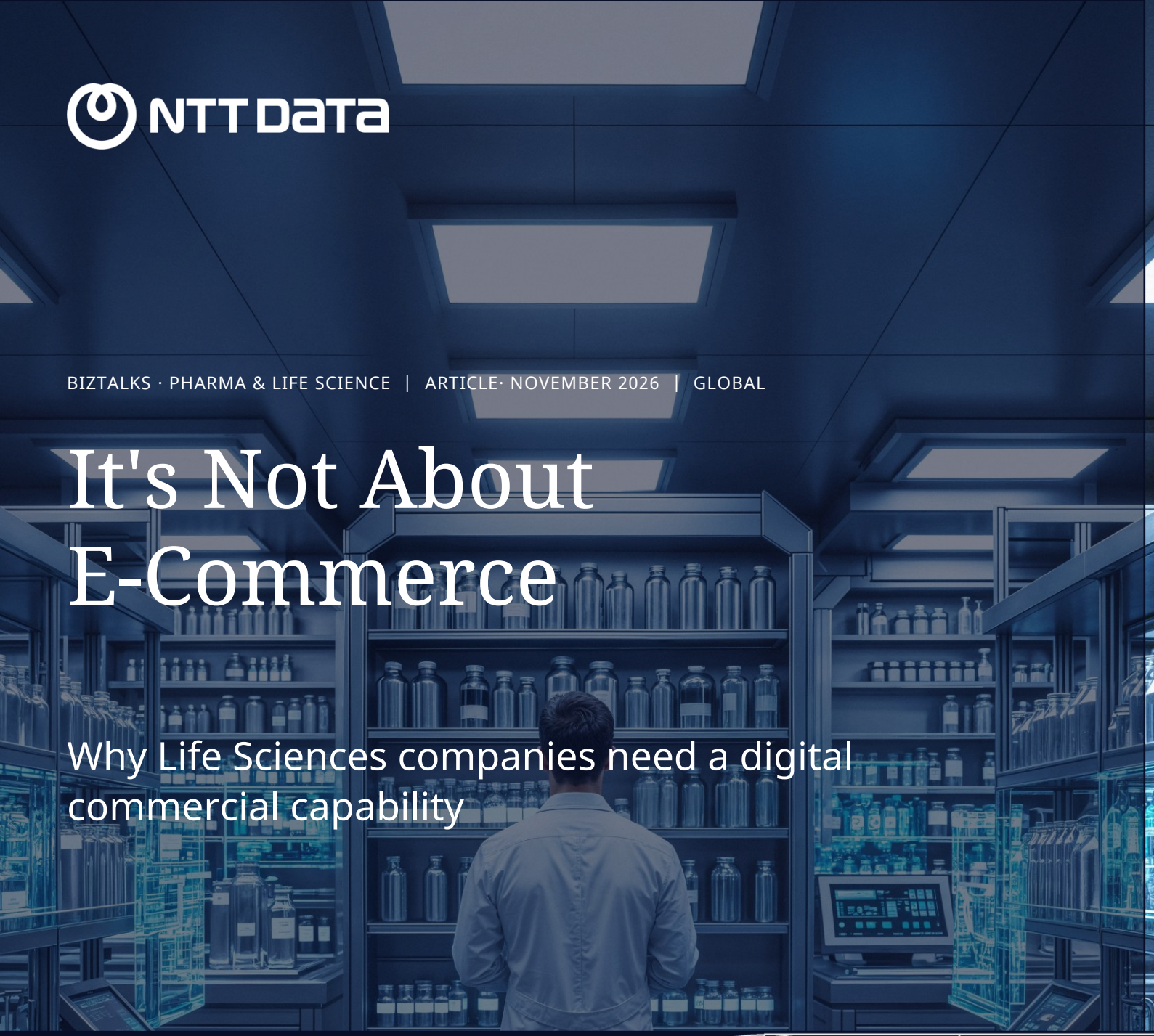


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It's Not About E-Commerce

Why Life Sciences companies need a digital commercial capability

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Pharma & Life Science

Executive Summary

For years, B2B e-commerce was viewed as an additional channel designed to digitize the purchasing process and reduce the operational burden on customers and sales teams. That approach helped advance the digitization of relationships with distributors, pharmacies, hospitals, and other stakeholders across the pharmaceutical ecosystem. Today, however, it is no longer sufficient for a market that is far more complex, highly regulated, and increasingly data-driven.

Leading organizations do more than implement an advanced platform. They recognize the online channel as a strategic capability that brings commercial strategy, operations, technology architecture, data, and governance together within a single operating model.

