, which would require significantly more time in the physical form of a catalog or store.

In addition to categorizing into basic product groups, the site offers search and filtering options that help users find products based on specific criteria such as product specifications, applications or industry needs. Additional product filtering options include sorting by relevance, popularity, and product price. When viewing each product, relevant information including specifications, accessories, spare parts, technical documentation, images and related software of the chosen solution is available. The inclusion of detailed descriptions, technical documentation and photos ensures that users have access to all the information they need to make informed purchasing decisions without the need for physical contact with the store.

Furthermore, the store offers options for online ordering and locating physical stores where the products can be purchased. Therefore, customers can decide which option best suits their preferences. Customers can go through the entire sales process online, but the ability to combine online research with offline shopping is especially useful for users who prefer to see and handle products before purchasing or need immediate access to products.

In addition, shopping is enabled internationally. This option allows users to order products that may not be available in their local markets and expands the reach of customers that might not be possible with a brick-and-mortar store. Accordingly, product details are available on multiple languages (English, German, Italian and French) and it is possible to choose the desired currency, which makes it easier for international customers to navigate the catalog and create orders.

Figure 5: Danfoss Product Store



Source: Danfoss (2024e).

4.6 Advantages of using the digital Danfoss product catalog

Danfoss' online product catalog offers significant benefits for customers. One of the primary benefits is the ability to view information on more than 800,000 products. Viewing just one of the product categories in physical stores or in a physical catalog would require more time and effort than in an online catalog. Customers can filter products according to their desired characteristics and needs in a few clicks, compare different solutions, and access installation instructions in one place. This feature is also an advantage for Danfoss, because the physical space that would allow the display of this number of products would require a very complex and expensive infrastructure and numerous trained personnel who would be able to provide all this information.

Also, customers can view products at an unlimited number of times, which would require a higher time and financial cost in the case of a physical store. The option to view products online allows customers to consult with, for example, their technical staff or installers by simply sharing a link. Otherwise, the customer would have to come to a physical store with the person they want to consult. The international availability of the catalog is also a significant advantage. The option to view product information in several languages and the ability to pay in several currencies ensures product availability to a wider market, which is an advantage for both customers and Danfoss.

Furthermore, the online catalog can be accessed 24/7, anywhere in the world. In the case of a physical store, it is necessary to adapt to working hours and travel to a physical location. It is also possible to make a purchase from the comfort of your home, office or any other

place without the need for personal interaction with sales staff. This is also an advantage for Danfoss because sales are possible 24/7, which would be very expensive in physical form. Another great advantage is information about product availability in the warehouse, so the customer does not have to potentially waste time going to the store, not knowing the stock status. Also, with each purchase, the stock status is automatically updated, which provides access to real-time stock information and the Danfoss sales department.

4.7 The impact of the Danfoss channels on sales improvement

This chapter presents the results of empirical research conducted through interviews. For the purpose of systematic analysis and clearer presentation of findings, the interview responses were divided into the following themes:

1. Digital Sales Readiness and Training,
2. Enhanced Product Visibility and Accessibility,
3. Closer Collaboration with B2B Clients,
4. Challenges and Resistance to Digital Transformation,
5. Future Digital Sales Initiatives.

The first interview was conducted with Simon Tholstrup, Digital Sales Director at Danfoss. As the Digital Sales Director, Simon Tholstrup plays a pivotal role in spearheading digital sales initiatives. The interview took place on 17th May 2024 via Teams meeting from 9:30 to 9:50. The results of the interview are summarized and shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Interview with Simon Tholstrup, Digital Sales Director at Danfoss

