

**Streamlining Supplier Management:  
A Guide to Building  
an Effective  
Supplier Portal**



# Introduction

Suppliers, or vendors, are key to the success of your business. The more efficiently your suppliers can provide the materials, parts, and services you need, the better and faster you can serve your own customers. Optimizing supplier management can also help you decrease operational costs, make inventory and shipment forecasting more accurate, and reduce the risk of price volatility.

Yet, as supplier networks grow more global, they are becoming more complex, requiring a variety of different systems and EDIs to manage. However, buyers may find it difficult to gain visibility into these interactions since there's little insight as to what is happening on the back-end.

Without this transparency, these technologies may fall short, and teams will still need to handle some processes manually instead, resulting in misalignment, wasted resources, and missed opportunities.

**What you need is a window into your systems that provides visibility to streamline processes and work more effectively with your suppliers: a supplier portal.**

In this ebook, we'll explore the following five key use cases that a supplier portal can help solve to increase efficiency for both internal teams *and* suppliers:

- 1 Automating the onboarding process**
- 2 Providing a single location for communication and collaboration**
- 3 Empowering suppliers with self-service capabilities**
- 4 Digitizing and automating supplier processes**
- 5 Monitoring and improving supplier performance**

# How to Build a Portal Your Suppliers Want to Use

As discussed, an effective supplier portal needs to sit on top of your existing systems as a window to what is happening on the back-end. To achieve this, build your supplier portal with a flexible solution, like a [digital experience platform \(DXP\)](#).

A DXP is enterprise software that provides the foundation for companies to deliver connected, contextualized digital experiences across multiple touchpoints for the entire customer journey. DXPs provide capabilities out-of-the-box to support and accelerate the composition, management, and optimization of digital experiences, including:

-  Digital asset management
-  Multi-site management
-  Commerce capabilities
-  Cloud capabilities
-  Personalization
-  Access control and privacy protection
-  Search and navigation

**But what sets DXPs apart is their ability to integrate with other technologies and act as an interface to bring relevant data in.** So not only can you use a DXP to build a supplier portal faster, but it can also help you consolidate data from external systems to offer visibility into common processes directly from the supplier portal.



Among DXP vendors, Liferay has been recognized for its integration strengths, fit for complex B2B scenarios, and low total cost of ownership. Businesses around the world have depended on Liferay DXP for its:

- **High customizability and flexibility to integrate systems.**  
Liferay enables easy interactions with third-party channels and applications. Liferay’s integration framework, connectors, and library of APIs facilitate customizations and integrations and are even configurable by non-technical users.
- **Strong user and identity management for personalized experiences that are secure.**  
Authenticated experiences are one of Liferay’s key strengths. Liferay allows you to create and manage different user roles easily, using granular access rights in conjunction with personalization to ensure that content shown to users is both relevant and authorized for their use.

Learn more about Liferay DXP [here](#).

# 1. Streamline the Onboarding Process

Selecting and onboarding the right suppliers is critical to supply chain success. But this process can be very time-consuming, sometimes taking as long as six months in larger organizations.<sup>1</sup> **Instead of using in-person meetings, phone, email, or fax to find and train new suppliers, you can use technology to eliminate inefficiencies and deliver a better onboarding experience.**

Here's how a supplier portal can make onboarding easier for your vendors and support teams:



**Validate and approve suppliers.** Potential suppliers can first register their interest through a form and fill out all the necessary information on their pricing, products, and compliance. They can automatically have their tax identification numbers and other critical supplier data validated with custom workflows. For example, you can automate fraud detection and check suppliers against United Nations trade sanction lists and other prohibited-supplier databases.



**Define step-by-step journeys based on segments and user roles.** Onboarding is not a one-size-fits-all experience. Your business may work with a variety of different suppliers. Within those supplier organizations, there are different teams and user roles that need specialized onboarding.

Use a platform that can model groups of users based on segmentation criteria, such as job type, supplier type, priority tier, etc. Grouping users into segments allows you to set varying levels of access through roles and permissions. Once these segments are defined, you can also establish specific onboarding workflows for each one. Within these workflows, you can outline all necessary steps and their sequence, ensuring they align with the unique needs of each segment.

Part of that process could include designing an onboarding experience that requires sales managers to accept a privacy policy or take required training. You may even need to design an onboarding experience where a manager has to sign off before moving the entire account to the next step.

