

Two E-Retailers Give Retail Management Software Two Thumbs Up

Integrating multiple sales channels allows for growth without adding staff at Unity Electronics and Trophies2Go

Two retailers, each looking for a cost-efficient way to manage their fast-growing operations while also providing higher levels of customer service, have found what they were looking for in a comprehensive retail management system from Saratoga Springs, N.Y.-based CORESense.

By integrating their multiple sales channels into the CORESense central retail management system, Unity Electronics and Trophies2Go have improved their distribution efficiencies, customer service and support programs management, as well as the ability to grow sales without incurring additional labor costs.

Union City, Calif.-based Unity Electronics, an e-retailer of consumer electronics, maintains a complex business model that includes sourcing CE and computer products from a variety of manufacturers and reselling the product through various channels. The company sells and distributes to e-commerce sites, such as amazon.com and overstock.com, to auction sites, such as eBay and Yahoo!, to wholesalers, direct to retailers, direct to consumers via unityelectronics.com and through phone and mail order.

Company president Russ Hedgpeth says that when Unity launched its business in 2000, it had a hodge-podge of back-end systems for functions such as accounting, order processing and inventory management.



CORESense has allowed Trophies2Go to handle extra order capacity with minimal stress.

As the business grew, however, the various systems became harder to manage, leading the retailer to seek out a solution provider to help get things under control.

“Every channel that we sell to has such a unique interface to get orders,” explains Hedgpeth. “One could be web-based, another could e-mail us orders, another might have an EDI link. They are all so different. It took quite a bit of time to process orders before CORESense.

“We were looking for a system that had everything from customer relationship management tools to inventory management to the physical publishing and posting of the website. We wanted to put it all under one skin,” he continues. “CORESense acts as a kind of translation tool for our various sales channels, evaluating our order entry information and formatting it so that it comes through our systems in a common fashion, saving us time and money.”

MULTI-LINGUAL SOLUTION The CORESense solution “talks” to each system in that system’s own language, and all orders are processed in a unified manner. “Everything we’ve thrown at this system, it can handle,” says Hedgpeth. “They seemed to have developed a system that can talk to anything.”

Since implementing CORESense in October 2002, Unity has slashed its labor costs by 50 percent, while sales during the same time period grew by approximately 40 percent.

Today, Unity Electronics services tens of thousands of customers through unityelectronics.com, as well as via the sites of 10 e-commerce affiliates. The retailer also serves approximately 400 wholesalers and 50 broker accounts.

With so many orders originating from various customers, Unity was often forced to enter data manually before implementing CORESense. “It was a uniform experience, but it was incredibly painful on our part to keep it that way,” recalls Hedgpeth. “Now, because the system is integrated, we can plug the data into the right fields and do a consistent business without having a bunch of people re-entering information into several different systems.”

Like most retailers, Unity experiences fluctuation in the volume of orders. On an average day, the retailer processes between 800 and 1,000 orders, but during peak seasons, such as Christmas, the order volume can triple.

“We didn’t have that volume when we started out, which is why we chose to just add pieces as we grew,” explains Hedgpeth.

“But when you have such a hodge-podge of systems and want to be able to continue to grow without stressing out your employees and risking chaos, the best thing to do is start over, which we did with CORESense.”

CORESense also provides an audit trail by maintaining every e-mail sent to or received from a customer, running a thread throughout the process. Unity can tell who took the order, who processed it and who picked, packed and shipped it. Once the order is shipped, CORESense generates a reference number that customers can use to help track the package during shipment.



By integrating the CORESense solution into the store's POS system, Trophies2Go can key in orders in-store.

Prior to the solution's implementation, Unity had no way of knowing who touched the order and no way to track it. While employees did a good job of keeping the order processing procedure glued together, Hedgpeth says that “it was pretty painful. The work level was tough.

“I think our customers now see a much more uniform experience because they get the same level of information and service whether they order over the phone, via e-mail, by fax, by EDI or through a website,” he adds.

Unity has also reduced the number of customer service calls received from customers inquiring about their orders. CORESense pre-empts the calls by automatically sending e-mails to

customers, updating them about their orders.

CORESense is also a marketing tool for Unity, generating a customer database of demographic and purchasing information that Unity uses to create and manage bi-weekly promotional e-mails.

FLUID AND FUNCTIONAL Issaquah, Wash.-based Trophies2Go, a retailer of trophies, plaques and awards, implemented CORESense almost two years ago. Trophies2Go sells its product through a bricks-and-mortar store, as well as seven websites: trophies2go.com, cheapbaseball-trophies.com, cheapgolftrophies.com, cheaphockeytrophy.com, cheapfootball-trophies.com, cheap-soccertrophies.com and cheapbasketball-trophies.com.

The benefits that Trophies2Go has realized have been “pretty extensive,” according to Jeff Anderson, president of Trophies2Go and owner of Issaquah Trophy and Awards. “We've re-engineered our production facility and our business processes to be very efficient, where we used to be in a state of chaos.

“CORESense helped us re-engineer the way we do business. It was a tremendous improvement. It's now a very fluid, very functional process,” he adds.

For Trophies2Go, one of the application's key benefits is that it allowed the retailer to grow its business without adding more staff or additional space. “Our Internet sales are up in the triple digits vs. a year ago,” Anderson says. “Because of CORESense, we've been able to handle that extra capacity without much stress. And there's a much calmer, more relaxed atmosphere when processing orders.”

Anderson estimates that Trophies2Go realized a return on its CORESense investment in six to eight months. In addition, the retailer integrated CORESense with the

physical store's POS system. “Now we're able to key in orders for the retail business and our production facility is able to fulfill them just as they fulfill orders that come in from the Internet, which is another efficiency gain for us,” explains Anderson.

Like Unity Electronics, Trophies2Go is taking advantage of the CORESense CRM features, keeping track of all e-mails that flow between the retailer's staff and its customers, gathering customer demographics and building a database of purchase histories. The retailer has also integrated its UPS shipping process into the application, giving shoppers the ability to track product shipments.

The solution additionally provides Trophies2Go with the ability to manage its price file across all channels. If a need exists to be more competitive on prices within any given channel, the retailer can update them from a central location.

Anderson recalls that not long after Trophies2Go went live with CORESense in 2000, it became clear that additional opportunities existed on the Internet, giving birth to the various sports sites. “After we launched CORESense, our ability to drive sales through one fulfillment process made it possible for us to add more smaller sites,” he explains.

The retailer recently launched an eighth site, issaquahtrophy.com, and is planning to add a second warehouse and production facility which will use the CORESense platform, allowing Trophies2Go to outsource some fulfillment operations.

“We're also planning a few more sites for the future,” adds Anderson. “Each one of these is modular, so we're able to put them inside CORESense – the same database, the same order-taking capabilities – and funnel production through one system.”

While neither quantifiable nor a hard savings, Anderson says that the biggest benefit of CORESense is the peace of mind it makes possible. “It's just calming to know that orders aren't getting misplaced or set aside or mishandled,” he says. “When you know that you have 100 percent accuracy and that all of the orders you have in process are where they should be and are continuing on their path to completion, you can relax.” — *Liz Parks* **STORES**



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