Theme	Impact
Digital Sales Readiness and Training	Increased product knowledge and sales effectiveness through training on digital tools, product data and marketing techniques (SEO, SEM, social media). Training helps in product presentation, the initial step of the sales process.
Enhanced Product Visibility	Over 800,000 products are available on the web store, and the creation of Ref Tools installation applications with a large user base has increased the transparency and accessibility of Danfoss products. Customers can find, order and arrange product pickup through these digital tools.
Closer Collaboration with B2B Clients	Digital tools facilitate more frequent communication and closer collaboration with B2B customers. They improve information exchange, increase transparency, and create new opportunities for local sales organizations, ultimately enhancing customer experience and satisfaction.
Challenges and Resistance	Effective communication and support are essential for reducing resistance to digital transformation among employees and clients. Digital changes should be implemented gradually to simplify processes and avoid unnecessary complexity.
Future Digital Sales Initiatives	Future initiatives include establishing a Design Center to improve digital user experience, integrating artificial intelligence for enhanced customer support, and improving delivery speed and tracking visibility.

Source: Own Work.

The next interview was conducted with Kristina Sertic, Customer Service Specialist at Danfoss. This interview took place face-to-face on 15th May 2024 at the Zagreb office from 11:30 to 11:50. Kristina Sertic, in her role as a Customer Service Specialist, offers insights into the operational aspects of digitalization from a customer service perspective. She provides valuable information on how digital tools are enhancing or complicating customer interactions. The results of the interview are summarized and shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Interview with Kristina Sertic, Customer Service Specialist at Danfoss

Theme	Impact
Digital Sales Readiness and Training	The application of SAP enabled the reduction of paperwork and improved intercompany communication. This digital tool made it possible for everyone to have an overview of delivery statuses, invoicing and customer debts at any time and therefore facilitates internal record keeping and daily operations, increasing the overall efficiency of the service.
Enhanced Product Visibility and Accessibility	The Product Store has significantly improved access to information and services. It enables the entire purchase process to be carried out online, and it is still possible to interact with the staff via e-mail or phone call. However, inquiries related to e-mail orders have decreased and are mainly related to complex solutions.
Closer Collaboration with B2B Clients	Customers value the Product Store for its ease of use, constant availability, and elimination of the need for interaction. However, the existence of the option for physical contact with the product and interaction with the sales staff should not be eliminated. Therefore, digital tools complement existing relationships with B2B clients.
Challenges and Resistance	Digitalization has brought challenges, such as the inability to change references on issued invoices or correct incorrect prices directly in the system. These issues require alternative solutions, such as issuing credit notes to compensate customers, but also represent an opportunity for system improvements.
Future Digital Sales Initiatives	Danfoss is constantly looking for alternative solutions and improvements in digital tools like SAP in order to simplify sales processes and provide customers with the best possible experience.

Source: Own Work.

The third interview was conducted with Ivan Simic, Area Sales Engineer at Danfoss. This interview took place face-to-face on 23rd May 2024 at the Zagreb office from 14:00 to 14:20. Ivan Simic brings a technical perspective to the sales process. His expertise is vital in understanding how digital tools are integrated into the sales process and how they affect the technical sales aspects. The results of the interview are summarized and shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Interview with Ivan Simic, Area Sales Engineer at Danfoss

Theme	Impact
Digital Sales Readiness and Training	The sales team uses various digital tools on a daily basis, such as Product store, SAP and Salesforce. Digital tools are indispensable in Danfoss' business as they enable quick access to product information, comparisons with competitors and inventory status, thereby improving technical efficiency and sales readiness.
Enhanced Product Visibility and Accessibility	Digital platforms offer comprehensive technical documentation and product details, enabling quick resolutions to technical queries and facilitating independent ordering by customers, thereby streamlining the sales process.
Closer Collaboration with B2B Clients	Digital tools are the basic means of supporting relations with B2B clients. At Danfoss, Salesforce, LinkedIn and Microsoft Teams are often used for this purpose. Danfoss has clients all over the world, so platforms that enable remote support, virtual meetings and detailed technical exchange improve the relationship and broaden the reach of possible collaborations.
Challenges and Resistance	Resistance to digitalization is minimal within the company. There is always room for improvement, which in Danfoss' case is specifically the management of product compatibility issues, which require alternative solutions and constant adaptations. Such solutions still require the physical presence of a team of experts to meet customer needs.
Future Digital Sales Initiatives	The entire sales process can be completed via the web store, however, there is still no option to exchange old products for new ones, which is possible in physical stores. Old products need to be evaluated to determine the adequate value and suitable replacement for these products, and there is no digital system yet that would perform this task.

