Rethinking B2B marketing: Growth along the *entire customer journey*

B2B marketing is not a support function for sales.
It is part of an integrated growth system that creates demand, makes buying decisions easier, and builds customer value across the entire lifecycle.

Strat-Exx In Practice • Bernd Hirschle · Andrew Parker · Dr. Clemens Oertel • 7 min read

Digital has long been the norm in B2B. Buyers today move naturally between in-person advice, remote interaction, and digital channels.

The numbers are clear:

10	71 %	~⅓	Both
touchpoints on average per B2B purchase[1)]	of B2B companies now offer e-commerce[1)]	of revenue already comes through digital channels[1)]	buyers combine digital self-service with expert advice for complex decisions

At the same time, many buyers prefer digital self-service for research and routine tasks, yet still seek competent personal advice for complex decisions[1)]. Successful providers therefore combine **self-service with expertise** – consistently, relevantly, and without friction.

A new dynamic is emerging: buyers increasingly use AI themselves. **61 % of B2B buyers already use AI in purchasing, and 38 % even use agentic AI** to search for, evaluate, and select offers; on the vendor side it is still only 45 % and 24 % respectively[1)]. The competition for a deal therefore often begins before sales is even involved – another reason to design the entire journey early, consistently, and AI-ready.

The whole customer journey counts

> *The customer journey does not end at the lead – and it does not begin at the sales conversation.*

It spans from initial research through evaluation and purchase to onboarding, usage, and expansion of the customer relationship. Holistic steering (see also our In Practice piece *Customer behavior is changing: the significance of digital commerce*) reveals which touchpoints actually move customers forward. Impressions, page views, and click-through rates remain useful diagnostics, but they are not business outcomes.

What matters for steering the business is instead **buying-group engagement, qualified opportunities, pipeline and revenue contribution, customer acquisition cost, customer lifetime value, retention, and demonstrable incrementality**.

This does not require a radical greenfield rebuild, but a clear target architecture. Proven industry knowledge, customer relationships, and functioning channels remain valuable; redundant processes, conflicting responsibilities, and isolated data silos, by contrast, must be deliberately changed. Modern go-to-market connects marketing, sales, commerce, partners, and customer success through shared goals, data, and decision rules.

Three capabilities are especially important:

1 **Understand market, offer, and buying groups**

Structure segments, accounts, decision-making units, use cases, and value propositions consistently from the customer's perspective.

2 **Orchestrate omnichannel**

Connect self-service, personal advice, partners, marketplaces, and communities so that customers always receive consistent information and the right support.

3 **Master data, AI, and MarTech**

Build a robust first-party data foundation, use automation sensibly, and integrate measurement, data protection, and governance from the start.

A shared growth system

The organizational model must follow this integrated approach. Instead of merely aligning marketing and sales, companies should establish a **shared revenue or go-to-market system**.

