B2B cloud integration: A strategic approach to optimizing your value chain

How the cloud transforms EDI networks to reduce cost and complexity, increase efficiency and drive collaboration with your customers and suppliers
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Clouds on the B2B horizon

The future of business-to-business (B2B) integration is in the cloud. As electronic data interchange (EDI) continues to grow increasingly vital to synchronizing hundreds or thousands of B2B relationships, forward-looking organizations are transitioning their commerce networks to a cloud model to reduce cost and complexity. They’re able to strengthen collaboration with partners and improve agility to meet fast-changing demands on a global scale.

In fact, the research consultancy Ovum predicts that global spend on cloud-based integration will grow at a 31 percent compound annual growth rate between 2012 and 2018, reaching $3.7 billion. Yet a B2B cloud integration strategy is not to be undertaken lightly. For all its rewards, a cloud approach that’s poorly conceived, executed and managed confronts organizations with significant risk. A well informed strategy and selecting the right B2B cloud business partner is essential to your success.

This ebook presents an overview of the B2B integration landscape: its challenges, its opportunities, and the approaches that leading organizations follow in developing a robust and scalable EDI solution. It also summarizes the IBM® B2B Cloud Services offering, with real-world examples of how companies are leveraging the IBM cloud to excel amid escalating global complexity, demand volatility and new customer requirements.
The disconnect between B2B vision and reality

In highly complex global markets that put a premium on speed and cost-efficiency, synchronizing with your suppliers and customers in automated networks is a prerequisite to long-term success and meeting the demands of end-customers. Without an advanced EDI environment, it becomes difficult to meet customer expectations for speed delivery, affordable pricing, multi-channel fulfillment and real-time visibility into orders and inventory availability.

The value of B2B integration is well recognized. For instance, 87 percent of IT decision-makers surveyed for IBM by the research consultancy Vanson Bourne believe their business community is “extremely critical” to success. Yet a large disconnect exists between present-day reality and the vision of seamless B2B transactions that benefit all trading partners and ultimately the end-customer.

Corroborating anecdotal evidence and IBM’s experience in working with global companies in B2B integration, the IBM survey revealed that B2B integration is a work in progress at many organizations. About 76 percent of value chain leaders don’t believe their organizations collaborate very effectively with their business communities. Just 30 percent believed they had achieved full integration with trading partners.

Source: IBM/Vanson Bourne

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The scourge of B2B complexity

Building on established B2B integration with their largest and most important trading partners, organizations have sought to extend transactional automation more broadly across their business communities. Architecting systems that meet a diverse set of requirements has not been easy and often exacerbates complexity, driving up infrastructure and IT resource burdens for many organizations.

With an average of 574 suppliers, partners and customers to deal with, according to IBM’s survey, the typical organization runs five disparate B2B/EDI systems involving 10 data formats and 11 B2B protocols. At the same time, reliance on manual email, phone and fax mechanisms remains high, used for 68 percent of supplier transactions at organizations surveyed by the Aberdeen Group (Figure 1).

While the advantages of transitioning from error-prone email, phone and fax transactions are clear, many organizations are rightly hesitant to move toward the more automated, but still problematic, B2B environments of multiple systems, data formats and protocols that they have partially in place. It can amount to replacing one flavor of complexity with another, without a strategic blueprint for a next-generation system that can meet the ideal of maximizing efficiency and collaboration across your value chain.

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**Figure 1**: Organizations use a variety of mechanisms for supplier transactions.
Meeting demands in dynamic global markets

Many of the traditional EDI solutions in place today are not well suited to support the more complex and collaborative relationships with the growing number of trading partners that the global marketplace demands. Adding to the collaboration limitations are individual regulatory requirements, varying degrees of technical expertise, communications protocols, data standards and disparate back-office systems used by partners.

Supply chains and trading partner relationships have evolved from the largely linear model of the past to dynamic, interconnected networks that require much more coordination. For instance, today’s manufacturers source components from dozens to thousands of suppliers and contract manufacturers, resulting in a proliferation of standards and requirements that are increasingly difficult to manage.

