

Implement Web.Venture as an e-commerce on-line system for 24/7 order taking

Situation

D'Addario Canada is an importer and distributor of musical accessories and instruments to the Canadian retail market.

Challenge

Implement an e-commerce on-line ordering system to place and receive orders 24/7.

Solution

Web.Venture is a component of Blue Link Elite. It could be customized to meet D'Addario's needs, be easy to set up and simple and quick to maintain.

Results

Increased sales. Better order tracking. Improved customer service.

Situation

Established in 1988, D'Addario Canada is an importer and distributor of musical accessories and instruments, with products sold exclusively to retail outlets across Canada.

The company initially provided the D'Addario brand quality string products to consumers and trade. Gradually expanding its product range, it became the appointed importer and distributor for J. D'Addario & Co's propriety brands of accessories: Evans Drumheads, Planet Waves, HQ Percussion, and Rico Reeds; carried independent and established brand name products; and introduced a range of quality, inexpensive acoustic and electric guitars, and hand percussion products – all established and recognized brands available only at music retail outlets.

The company sees itself as an important "one stop" source of accessories for the Canadian retail market.

Challenge

By mid 2000, D'Addario was considering an e-commerce on-line ordering system to place and receive orders 24/7, in addition to the traditional model of sales reps, fax machines, telephone and mailed-in orders. The company also wanted a different method of marketing and promoting items, tracking purchases, and checking buyer profiles.

In summer 2005, Brad Davidson joined his family company after graduation. He was, self-admittedly, the most "tech-savvy" member of D'Addario and, therefore, the natural choice to research the addition of an e-commerce site to the company's traditional business model.

For 12 months, Brad assessed e-commerce features and outcomes considered essential to the company's needs:

- **Added customer value:**
Canadian research showed that 81% of internet shoppers investigated products online and 56% bought online; Brad judged that an e-commerce site would allow customers a more efficient and convenient ordering method than telephone/fax.
- **Faster, efficient reporting/tracking orders and inventory:**
The company needed a system to minimize the time taken between a price change, discount or special offers in-house, and the reps (and customers online) receiving that amended information.
- **Flexibility:**
The system had to allow temporary special pricing to assess sales changes and volume discounts to increase sales. It had to manage inventory quantities and pricing, and allow for D'Addario's unique image to be translated to website content.
- **Ease of use:**
With no onsite web master (an expert in web design and coding), D'Addario needed a system that would be easy to set up and administer.

Deciding that e-commerce would be beneficial, Brad began looking for a suitable system.

D'Addario's existing software package was Blue Link Elite – an integrated accounting, business management and inventory management solution – originally installed in 1999. Blue Link Elite utilizes Microsoft SQL-Server for its back-end database and is flexible, robust and has ease-of-use built in to the customizable modules. It accommodates a single-user or dozens of concurrent users and reliably handles large transaction volumes.

Brad investigated a wide range of e-commerce products. He found integrating two separate systems would require considerable work, including re-entering all data. D'Addario management didn't want to run two systems.

However, as Brad says, "Once I examined Blue Link's Web.Venture e-commerce solution (a powerful component of Blue Link Elite) I realized it served my comprehensive needs."

Since D'Addario was already satisfied with Blue Link Elite and the company's efficient customer service, Brad's search for an e-commerce solution was over.

Solution

As Web.Venture is a component of Blue Link Elite there was no need for integration with another system. It could be customized to meet D'Addario's needs, was easy to set up and simple and quick to maintain.

Web.Venture provides templates – although Brad found that basic html knowledge is useful for changing source code, such as altering type colour – and the company's specific "look", including layout, colours, labels and language, could be configured without expert web design knowledge. D'Addario product could easily be displayed on the site, together with video and links. The system offers more customization as it is consistently upgraded, responding quickly to customer requests for certain features.

Web.Venture also met the company's specified needs:

- Reps can order online and get pricing and specials almost as quickly as changes are made on the central database;
- Customers have more options – some continue to order by telephone, or through their rep, but they can access product information online prior to making an order – even if they don't subsequently order online;
- Information is accessible 24/7; and
- D'Addario's unique brand image has been translated on-line, with on-going customizing.

Anticipated challenges, such as acceptance by employees/customers, didn't materialize. The reps didn't ask/need additional training as the system is easy to understand and use. Because the e-commerce site is constantly available, reps can access information from their laptop or hotel room and give customers up-to-date information on prices and special offers; it provides better communication between Head Office and employees.

Customers have shown increasing acceptance of online ordering and shopping – bearing out Brad's initial research.

Technically, it was a smooth transition. D'Addario purchased a server (about \$2,000) to ensure data security – as opposed to using an external, shared off-site server.

Results

- Increased sales: 10% of total sales currently come through Web.Venture, and it is seen as having potential to create extra sales in addition to those generated by the reps or company staff.
- Better tracking: orders are tracked in real-time with customer information immediately accessible. Due to Web.Venture's flexibility, customers who choose to use fax or telephone can continue to do so, while the 24/7 accessibility of the new e-commerce site has attracted new customers, additional orders and extends the potential customer base.
- Improved customer service: customers can browse online, access previous orders, see any special offers and input orders at their convenience. The company can improve customer service while enhancing orders by using a manual interface that appears just before the final order window, which allows D'Addario to add on special pricing, or suggest free shipping. For example, the office can see that an order might qualify for free shipping if one more product was added, or an extra unit added, and can contact the customer with that suggestion.
- The customizing features allow D'Addario to maintain its image with the unique online "storefront".

The successful implementation of Web.Venture has achieved D'Addario's objectives of adding e-commerce functionality, providing accurate and timely information to management and staff to ensure secure, timely updates and increased sales opportunities.

"Web.Venture has made D'Addario lives much easier... and more profitable."