

Consolidate management for increased sales

BY CHRIS MARTIN

As retailers expand their multichannel selling activities, their growth inevitably becomes constrained by the time and effort needed to manage product, customer, and inventory data across multiple standalone systems.

For many retailers, the problem lies in the fact that their channels are disconnected from one another, resulting in silos of information. Many are growing so fast that the need to activate a new channel is the primary concern, with integration of the channels into their overall business secondary. As the new channel matures, order volume and the number of products and customers all increase. When this happens, the manual processes needed to coordinate activities across channels begins to break down.

To avoid these issues, retailers are switching to solutions that centralize management of their multiple sales channels. These solutions enable product information and changes to product



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data to be uploaded once and be available immediately across channels. All customer data are maintained in a central location, allowing the retailer to quickly and easily locate files and respond to customer inquiries regardless of sales channel. The entire process of managing orders – from capturing the purchase and picking the item from inventory through preparing a packing slip and alerting the customer that the item has

shipped – is handled in a common system, regardless of where an order originates.

Huron Scuba, a full-service dive company based in Ann Arbor, MI, has experienced this situation first-hand. The retailer sells scuba and snorkel equipment, apparel, services and travel through its own stores, phone and Web site, as well as on Amazon. Since consolidating retail management in a single application, Huron Scuba has seen an increase in sales across channels and faster inventory turnover. Moreover, the company has reduced order cancellations on Amazon by a factor of six, late shipments by 67%, and lowered returns by 40%.

The key to getting multichannel retail right is to consolidate management of in-store POS, e-commerce, catalog call centers, and other channels. When resources are diverted to managing each channel independently, orders are lost and customers suffer.

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Improving effectiveness of multichannel marketing

BY SARI TAMILIO

The benefits of multichannel marketing for retailers are myriad and proven. The Internet as a revenue channel has grown at exhilarating rates year over year, with no sign of abating. E-mail has been universally adopted as a promotional tool that is flexible and cost-effective. And some marketers are already going mobile.

Despite these positive developments, however, many retailers are not as effective at multichannel marketing as they could be, even as they face the most challenging economic environment in more than a decade. Rising oil prices, falling consumer confidence, and faltering holiday sales are threatening the retail outlook. Now is the time to improve multichannel marketing practices with the following tactics:

Improving data capture. To communicate in a true multichannel fashion, retailers need robust and accurate customer contact data. Even if your POS system can accommodate data capture at the point of purchase, many sales associates do a poor job of this task. Implementing compliance programs that track not only the percentage but also the accuracy of data capture can dramatically grow your list and extend your reach across channels. Providing a standard e-mail request script will also support your adherence to best-practice data capture should an audit of your capture efforts be necessary.



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Centralized control of e-mail campaigns. A decentralized e-mail deployment process that allows your store personnel to contact customers on their own could have damaging implications for your brand. Opt-in and opt-out requests can only be accurately maintained in a centralized database, especially if you offer customers multiple preference options at the corporate e-mail level. Centralized e-mail also

enables you to implement effective best practices, such as triggered messaging and targeted segmentation, to match your offers and product focus to the consumer's stated or implied interest.

Eliminating corporate silos. Channels cannot compete with one another but should work together, synergistically, for the overall good of the brand. This means realigning management responsibilities and P&L statements to focus on the goal of the overall organization's health, not the health of a single channel.

Streamlining the marketing process, centralizing operations, and strengthening brand communications will enable you to continue to market effectively, weather the storm, and be prepared for future growth and the adoption of new technologies.

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