Adding to this complexity is the short supply of EDI and B2B process expertise, skilled resources and technologies to meet the demand for heightened collaboration. This shortage is prompting some organizations to contemplate greater investments in their existing EDI resources and systems, despite mandates to cut administrative costs and increase efficiency.

In fact, cost reduction is the top business pressure for more than 80 percent of value chain decision-makers surveyed for IBM by Vanson Bourne, followed by the need for increased business agility, the need for real-time visibility, the need for risk and compliance management, and the need to exchange electronic documents with business partners (Figure 2).

At some organizations, the result is stagnation in the EDI environment: laboring on with the status quo because the cost and scope of an upgrade to existing systems and the sourcing of skilled resources is too daunting to undertake. Other organizations, however, are breaking their dependence on antiquated EDI systems by moving B2B integration to a cloud environment.

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**Figure 2**: Cost reduction is the top priority for B2B integration.
The cloud as a strategic option for B2B integration

The cloud has emerged as a compelling option for B2B integration. After gaining a stronghold in such application areas as sales force automation, customer relationship management and human resources/payroll, the cloud has made significant inroads in data integration, business intelligence, enterprise resource planning and B2B integration.

Taking a cloud approach to B2B integration is a strategic decision that can materially improve operational performance and an organization’s interactions with its business community. In addition, without the need for on-premise software and servers, organizations can dramatically reduce implementation times while avoiding the high capital costs of an in-house system and maintenance expenses for highly customized legacy EDI systems.

The IBM B2B Cloud Services portfolio offers a proven set of cloud solutions and services to address global B2B needs in a strategic framework geared for collaboration and competitive advantage in an open, scalable and standards-based environment. Spanning a broad range of capabilities—from world-class global connectivity to expert managed services to alleviate resource constraints to targeted solutions for discrete business demands—secure and flexible IBM B2B cloud solutions can enable your organization to capture benefits in three key areas.

Reduce TCO and internal resource requirements. IBM enables your organization to better manage its B2B integration technology so you can rapidly grow and adapt your B2B community with a low total cost of ownership (TCO). IBM B2B Cloud Services offer the following benefits:

- Integrates business partner transactions with back-end applications by using IBM experts and a service-oriented architecture (SOA)-based platform
- Offers flexible delivery options, in which you can take as much or as little responsibility as needed
- Offering security-enhanced communication with any partner around the world, independently of protocols or gateway
- Improves the agility and control of your supply chain with real-time business process intelligence

Increase profitability and competitive differentiation. IBM helps drive increased profitability and competitive differentiation through the following B2B and EDI reliability benefits:

- Reduces order, price, and invoice errors by using IBM expertise to manage your document delivery process
- Provides skilled consultants to enhance your e-commerce strategy
- Helps you achieve cost efficiencies with our world-class support 24 hours a day, every day of the week and “dial tone” reliable infrastructure
- Makes it easier for customers and partners to do business with you

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Accelerating B2B collaboration to achieve a competitive advantage. IBM helps you improve B2B collaboration through the following benefits:

- Improves supplier compliance by using IBM experts to monitor and manage your community
- Provides document expertise that reduces order, price, and invoice errors, and manages your document delivery process times
- Decreases time to market for new products and services with our B2B expertise

Teaming with IBM sends a strong message to your customers and partners that they can rely on the integrity of the data you send them. The partnership with IBM also shows that you can keep pace with changes and upgrades. With IBM expertise on your side, you can better earn client loyalty as you profit internally through more agility, control, and visibility into shared business processes.

“It was crucial to Gist’s strategy that our B2B integration was simplified into a single solution able to eliminate manual processes and provide scalability with a range of trading partners. Not only did this create real-time visibility into our supply chain, but with IBM as our B2B integration partner, we can continue to focus on delivering outstanding customer service.”