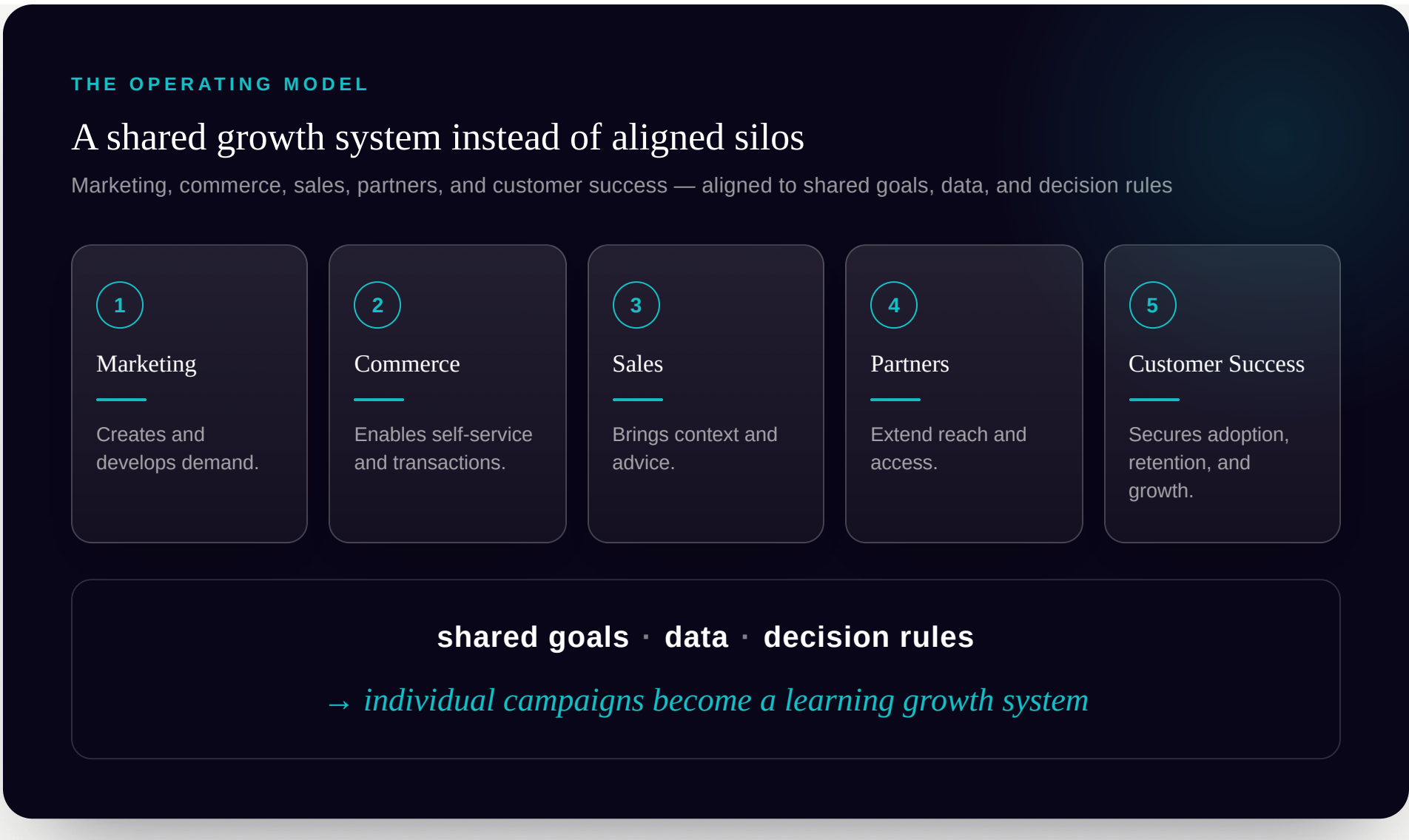


Fig. 1 — An integrated go-to-market system connects five roles along the customer journey.

Especially in engineer-to-order and project business, personal expertise remains indispensable – digital buyer-enablement offerings make it more effective, not obsolete.

Data, AI, and MarTech as the foundation

MarTech is not a tool warehouse, but the technical foundation for relevant customer experiences. This includes CRM and customer data platforms, product information and digital asset management, marketing automation, experimentation, attribution, as well as AI-powered search, content creation, and conversational interactions.

The bottleneck is often not the AI model, but the **quality, availability, and governance of the data** – and the underlying architecture. An AI agent does not improve a weak operating model, it scales it; the sustainable advantage therefore arises at the workflow and architecture level, not the tool level. Companies need clear rules for consent, data protection, brand governance, transparency, and human oversight – also in view of the transparency obligations of the EU AI Act from August 2026[1)].

The updated B2B growth capability framework brings together the central capabilities. It connects market and offer expertise, omnichannel go-to-market, buyer engagement, and revenue management with customer value and growth. A shared data, AI, and governance base carries all areas.