Source: Own Work.

Interviews with Danfoss staff indicate that digital readiness for sales and training has become a key aspect of Danfoss' business. Namely, the company provides training to its employees to manage digital tools such as SEO, SEM, SAP, Microsoft Meet, Salesforce and others. The application of the mentioned tools is used for data management, intercompany communication, marketing efforts and other daily operations. Therefore, the need for paperwork is reduced and processes can be performed more simply and quickly. They also make it easier to keep records of stocks, orders, receivables and the like in real time and visible to everyone who needs this information to do their job.

The use of digital tools also made products more accessible. The Product Store on the Danfoss website stands out here, where customers can browse a range of over 800,000 products. This tool expands the customer base, makes it possible to perform the entire process online or to provide information before coming to physical stores. However, one of the interviewees suggests the development of a system for evaluating old products that would be replaced by new ones, as this option is currently only possible by coming to the store.

Respondents agree that digital tools are an integral part of maintaining relationships with their B2B clients. Given their international reach, platforms enable communication and information exchange across platforms at intervals that might not be possible without them. Respondents state that digital tools are used to manage and maintain customer relationships, perform the sales process and provide support during product installation and maintenance. In this way, Danfoss provides reliability and availability for its customers, which makes collaboration easier. They also note that digital tools are indispensable but cannot exclude and face-to-face interaction for specific cases.

Introducing digital tools as a support or replacement for traditional tools is in itself a process and a change for staff and clients. Therefore, they emphasize good information about the changes, communication and support. Staff are trained in the use of the tools and resistance to these changes was minimal. As already mentioned, today digital tools are used in performing everyday tasks. Opportunities for system improvement are also mentioned, such as limitations in direct changes within the system, however, these are mostly specific situations for which programs do not yet cover.

Respondents also highlighted some plans for further progress in the development of digital tools. The launch of the Design Center will be responsible for further facilitating the use of digital tools for staff and customers. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is continuous investment in the digitalization of processes with the aim of improving the user experience and facilitating process.

In addition to the above plans, it is also proposed to introduce a system that would allow for the collection of customer feedback. For example, conducting interviews or surveys with customers could provide valuable insight into how effectively the Design Center and AI-driven tools are addressing customer requirements and how they could be further improved. This feedback could help ensure that these tools are truly aligned with customer expectations and facilitate purchasing decisions.

Testing the usability of portals with new users is another strategy that could be used to refine digital tools. User testing would reveal any challenges early adopters face, offering insight into where the interface or features might need further simplification or improvement. Additionally, incorporating predictive analytics into these digital initiatives could further improve the sales process. AI-driven analytics could be used to predict customer needs, enabling more proactive support and personalized product recommendations. By predicting purchasing patterns, inventory management could better align with customer demand and improve the efficiency of the sales process.

Another way to improve would include identifying critical stages of the customer journey such as product selection, order placement and delivery tracking with the help of AI—Danfoss could identify areas where digital solutions could further streamline processes. This approach could highlight specific opportunities where AI integration could optimize decision-making, thereby improving sales results and customer satisfaction. Table 6 shows an example of activities in the sales process.