— Susannah Teixeira, Application Architect, Gist Limited
Inside IBM B2B Cloud Services

The IBM B2B Cloud Services portfolio is built on two foundational components: the IBM Sterling Collaboration Network, a cloud-based B2B integration solution providing secure connectivity and collaboration with customers and business partners, and IBM Sterling B2B Integration Services, which builds on the network with IBM managed services for B2B process management, trading partner onboarding, partner support and more.

Extending these core offerings, the IBM B2B Cloud Services portfolio includes a range of add-on solutions to address unique business needs. As depicted in Figure 3, the portfolio breaks down across four areas: 1) global connectivity 2) integration services 3) community services and 4) process services. Figure 3 illustrates the capabilities in each area and the IBM technology offering enabling those capabilities.

The following section of this guide summarizes components in the IBM B2B Cloud Services portfolio. To assess the solutions in more detail and understand how they may be applied in your B2B environment, contact your IBM representative or IBM Business Partner.

“The decision to outsource our B2B was simple because we knew the return on investment would occur instantly. The IBM Sterling solution was 90 percent less expensive than our in-house option.”

— Nico Schuetz, Lead IT Technician, Hirschvogel
### Business requirements

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<tr>
<th>Global connectivity</th>
<th>Capabilities</th>
<th>IBM technology offering enabling those capabilities</th>
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| Collaborative B2B integration | • Technology infrastructure  
  • Exchange services (communications, processing, data archival, gateways)  
  • Data and process visibility  
  • Business continuity and disaster recovery  
  • Security services  
  • Customer support  
  • EDI and content routing interconnects | • IBM Sterling B2B Collaboration Network  
  • IBM Sterling File Transfer Service  
  • IBM Sterling Managed AS2 Gateway |

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<th>Integration services</th>
<th>Capabilities</th>
<th>IBM technology offering enabling those capabilities</th>
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| Managed services and outsourcing | • Ongoing management of B2B infrastructure  
  • Transition services (mapping, transformation, onboarding)  
  • Document process management  
  • Customized trading partner support  
  • Program management  
  • Supplier portal development | • IBM Sterling B2B Integration Services  
  • Transformation and mapping services  
  • Multi-enterprise process services  
  • Trading partner help-desk services |

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<th>Community services</th>
<th>Capabilities</th>
<th>IBM technology offering enabling those capabilities</th>
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| Small partner enablement and community development | • Automated delivery, confirmation, archiving and document tracking  
  • Extend B2B community to smaller partners  
  • Convert faxes to any standard electronic format  
  • Community-building conversion assistance, recruitment programs and document certification | • IBM Sterling Supplier Portal  
  • IBM Sterling Web Forms  
  • IBM Sterling Fax Conversion Services  
  • IBM Sterling Community Development Services |

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<tr>
<th>Process services</th>
<th>Capabilities</th>
<th>IBM technology offering enabling those capabilities</th>
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| Invoice compliance, order status, supplier management, etc. | • Process-specific visibility, tracking, reporting, alerts, and supplier scorecarding  
  • Invoice compliance with country-specific tax regulations  
  • Data collection, cleansing, registration and pool subscriptions  
  • Global Data Synchronization Network (GSDN)-compliant data pool | • IBM Sterling Data Synchronization Manager  
  • IBM Sterling Supply Chain Visibility  
  • IBM Sterling e-Invoicing |

**Figure 3**: The continuum of capabilities in IBM B2B Cloud Services

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IBM Sterling B2B Collaboration Network

Built on a security-rich cloud infrastructure that can process millions of transactions a day, the IBM Sterling B2B Collaboration Network’s service-oriented architecture gives your organization the agility to adapt to the ever-changing needs of multi-enterprise environments. Results include cost savings, greater collaboration, process improvements and a synchronized value chain to drive competitive advantage.