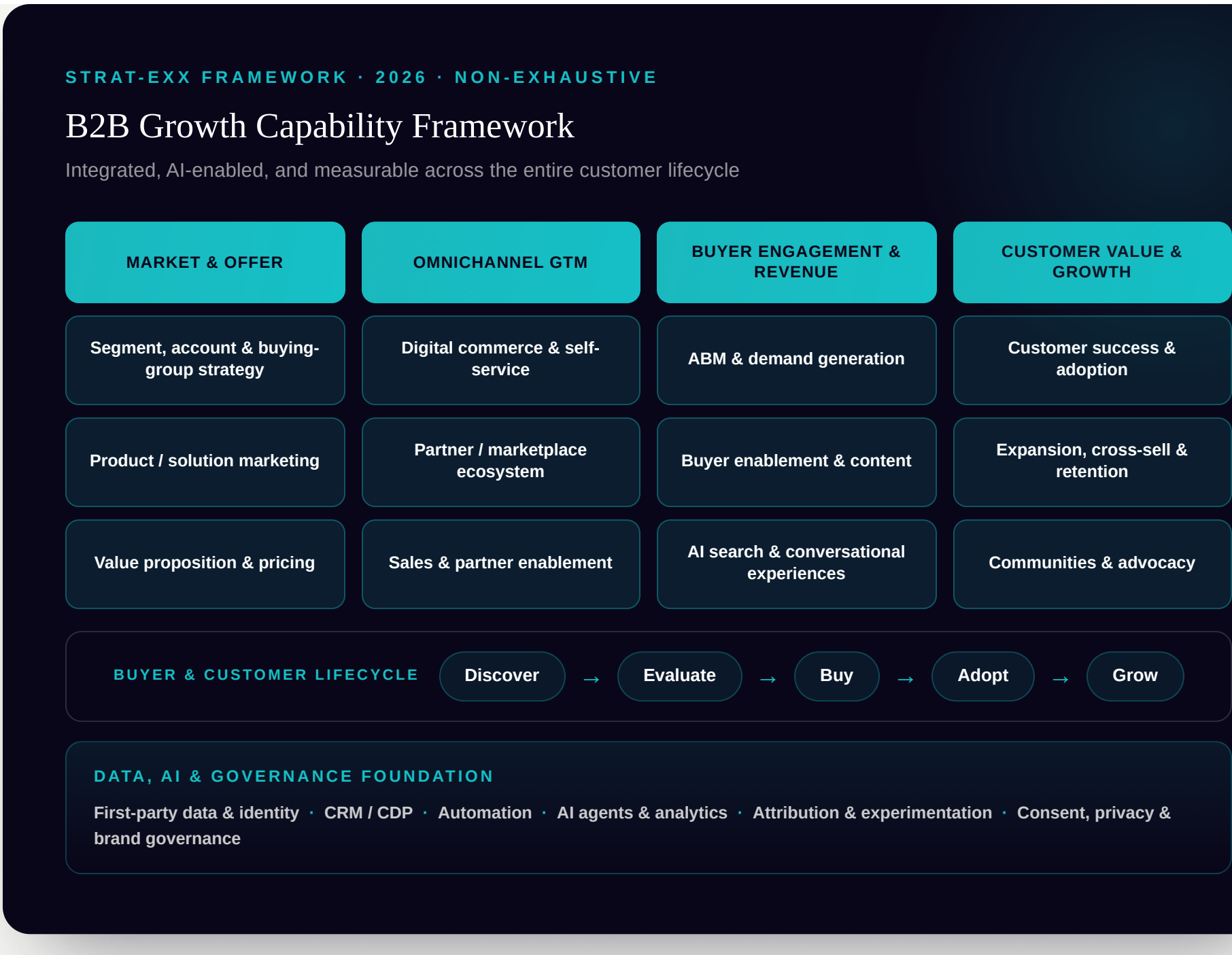


Fig. 2 — The B2B growth capability framework: integrated capabilities on a shared data, AI, and governance base.

Marketing thus becomes more multidisciplinary – and at the same time closer to the business. Product, segment, account, channel, and lifecycle marketing must not operate as separate islands. What matters is a shared operating model along the buyer and customer journey: **Discover, Evaluate, Buy, Adopt, and Grow**.

The benefit of digital and AI-supported measures cannot be seriously promised with blanket percentages. Impact depends on the starting position, offer, market, data quality, and execution. Companies should therefore work with **clear baselines, controlled experiments, and incrementality measurement**. A federated marketing center of excellence can provide standards, platforms, governance, and specialist expertise, while market-facing teams own the application.

Conclusion: from campaign thinking to a growth system

The decisive question is no longer whether marketing must go digital. It is how marketing, together with sales, commerce, partners, and customer success, creates **measurable growth**. Those who consistently connect customer value, data, and accountability turn individual campaigns into a learning growth system.

> *Marketing then no longer merely supports sales – together, both shape the market.*

[1)] Sources: McKinsey Global B2B Pulse 2026; Gartner B2B Buyer Survey 2025; Salesforce State of Marketing 2026; European Commission – AI Act.

STRAT-EXX

From silo to *growth system*.

We help B2B companies connect marketing, sales, commerce, partners, and customer success into a measurable, AI-enabled growth system.

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