Table 6: Example of activities the sales process

Phase	Key Decision Point	AI Potential
Opportunity Identification	Identify sales opportunities through customer inquiries, market research, or proactive engagement.	AI could analyze historical customer data and external market trends to forecast potential sales opportunities and identify high-value leads. Predictive analytics tools could alert sales teams to customer behaviors indicating readiness to purchase.
Initial Planning	Define the project scope based on customer requirements and initial solution discussions.	AI can assist in customizing solutions based on customer needs by analyzing previous customer interactions and preferences. A recommendation engine could propose tailored product bundles that best fit the customer's operational context.
Specifying the Solution	Collaborate with the customer to define a solution that addresses specific needs.	AI can aid in optimizing configurations, drawing on a database of technical specifications and previous project outcomes. Using machine learning, it could suggest cost-effective and efficient technical solutions, reducing the time spent on configuring complex systems.
Solution Evaluation	Both parties evaluate the feasibility, efficiency, and cost of the proposed solution.	AI could simulate different solution outcomes, analyzing cost, efficiency, and long-term value, allowing for a quicker and more accurate evaluation. This would also aid in identifying possible bottlenecks in implementation.
Customer Decision	Customer makes the final decision on the supplier and solution.	AI could streamline contract management by automating contract generation, reviewing historical performance, and providing insights into the potential benefits of choosing specific configurations.
Closing the Sale	The deal is finalized, and the terms of sale are agreed upon.	AI could automate much of the final sale process, including generating contracts, pricing approvals, and ensuring compliance with local regulations, reducing administrative burdens.
Implementation and Post-Sale Evaluation	Ensure the solution is delivered and functions effectively within the customer's environment.	AI-driven logistics and predictive maintenance tools could improve delivery tracking, provide timely updates, and enhance customer satisfaction through early issue detection.

Source: Own Work.

Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) partnerships represent a strategic collaboration where one company, typically a manufacturer, produces products or components in alignment with the design specifications of another company. The client company, which in many cases may not have in-house manufacturing capabilities or prefer to outsource production, subsequently markets and sells these goods under its own brand name. This arrangement allows for a division of labor, where the OEM focuses on manufacturing quality and efficiency, and the client company dedicates resources to branding, marketing, and distribution. OEM contracts are especially valuable in long-term agreements, where the client benefits from a reliable, high-quality supply chain and the OEM from stable, forecastable production volumes.

In terms of improving collaboration with B2B customers, a greater focus is proposed on so-called Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) Partnerships. OEMs are strategic collaborations in which one company, usually a manufacturer (in this case Danfoss), manufactures products or components according to the design specifications of another company. The client company, which in many cases may not have its own manufacturing facilities or prefers to outsource production, subsequently markets and sells these goods under its own brand name. This arrangement allows for a division of labor, with the OEM focusing on quality and production efficiency, while the client company devotes resources to branding, marketing and distribution.

OEM agreements are particularly valuable in long-term contracts, where the client benefits from a reliable, high-quality supply chain and the OEM benefits from stable, predictable production volumes. In the case of Danfoss, these partnerships are a critical component of its business model. Danfoss manufactures and supplies specialized components or systems according to the specific needs and technical specifications of its customers, who integrate these components into larger systems or products or resell them under their own brand. Given this reliance on long-term OEM contracts, Danfoss is able to benefit significantly from implementing digital tools to generate revenue projections for these contracts. Currently, when an OEM contract reaches “closed-won” status, Danfoss records the total contract value and the closing date, which only provides a snapshot of potential revenue with no indication of when it will be realized.

By implementing a digital revenue planning tool, Danfoss could gain a much more realistic picture of when revenue will be recognized over the life of the OEM contract. In a hypothetical two-year contract to deliver 100,000 units worth €1 million, for example, revenue planning could break down revenue recognition into phases – either by quarter or by key production milestones – allowing for the gradual realization of revenue over the life of the contract. This phased approach offers significant advantages: it aligns revenue forecasts with actual production plans and cash flow, improves visibility into future revenue streams, and strengthens short- and long-term financial planning.

The revenue planning method can be integrated into existing CRM systems and provide targeted training to its sales teams on revenue schedule management in the context of long-term OEM contracts. Furthermore, this integration can be accompanied by previously proposed digital tools such as predictive analytics, customer feedback mechanisms and usability testing. These tools would not only improve the efficiency of the sales process, but would also ensure that the CRM system adapts to the evolving needs of both Danfoss and its OEM customers. Leveraging these digital solutions, Danfoss could position itself as a more adaptable, customer-centric company focused on increasing value in long-term OEM

partnerships through superior financial planning, process efficiency and resource optimization.