With support for dozens of data types and protocols, and connections to more than 100 B2B networks worldwide, IBM Sterling B2B Collaboration Network supplies comprehensive security capabilities, 99.95 percent uptime, disaster tolerance and recovery, and 24/7 global multilingual support. This single reliable connection to virtually all your business community delivers real-time visibility into critical business data for better decision-making, analysis of partner performance and an enhanced customer experience. These benefits allow you to:

**Simplify and accelerate partner integration in the cloud.** Exchange information with virtually any partner anywhere and with virtually any data type using a single secure connection. Many of your global partners will likely be among the over 340,000 trading entities accessible via IBM Sterling B2B Collaboration Network. Beyond connecting with your trading community, you can expand it with IBM Sterling Community Development Services, including network conversion assistance, partner recruitment and onboarding, and community surveys.

**Automate processes with your smallest partners.** With IBM Sterling Supplier Portal, IBM Sterling Web Forms and IBM Sterling Fax Conversion Service, you can automate transactions with your smallest partners with little or no impact on their current processes. Status reports on purchase orders, invoices and advance ship notices let you monitor business processes, while proactive alerts help you reduce errors.

**Take advantage of cloud economics.** Sterling B2B Collaboration Network lets you take advantage of cloud economics to automate business processes without the up-front investments of traditional on-premise implementations. You have access to a comprehensive set of proven, security-rich cloud solutions to help speed value chain synchronization and collaborate with trading partners more quickly.

**Irish Dairy Board customer success**
The Irish Dairy Board, the leading international exporter of Irish dairy products, uses IBM technology to improve collaboration with hundreds of global suppliers and customers, simplifying supplier relationships and meeting increasingly stringent customer requirements.

Visit [https://ibm.biz/Bdx8P4](https://ibm.biz/Bdx8P4)

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IBM Sterling B2B Integration Services

To be successful, B2B integration requires ongoing management and monitoring. But with so many moving parts and ever-changing requirements, management can strain resources to the degree that collaboration projects are delayed or abandoned. IBM Sterling B2B Integration Services utilizes the power of the IBM Sterling B2B Collaboration Network combined with IBM expertise and technology to deliver a comprehensive B2B managed services solution.

Available in Basic and Plus editions, IBM Sterling B2B Integration Services can assume responsibility for some or all of your B2B integration so that your organization can:

Maximize internal resources with managed services. Sterling B2B Integration Services provides the resources to manage your B2B integration environment, enabling you to use internal resources where they are needed most. You get best-in-class support backed by IBM, offered with maximum flexibility so you can take on as little or as much responsibility as you like. No matter how much you decide to have IBM manage, you always have real-time visibility into your B2B integration operations.

Reduce your total cost of ownership. By leveraging IBM infrastructure, software, network services and expertise, IBM Sterling B2B Integration Services maximizes business value with low TCO. In fact, this service generally pays for itself in less than 10 months. Our experts will manage your document delivery process, which can reduce errors in orders, pricing and invoicing. IBM’s pay-as-you-go model allows you to preserve working capital to fund other mission-critical initiatives, and we can assist with your B2B integration strategy to drive further value and savings.

Realize competitive advantage by accelerating B2B collaboration. Rely on IBM’s B2B expertise and support to help accelerate customer and supplier B2B collaboration and speed your time to market. With IBM experts managing and monitoring your B2B integration community, you stand to benefit from faster partner onboarding and improved supplier compliance, supporting an enhanced customer experience and increased profitability.

IBM Sterling B2B Integration Services Basic provides ongoing infrastructure management, with services for mapping, translation, community development, visibility and real-time processing. The Plus edition offers additional services for transition and integration, as well as document process management, premium support and partner support.

Sterling B2B Integration Services

With IBM experts managing and monitoring your B2B integration community, you’re positioned to benefit from faster partner onboarding and improved supplier compliance. Visit https://ibm.biz/Bdx8Pa
IDC study documents customer ROI

In interviews with 11 IBM B2B Integration Services customers, the research firm IDC found the solution paid for itself in less than 12 months. On average, for every $1 invested in Sterling B2B Integration Services, the companies in this study realized $3.57 in reduced costs, increased productivity and other business benefits.