Against this backdrop, the question is no longer which platform an organization should implement, but which capabilities it must develop to build an e-commerce ecosystem that can grow, adapt, and evolve with the business. From this perspective, the digital channel moves beyond a technology project to become a robust infrastructure, designed to drive efficiency, generate insight, and open new growth opportunities while remaining aligned with the business vision.

> “ This article presents a new way to think about the B2B digital channel: not as a portal, but as a business capability that provides the foundation for the next generation of commercial intelligence, automation, and digital business models.

Digital business is no longer just a channel

E-commerce in the pharmaceutical industry has evolved gradually, but its meaning and impact have changed substantially. What began as a tool for managing orders has become a point of convergence for customers, processes, data, and operations. Every action, from a search or an order to a service request or document download, generates information that can deepen an organization's understanding of market behavior and improve decision-making.



This transformation coincides with a shift in customer expectations. Distributors, pharmacies, hospitals, and other stakeholders expect consistent, efficient experiences across channels. They increasingly want autonomy for routine tasks while retaining access to expert support when the context and their needs require it. As a result, the digital channel is no longer seen as competing with the sales force. Instead, it complements the sales team's work, shifting human effort toward consultative and business development activities.

In the pharmaceutical industry, this evolution brings an additional layer of complexity. The digital experience depends on pricing models, product availability, regulatory compliance, traceability, documentation, returns, and order-to-cash processes. When one of these elements fails, the problem does not necessarily lie in the portal interface. It often reflects the organization's ability to coordinate the commercial system as a whole.

The real shift, therefore, is to stop treating e-commerce as a channel and start managing it as a strategic capability.
Its value no longer lies solely in facilitating transactions, but in connecting business, technology, and data to create an organization that is more efficient, more adaptable, and ready to evolve continuously.

So where should organizations start?

E-commerce programs often begin with a technology decision: organizations compare platforms, architectures, and features to select the most appropriate solution. Starting with technology, however, can move a conversation forward before the business model and required capabilities have been defined. Before choosing a platform, organizations should answer a much more important question: What capability do they want to build?



That question changes the entire approach. When e-commerce is framed as a technology project, success is measured by the implementation of a platform. When it is understood as a strategic capability, the objective becomes the transformation of the commercial model. Technology remains an essential enabler, but it is no longer the center of the conversation.

This distinction is particularly important in Life Sciences because the digital experience depends on processes that span the entire organization. Pricing strategy, contracts, inventory, logistics, customer service, compliance, and data shape the quality of the channel long before a customer interacts with the portal. Ultimately, the platform simply makes the strengths and weaknesses of the operating model visible.

Organizations that successfully scale their digital initiatives tend to move beyond building a portal and develop integrated capabilities. They connect commercial strategy, operational excellence, architecture, information, and governance within a single model designed to evolve. That is the difference between implementing a project and building a sustainable source of competitive advantage.

The capabilities that turn e-commerce into a competitive advantage

Organizations that turn the digital channel into a competitive advantage do not stand out because they have implemented a particular platform. They stand out because they have developed a set of capabilities that connect business, operations, and technology, with the platform serving as an enabler. True differentiation lies in the organization's ability to evolve continuously without adding complexity to the operating model. In an industry where the digital experience depends on highly interdependent regulatory, commercial, and logistics processes, this distinction is especially clear.

The Strategic Commercial Capability Model

1 Define the Right Strategy

Digital commerce creates value when it is driven by a strategic decision, not merely a technology initiative. Defining its role within the commercial model means determining how it will contribute to growth, operational efficiency, and customer relationships, as well as how functions such as sales, customer service, and marketing will evolve. NTT DATA helps organizations assess their starting point, define a target model, and build a roadmap aligned with business priorities, drawing on industry knowledge and practical experience.

2 Design Experiences That Drive Adoption

Channel adoption depends on delivering a consistent, intuitive experience tailored to the needs of each customer segment. Distributors, pharmacies, hospitals, and healthcare professionals expect to interact with the organization easily and consistently, regardless of the touchpoint. The goal goes beyond simplifying order management: it is to reduce friction, increase customer autonomy, and strengthen the commercial relationship. The approach therefore focuses on designing user-centered omnichannel experiences that encourage adoption and build stronger, more lasting relationships.

3 Transform Commercial Operations

The quality of the digital experience depends on the strength of the processes behind it. Pricing, commercial terms, the end-to-end order cycle, logistics, returns, and customer service must operate as an integrated system capable of delivering efficient, consistent service. NTT DATA's experience in commercial process transformation helps connect business and operations, turning digital commerce into a natural extension of the organization's operating model.

