

Cross-Channel Integration Drives Efficiency For Fontana Sports

Since integrating brick-and-mortar and e-commerce systems on the Celerant platform, Fontana Sports reduced inventory 20%, increased turns by 1.5 times, and created immeasurable training and operational efficiency.

2012 marks 63 years in business for family-owned Fontana Sports, and in that time the company has grown from a small army-navy surplus store to a 2-site, 50-employee cross-channel retailer. While the retailer has been running Celerant at its brick-and-mortar POS lanes since 2008, its Web integration project was tackled much more recently. “We had an e-commerce site, but it wasn’t running on live inventory,” says John Hutchinson, who serves the company as President and whose parents started the business in 1949. The disparity between its e-commerce and store operations created a costly burden. “Our Web site ran totally independently of the stores. We were managing Web inventory on spreadsheets, which required dedicated data-entry and monitoring labor. We would process Web orders manually as well, taking orders in batches and fulfilling them through stores,” explains Hutchinson. In addition to the inefficiency of managing orders and inventory this way, inventory inaccuracy created a customer service problem. Because of its Web/store operational and inventory disparity, Fontana’s Web catalog was frequently inaccurate. “We would often show merchandise on the site and in reality it would be out of size or out of stock,” says Hutchinson. “Attempting to keep the Web site up to date was a labor-intensive, costly endeavor.”

The decision to upgrade its Web site and integrate inventory operations across channels was



an easy one, and Hutchinson was committed to continuing the relationship with Celerant. “We belonged to a buying group called Nation’s Best Sports, and Celerant’s integrated system is consistently referenced by our peer retailers in that group,” says Hutchinson. “Celerant proved to have the product we were looking for at a price that fit our IT budget.”

Cross-Channel Inventory Control Yields Savings

Hutchinson says the difference between live cross-channel inventory management and the previous manual, channel-specific approach is akin to the difference between night and day. He lauds the system’s intuitive interface. “The most difficult aspect of the project was really a process issue, and that was fully utilizing the attribute fields available to us in the new system,” he says. “We were used to abbreviating given the limitations of our old system, but that was no longer necessary. To keep the data consistent and understood by associates and consumers alike, we had to train ourselves to spell it out.” The other great advantage of full utilization of product attribute fields is analysis. Celerant



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Command Retail provides robust analysis and reporting tools for buyers and merchandisers, but the tools are only optimized if attributes are correctly entered. “The system gives us plenty of open fields that help us get granular on inventory at the SKU-level. Once we began using these fields properly we realized we can get quite granular with our reporting,” says Hutchinson. “With better control of inventory and the use of Celerant for more concerted analysis and reporting, including using open-to-buy, we’ve been operating with 20% less inventory even though we’ve grown 15% to 20% year-over-year,” he says. Fontana has also increased its inventory turns; it previously turned inventory 2 to 3 times per year, but Hutchinson says that’s improved to better than 4 times per year since the Celerant initiative.

In addition to enabling cross-channel inventory integration, Fontana Sports improved site functionality with the upgrade. It deployed advanced navigational tools on the homepage and product pages to facilitate ease of browsing and overall site usability, and enhanced zoom capabilities are now available for product views. A dropdown has also been added to the shopping cart so that customers can easily view and update pending purchases

With better inventory control comes the opportunity to add customer-facing applications. With its old approach to inventory management, a gift registry, for instance, would have been out of the question. That said, due to customer request, Fontana is in the process of launching a gift registry using the Celerant



platform. While it’s not a common application among sporting goods retailers, Hutchinson says his company gets several gift registry requests per month. “We get a lot of customers who want to register if they’re going on a trip somewhere, such as an African safari or a climbing trip out West,” he says.

Training, Operational Efficiency Gains

Hutchinson says the Celerant system’s ease of use remains one of the most important benefits Fontana has realized. “Being near the University of Wisconsin, several of our employees are college students. Because they’re somewhat migrant, we turn our staff over about three times per year,” he says. Using its old POS system, it took new Fontana sales associates up to two weeks to become proficient at the checkout. Today, Hutchinson says he can have a new employee up to speed in a day. “Training is equally intuitive for our office staff. Within a few hours new associates can be entering SKUs and purchase orders. We’re very pleased with the simplicity of the interface,” he says.

For more information on the Celerant Command Retail System, contact your Celerant representative or go to www.celerant.com.