B2B Integration Services: Three-year ROI analysis

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<th>Benefit</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Investment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Net present value (NPV)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ROI</td>
<td>257%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Payback</td>
<td>9.4 months</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discount rate</td>
<td>12%</td>
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Hirschvogel customer success

Automotive component manufacturer Hirschvogel reduced its TCO for B2B collaboration by 90 percent while improving supply chain visibility with IBM Sterling B2B Integration Services.

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Additional B2B integration offerings

**IBM Sterling File Transfer Service**
IBM Sterling File Transfer Service provides cloud services to reduce the cost and complexity of file-based B2B interactions. It lets you manage a single security-rich, highly reliable connection between you and your B2B partners. IBM Sterling File Transfer Service offers an alternative to more expensive on-premise software, while helping to reduce operational impact on your technology staff with simplified B2B file transfers that consolidate redundant file transfer servers, software and partner connections to optimize file deliveries.

**IBM Sterling Transformation Services and IBM Sterling Mapping Services**
IBM Sterling Transformation Services and IBM Sterling Mapping Services provide mapping services and translation-as-a-service to help businesses adapt to the ever-changing requirements of electronic commerce. These services allow you to send data in the format you choose, so that it reaches your business partners in the format they require, including translation from EDI to XML, flat file to XML, flat file to EDI, and more. They also enable you to do business with virtually anyone you choose, without having to manage data-translation processes.

**IBM Sterling Community Development Services**
IBM Sterling Community Development Services combines innovative tools and processes with dedicated resources to help you build, manage and expand your global B2B communities. IBM removes the challenges of community development by researching the current capabilities of your trading partners, winning trading partner participation and speeding onboarding through conversion assistance, document verification, recruitment and community surveys.

**IBM Sterling Web Forms**
IBM Sterling Web Forms provides an electronic alternative to the inefficient paper-based communications you may be supporting with some of your smaller trading partners. The solution is ideal for creating and exchanging business documents electronically with small business partners atop an economical, secure and customizable website to expand trading partner participation.

“At first we felt a bit of trepidation about migrating our customers to a new network because they include some of the largest retailers in the UK and Europe, but the people behind Sterling Community Development Services immediately put our concerns to rest. The migration went smoothly and was completed on time…The multi-lingual capability they offer will be essential for future European customers. We are confident they will be onboarded quickly and easily.”

— John O’Shea, IT Project Manager, The Dawn Meats Group
IBM Sterling Supplier Portal
IBM Sterling Supplier Portal allows you to create and exchange business documents electronically with your trading partners, regardless of company size or technical expertise. With Sterling Supplier Portal, you can configure and manage your supplier community while providing simple, security-rich document exchanges and gaining near real-time visibility into partner performance. Using a web portal, your suppliers can enter data in forms to create electronic business documents that help process orders more accurately.

IBM Sterling Fax Conversion Services
IBM Sterling Fax Conversion creates a single streamlined process that combines human and artificial intelligence to convert inbound faxes, email and postal mail to EDI or XML, detect and handle errors, and drive down costs. The reliable fax conversion service automates your end of fax transactions while catering to partners who are likely to continue to rely on faxes for years to come, and preserving access to original documents throughout the process.

IBM Sterling Supply Chain Visibility
IBM Sterling Supply Chain Visibility optimizes inbound supply and outbound fulfillment processes through near real-time, in-depth visibility across your supply chain networks. It provides a thorough view of your inbound supply and outbound fulfillment activity with connectivity to your trading partners and their enterprise applications. The solution enables you to configure your supply chain processes to track supplier and carrier performance and optimize inbound supply and outbound fulfillment processes.