4 Build an Architecture Designed to Evolve

The technology architecture must provide the flexibility to support business evolution without compromising the stability of critical systems. This requires seamless integration with the existing ecosystem, service-based architectures, cloud platforms, and a model that can incorporate new capabilities without adding unnecessary complexity. Drawing on a technology-agnostic approach and a broad ecosystem of technology partners, NTT DATA designs and integrates architectures tailored to each organization's needs, balancing scalability, resilience, and the ability to evolve.

5 Turn data into Business Intelligence

Every interaction with customers, products, and channels is an opportunity to understand the business more deeply and make better-informed decisions. When data is managed in an integrated way, digital commerce moves beyond a purely transactional channel to become a continuous source of commercial intelligence, capable of identifying behavioral patterns, anticipating needs, and uncovering new growth opportunities. To achieve this, NTT DATA brings together capabilities in data management, advanced analytics, generative AI, and intelligent agents to translate information into faster decision-making, more personalized experiences, and commercial models that can learn and evolve continuously.

6 Scale and evolve the model continuously

Building a strategic capability does not end when the channel goes live. Maintaining its relevance requires a governance model that can keep pace with the business, support expansion into new markets, integrate additional features, and adopt new technologies without rebuilding the ecosystem for every initiative. NTT DATA supports this evolution through governance models, international rollouts, change management, and continuous improvement. Together, these disciplines help consolidate reusable assets, accelerate expansion, and ensure that digital commerce continues to create long-term value.

These six capabilities do not create value in isolation. Strategy loses its effectiveness without strong processes; even the best architecture has little impact without a differentiated experience; and data does not yield insight without a model for governance, monitoring, analysis, and continuous evolution. The real challenge is to integrate all six into a single business capability.

This requires more than implementing technology. Organizations must connect strategy, processes, architecture, platforms, data, and organizational transformation to build an e-commerce infrastructure that is ready to grow, adapt, and evolve. This ability to integrate is a key differentiator in a digital business program and the foundation on which pharmaceutical organizations can build future digital capabilities.

How NTT DATA builds an e-commerce capability

Building a strategic digital commerce capability requires far more than implementing a platform. It requires understanding the business model, identifying the constraints that prevent scale, and defining a vision that integrates commercial strategy with the full set of processes and capabilities within the system. This principle shapes NTT DATA's approach and explains why our programs begin before a technology is selected.

The first step is to understand the organization's current reality through an industry-specific assessment that considers how it differentiates itself and the sector's distinct operating dynamics. The analysis examines the maturity of the commercial model, the end-to-end sales process, pricing complexity, technology architecture, information and data governance, and the experience of different customer profiles. The objective is not simply to produce an assessment, but to establish an objective basis for strategic decision-making.

Implementation is only one phase of the journey. By combining business, architecture, integration, and delivery capabilities, NTT DATA connects commerce platforms and cloud solutions within an ecosystem designed to scale. The goal is not to accelerate a stand-alone project, but to create a reusable capability for expansion into new markets, new lines of business, and new digital initiatives.

That understanding informs a roadmap for the future capability. Rather than designing only a portal, the organization creates an operating model that can evolve with the business. It then defines a capability model that distinguishes which elements should be standardized for deployment across markets, which specific requirements should be adapted locally, and which technology architecture principles will enable agile evolution while preserving the balance between global consistency and local flexibility.

Experience gained through international programs reinforces this approach. In global organizations, the primary challenge is rarely limited to implementing a platform. The greater difficulty often lies in harmonizing different commercial models and building a global framework that preserves local flexibility. Similarly, in projects focused on the pharmacy channel, value comes not only from developing a more comprehensive portal, but from connecting orders, offers, documentation, training, returns, and governance within a coherent customer experience.



The Next Frontier: from a digital channel to an intelligent commercial system

The future of e-commerce will be shaped not only by new platforms, but by the ability to turn every interaction into actionable intelligence. Data generated through the digital channel will increasingly move beyond performance measurement to power intelligent assistants, recommendation engines, AI-enabled sales agents, and predictive models that support and progressively improve decision-making.

In this environment, artificial intelligence plays a very different role from the one commonly assigned to it. Its contribution lies not only in automating activities or making certain processes more efficient, but in strengthening the organization's ability to make better decisions throughout the commercial cycle.

The emergence of agents that can interpret each customer's context, recommend the next best action, anticipate operational issues, assist sales teams, or identify new growth opportunities is a natural evolution of digital commerce. It also highlights a reality that is often overlooked: the quality and reliability of the decisions these systems generate will depend heavily on the quality of the processes, data, and architecture that support them.