5 CONCLUSION

Sales is the process by which a company delivers its products or services to consumers or other organizations in exchange for a certain fee. The importance of sales lies in the fact that it not only enables the placement of products on the market and the generation of revenue, but also provides key information that influences production, new product development and strategic business decisions, thus ensuring the long-term sustainability of the business. The sales process represents a structured series of activities that a company carries out in order to place products or services on the market and satisfy the needs of its customers. A well-designed and organized sales process enables focused and coordinated implementation of activities, which results in better sales results, building trust with customers and long-term business success. The advent of the Internet transformed sales by enabling the digitalization of the process and the expansion of sales activities to the global market. The Internet has facilitated access to information, which allows customers to make more informed decisions, while providing sellers with tools for personalization of the offer and faster communication. With the development of online shopping, customers can search, select and order products from the comfort of their own home, while sellers use digital tools to analyze data and improve customer experience. The B2B (business-to-business) model is a sales approach in which companies sell their products or services to other companies, rather than to end consumers, with an emphasis on complex purchasing decisions that include cost-effectiveness assessments, multi-stakeholder participation, and a focus on achieving business goals. The focus of this thesis was on analyzing Dnafoss' approach to digitalizing the sales process. The research showed that Danfoss significantly reduces the need for paperwork through the implementation of digital tools such as SAP, Salesforce, and a digital product catalog (Product Store). These tools enable more efficient data management, easier real-time overview of inventory, orders, and debts, and facilitate internal communication and daily operations. For example, the Product Store allows users to view more than 800,000 products online, providing users with the necessary information without the need to physically visit stores. In addition, a digital documentation system and technical manuals speed up decision-making and reduce dependence on printed materials. Digitalization of sales processes brings Danfoss numerous advantages, but also challenges and opportunities for improvement. Among the key benefits is increased operational efficiency, where digital tools such as SAP and Product Store enable faster access to information, reduce administrative tasks and facilitate the decision-making process. Digital tools also improve collaboration with B2B customers by enabling transparent and continuous communication, while international product availability in multiple languages and currencies expands the market and reduces physical resource costs. On the other hand, challenges include limitations of current systems, such as the inability to directly change data such as invoices and prices, which requires alternative solutions. In addition, the lack of a digital tool for evaluating old products creates obstacles in some sales processes, while resistance to digitalization, although minimal, is still present among some employees and customers. Areas for improvement include the implementation of artificial intelligence for customer needs analysis and demand forecasting, the development of a feedback collection system and the improvement of tools for managing long-term OEM contracts. These initiatives would enable Danfoss to further optimize processes, increase customer satisfaction and strengthen its competitive advantage in the global market.

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Limited access to internal information and company documentation due to confidentiality requirements and organizational restrictions within Danfoss.

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APPENDIX 1 - INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The purpose of the interviews was to obtain a deeper understanding of the transition from paper-based to digital processes within Danfoss' B2B sales operations. The interviews aimed to identify key experiences, perceptions, challenges, and opportunities associated with digital transformation, as well as to examine its impact on customer relationships, operational efficiency, and future sales development initiatives.

The first phase involved the preparation of structured interview questions based on the research objectives and theoretical background of the study. The questions were designed to address key aspects of digital transformation, including digital readiness, customer interaction, implementation challenges, and future digital initiatives.

The second phase involved identifying and contacting potential participants within Danfoss who were directly involved in sales activities and digital transformation initiatives. Employees whose roles were closely connected to the research topic were selected and invited to participate in the study. Participation was voluntary.

The final phase consisted of conducting structured interviews with selected participants. The interviews focused on gathering information regarding experiences with digital transformation, challenges encountered during implementation, and perspectives on future digital developments within Danfoss. Responses were documented and prepared for further analysis.

The themes were established based on repeated concepts and issues identified across multiple interviews. Their inclusion was justified by their relevance to the research questions and their ability to explain critical aspects of digital transformation within Danfoss' B2B sales environment.