<sup>1</sup> The Monthly Metric: Time to On-Board a New Supplier

# 6 months

is the time it takes to onboard  
a new supplier at many large  
organizations.<sup>1</sup>



**Equip suppliers with the information they need.** Journeys and segmentation capabilities can also be used to curate content, guiding suppliers to the right resources (videos, demos, manuals, e-learning, and other content) as they progress through their onboarding. For example, you can design an onboarding workflow for your suppliers' finance team that takes them through demo videos on how to track and monitor invoice and payment statuses. Or you could create a separate onboarding experience with documentation explaining how inventory managers can utilize real-time inventory data to make informed decisions.

In addition, consolidate FAQs, frequently-visited links, access to knowledge bases, and important documentation in personalized dashboards. All of this will help suppliers understand your buying processes without needing a representative to walk them through.

Instead of just thrusting suppliers into the selling process head-first, make sure they have the tools and resources to learn how to do business with you on their own. **Proper onboarding is the first step to establishing a long-term partnership with your suppliers.**

See how you can deliver more relevant and **personalized experiences** for your suppliers with Liferay [here](#).

## 2. Provide a Single Location for Communication and Collaboration

According to Gartner, the top business problem supplier portals address is inefficient communication with suppliers.<sup>2</sup> Especially with a growing supplier network, it may be difficult to provide accurate and up-to-date information to them.

As a single solution that suppliers can depend on, you can leverage the portal to:



**Store and manage important documents**, like contracts, tax and business certifications, price lists, product specifications, returns and warranty policies, and compliance agreements. Since document management is simplified through one platform serving as a single source of information, suppliers won't get confused about where to upload documentation. Additionally, internal teams can search and browse through uploaded documents more efficiently.



**Communicate with suppliers before data is entered into back-end systems.** For example, you can negotiate pricing and contracts with suppliers before finalizing that information into your ERPs. Or, for distributors and resellers, you can adjust product information and descriptions from suppliers before they enter your PIM.



**Resolve issues without needing to use phone or email.**

For instance, if your suppliers need to adjust an invoice, they can directly edit or leave a comment on the supplier portal, eliminating the need for phone calls or email correspondence.



**Innovate and collaborate more closely with suppliers.**

For example:

- **Manufacturers** can host product and engineering discussions for new parts using messaging tools, message boards, and comments.
- **Logistics companies** can gather feedback and ideas from their suppliers to improve processes.
- **Healthcare organizations** can negotiate custom orders for medical supplies and devices, laboratory supplies, protective equipment, and discounts for bulk purchases.

### See why Liferay's CMS is analyst-recognized

Learn [here](#) how you can enable your business teams to create, organize, and manage their **digital assets** more efficiently.

<sup>2</sup> Quick Answer: 3 Options When Deploying a Supplier Portal

### 3. Empower Suppliers with Self-Service Capabilities

With a supplier portal, you can provide your suppliers with self-service functionality that empowers them to complete many tasks autonomously, freeing your team to handle more strategic work.

But self-service doesn't just make processes easier and more efficient for suppliers and buyers. It also helps enforce compliance and accuracy. A digital system ensures every compliance factor is tracked and checked along the way so that no legal issues arise later. And since suppliers have to enter less information manually, digital systems can limit human errors that might lead to payment delays or disputes.

What self-service functionality do suppliers need? Suppliers need to be able to:



**Manage their own accounts.** Once suppliers are given access after registration, they should be able to edit and control their own accounts without needing to contact your support team. This will prove especially useful when suppliers have new users that join or leave. Assigning an admin role allows someone on the suppliers' team to manage user permissions, accounts, and passwords.



**Access the portal on multiple devices and channels.** Suppliers may not always be at their desk or computer. If they're at a factory or on site, they will need to access the portal on another type of device. Provide 24/7 multichannel access on any device, no matter where the supplier is located.