IBM Sterling e-Invoicing
IBM Sterling e-Invoicing helps you adapt to ever-changing business and technical regulations of international electronic invoicing. It automates business processes and tax compliance, using global integration standards to support buyer and supplier compliance while conforming with tax regulations for multiple countries. The solution simplifies the technology management requirements of delivering complex cross-border electronic invoicing while reducing costs by automating manual processes.

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“IBM Sterling Fax Conversion Services doesn’t require our customers to use a specific fax format, which enables a wide variety of fax formats—from computer-generated to handwritten—and this flexibility wasn’t available with our prior solution. Sterling also customized our purchase order process to suit our particular business rules.”

— Suzanne Dobbs, Senior Programmer/Analyst, Huhtamaki Americas
IBM Sterling Managed AS2 Gateway
IBM Sterling Managed AS2 Gateway simplifies the setup and management of connectivity for the AS2 EDI specification, eliminating the need to engage specialized resources to comply with AS2 requirements for authentication, encryption, non-repudiation and data integrity. Sterling Managed AS2 Gateway lets you send EDI documents as you normally do, with IBM supplying the AS2 interface to your partners requiring AS2 communications. Going the other way, IBM receives documents from your AS2 partners, decrypts them, and forwards them to you using your preferred protocol.

Real-Time Multi-Enterprise Processing Services
These services allow access to external data sources for real-time document enrichment. IBM Sterling Synchronous B2B Process Service enables real-time website inquiry and response processing, as well as the synchronous exchange of supply chain documents and message exchange with trading partners across multiple web service interfaces. In addition, IBM Sterling Process Enrichment Service enables a standard B2B document flow to connect to an external data source, validating information within the business document or gathering additional information to enrich the content.

IBM Sterling Data Synchronization Manager
IBM Sterling Data Synchronization Manager improves data accuracy across your supply chain by supporting high-speed, high-volume sharing of product data through a common information pool, regardless of platform, operating system, installed database and applications. A complete solution that simplifies data collection, cleansing, registration, validation, and publication to a GDSN-compliant data pool, the solution helps you increase order and invoice accuracy, identify and correct internal data discrepancies and reduce retailer out-of-stocks.

“The not one problem occurred when Sterling migrated our network traffic. Our trading partners migrated successfully, data flowed easily and service was uninterrupted and totally transparent to our users and to us. You can’t ask for anything better than that.”

— EDI Administrator, large North American manufacturer

Helen of Troy customer success
The maker of such personal care brands as Vidal Sassoon, Revlon and Infusium, Helen of Troy used IBM cloud technology to improve B2B integration speed, reliability and customer satisfaction.
Visibility Services: Document Tracking & InFlight
The Sterling Document Tracking web interface enables you to view the status of documents exchanged at the interchange and group levels, and allows you to search for specific information about the data that makes up the documents. IBM Sterling InFlight Data Management keeps track of your electronic business data, both in-bound (data sent to you) and out-bound (data you send), with capabilities for mobile support.

Trading Partner Helpdesk Services
To help you get your partners up and running and ensure optimization, IBM Sterling B2B Cloud Services offers trading partner support with IBM experts to assist partners in resolving document processing, mapping, data tracking and other B2B integration issues, regardless of time zones, geographies and spoken languages. The service provides trading partners with direct-dial access to assigned IBM client service representatives who can answer the phone as your company, as well as email support.

Webinar: Value chain synchronization
Watch this webinar with IT research consultancy Vanson Bourne on how organizations are bringing together suppliers, partners and customers. Visit https://ibm.biz/Bdx8P8
Smarter Commerce: An integrated approach

IBM Smarter Commerce is designed to help companies orchestrate the ecosystem to consistently deliver optimum experiences throughout the customer journey and drive profitable growth. It includes buy, market, sell and service processes that put the customer at the center of decisions and actions to improve customer loyalty, profitability and agility.

The IBM integrated portfolio for Smarter Commerce includes consulting and services, advanced analytics, infrastructure, managed services and a set of industry-leading solutions for the commerce cycle core business processes of buy, market, sell and service. Learn more at ibm.com/smartercommerce