When information remains fragmented across repositories, business rules are not formalized, or critical decisions still depend on manual processes, artificial intelligence does not remove that complexity. It reproduces it at scale and makes it more visible. By contrast, when e-commerce is part of an integrated commercial capability connected to the rest of the value chain and supported by a robust data governance model, AI becomes more than an additional feature. It becomes a mechanism that amplifies the organization's ability to deliver a more personalized experience, optimize operations, and respond more quickly to an increasingly dynamic commercial environment.

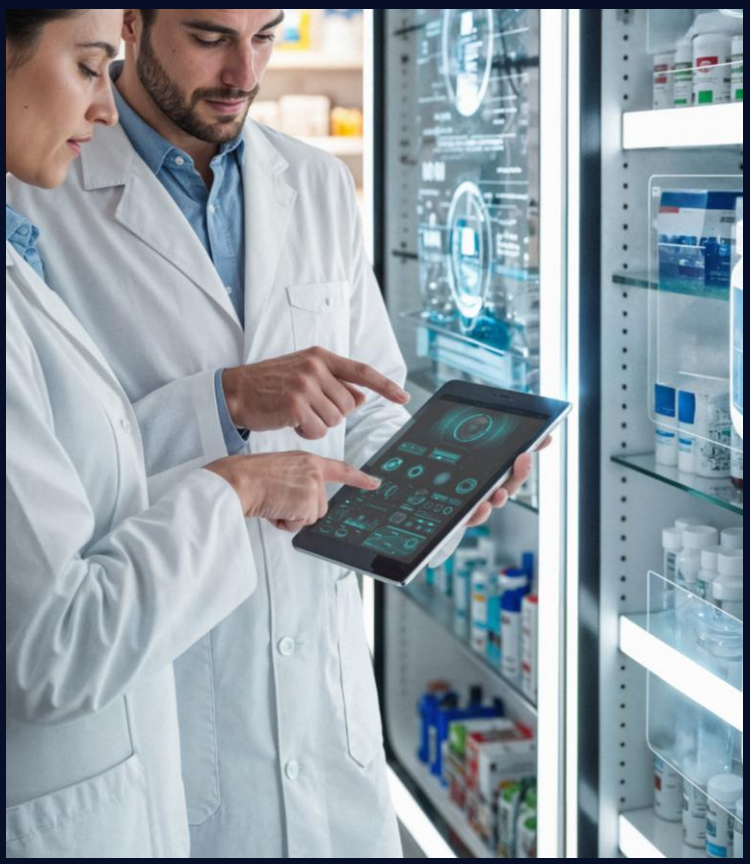
NTT DATA's vision combines capabilities in strategy, digital architecture, platform integration, Data & Analytics, GenAI, and Agentic AI to help organizations transform e-commerce into a business capability that evolves continuously. This approach brings customers, processes, and business intelligence into a shared environment, reducing the silos that have traditionally limited organizational visibility and the ability to act.

With this vision, artificial intelligence is no longer an isolated technology. It becomes a natural part of the operating model, informing strategic direction, automating routine activities, freeing people to focus on higher-value work, and enabling more intelligent interaction among people, systems, and channels. The result is a commercial model that can learn from every transaction, interaction, and signal generated across the value chain to anticipate needs, simplify workflows, and respond more quickly to an increasingly challenging business environment.

Conclusion

For years, the success of the digital channel has been associated with implementing new platforms and adding increasingly advanced features. Technology alone, however, rarely transforms a commercial model. The difference lies in an organization's ability to align strategy, operating model, processes, data, and technology within a model that can evolve at the pace of the business.

In Life Sciences, regulatory complexity, the coexistence of multiple go-to-market models, and the growing strategic importance of data mean that e-commerce must extend beyond its role as a transaction channel to become a foundational element of the business. Its ability to connect customers, operations, and information systems places it at the center of decisions that affect not only the commercial experience, but also operational efficiency, traceability, regulatory compliance, and the organization's ability to respond quickly to changing market needs.



Building this capability means going beyond platform implementation or the addition of new features. It requires designing a commercial model that can evolve over time, integrating business, operations, information, and technology under a common governance framework. That framework must support scale across markets, enable a rapid response to new needs, and incorporate analytics and artificial intelligence without adding unnecessary complexity or compromising control over processes and information.

With this vision, NTT DATA supports organizations in designing and evolving digital commerce models as strategic business capabilities. The combination of industry knowledge, transformation capabilities, and technology expertise enables the development of ecosystems designed to evolve continuously, with strategy, processes, data, and technology working in service of the business rather than as isolated initiatives.

> “ Platforms will continue to evolve, and new technologies will continue to redefine the digital landscape. What will make the difference, however, is an organization's ability to integrate those changes without losing coherence, scalability, or agility. Ultimately, competitive advantage will depend not only on the technology implemented today, but on the capability built to adapt to future market and operating demands.


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