# 15 to 20%

of an organization's Accounts Payable headcount is answering calls that involve routine questions from suppliers on topics such as the status of their invoices, payments, etc.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Vendor Self-Service Portal | Aavenir



**Access and find relevant information quickly.** You can use technology in multiple ways to help suppliers successfully navigate available resources and advance the supply chain. Plus, enabling suppliers to find information like orders, invoices, and payments quickly reduces the support burden on your staff with tools like:

- **Knowledge bases and FAQs.** Consolidate commonly asked questions and topics around rules of engagement in a knowledge base or FAQ page and let suppliers easily search and filter the responses according to their needs.
- **Tailored search results and recommendations.** Surface relevant search results by leveraging segmentation capabilities. You can display certain results based on job function, supplier type, previous search history, location, etc. By delivering more personalized answers, suppliers should be able to get all the information they need without contacting a support team. For example, for a supplier that primarily sells semiconductor chips to a smartphone manufacturer, you can prioritize content and search results related to semiconductors.
- **Modern tools like Applied AI/ML** also make it easy to target search results and content based on the search behavior of users who are in a similar role or segment.
- **Linking related documents and information.** Instead of suppliers needing to search through their emails or external systems for documentation, a supplier portal should be able to compile and link related information together. For example, if a supplier is looking at a specific order, they should also be able to access the related invoice and any other related communications easily.
- **Community forums.** Give suppliers the ability to post questions and search through already-answered issues. Forums not only allow your suppliers to engage with your organization but also offer you visibility into what challenges and questions they may be running into. For example, if multiple suppliers are posting about how to access forecasting predictions, you may want to change where this information is displayed or adjust the onboarding process to better highlight this feature.

Learn [here](#) how to use Liferay's **native search capabilities** to guide users in finding the content they need faster.

## 4. Digitize and Automate Supplier Processes

Without a single interface to surface supplier interactions, you may resort to using manual processes to handle tasks like procurement and payment. A robust DXP integrates important tools, including your ERPs and CRMs, allowing you to digitize and automate these processes while improving overall transparency.

An effective way to automate is to build tailored workflows for your unique supplier network. These workflows can pass information to different systems without requiring you to leave the supplier portal. For example, you can build workflows to:



**Capture purchase order responses and track their status** to see if they have been accepted or rejected. For instance, you can create a workflow to track the progress of purchase orders, setting an SLA to trigger automatic reminders for suppliers if there is no response within five business days. Should an additional five business days elapse, the system can automatically regenerate and redirect the purchase order to an alternate supplier.



**Allow suppliers to have visibility on required changes to an invoice.** If you reject an invoice or need modifications, suppliers are able to see what needs to be changed and make the necessary updates without leaving the supplier portal.



**Automatically split orders that require fulfillment by different suppliers.** When submitting a purchase order that needs attention from multiple suppliers, you can establish a workflow to seamlessly divide the order into sub-orders for independent fulfillment.

# 5. Monitor and Improve Supplier Performance

Do you know which of your suppliers are performing well—those with whom you'd like to continue your working relationship?

A robust DXP can help you surface information on supplier performance to help you make strategic decisions on which supplier to work with by:



**Defining SLAs and providing metrics for workflows**, as mentioned in the previous use case. If suppliers fall short of meeting the established SLAs or goals, you can decide whether to maintain the partnership or seek an alternative supplier capable of aligning with the set SLAs.



**Surfacing information from EDIs**, like fulfillment time and accuracy. Utilizing integrated EDI information allows you to identify and prioritize reliable suppliers for ongoing collaboration.



**Integrating with back-end analytics systems.** Your supplier portal can connect to existing BI or other analytics tools, providing a unified interface for displaying metrics and reports.

Your suppliers should also be able to provide feedback about your portal and how it can be improved to better serve them:



**Encourage supplier engagement and build stronger relationships with your suppliers** by providing opportunities for them to share their insights and requests.



**Gather feedback and capture suggestions for improvements** through survey forms. Ultimately, your supplier portal will only be as successful as your suppliers find it.

# Working More Efficiently with Your Suppliers Using Liferay DXP

To accomplish these five use cases, you'll need a robust DXP that is able to provide both the necessary insight you need into your back-end systems and the ability to streamline processes within those systems.

With Liferay DXP, you get a platform that enables you to build a supplier portal fit for your unique supplier network. Use Liferay DXP's robust site-building capabilities and flexible architecture to create an interface that sits on top of your existing systems, giving you crucial visibility into your supplier interactions.



Learn more about how Liferay can help your business:  
[www.liferay.com/supplier-portals](http://www.liferay.com/supplier-portals)

Experience the power of Liferay DXP with a demo:  
[www.liferay.com/demo](http://www.liferay.com/demo)





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