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Finding the Right Fit for Multi-Channel Commerce

American Eagle Outfitters upgrades its commerce platform to unify the customer experience across all touch points

THE CHALLENGE:

Making the most of a booming multi-channel business

With its market presence exploding over the last three years, American Eagle Outfitters (AE) needed to extend its retail momentum to the online marketplace. But its outmoded commerce platform didn't scale or integrate customer touch points, making that objective far out of reach.

THE SOLUTION:

Moving to a single multi-channel platform

AE abandoned its antiquated platform for ATG Commerce, and now has centralized management of not only its Web site, but its call center and order management systems, too.

THE RESULT:

Achieving total control of the multi-channel business

With ATG, AE gained total control of its multi-channel business. The new ATG platform enabled AE to manage the entire customer experience – from the retail store to the Web site to the call center. It also gives them the foundation they needed to grow their existing brand, and launch new ones.

Known for designing, marketing, and selling its own brand of laidback, current clothing for teenagers and young adults, American Eagle Outfitters (AE) stands for high-quality merchandise at affordable prices.

The retailer's market presence has grown exponentially within just three years, with more than 800 stores now in North America. Extending this momentum to the online arena was becoming a difficult, resource-intensive task for AE Direct, the team managing AE's online and call center businesses. An antiquated commerce platform had multiple, cumbersome integration points with other systems, lacked scaleability, and required awkward, manual processes for even small Web page adjustments.

Growing fast, AE was ready to bring its multi-channel commerce initiatives to the next level. But first it needed the right commerce platform. To serve the digital generation, AE needed to replace its outmoded system with a scaleable platform that provided central management of not only its Web site, but its call center and order management systems that had previously been outsourced.

Extending the existing business – not building a new one

According to Dave Brumback, director of operations at AE Direct, "The new platform had to ensure that the entire customer experience was consistent as customers traverse our physical and virtual stores, and our call center. We wanted to make sure the new platform could support our Web site, call center, and order management systems. Yet we were not looking to mold our business around software. We wanted software that would mold to our existing business."

Moreover, the AE Direct team wasn't changing its Web site design. Customer feedback on the existing site was very positive. In moving to the new platform, the goal was to preserve the existing look, yet implement a new back-end that would bring higher efficiency and maximize profitability by integrating with the systems and processes that supported the entire AE business. To accomplish that goal, the new platform needed to use the merchandising, transaction processing, and distribution systems already in place.

Master the art of customer experience

> "ATG delivered. We had a smooth and controlled migration from our old architecture to the new ATG platform. In fact, AE Direct had a record holiday season." —Lou Pietragallo, Manager of Information Technology, American Eagle Direct

And, it had to provide unique online capabilities, such as personalization, dynamic up-selling and cross-selling, robust search, simplified content administration, and e-mail integration.

The AE Direct team formed a steering committee that used a formal process to evaluate and compare 10 e-commerce vendors. Their criteria included the overall strength of the platform in terms of scaleability and flexibility, the reputation and stability of the vendor, customer references, the ability to run on Java, and ease of content administration.

ATG Commerce won across the board. "The ATG Commerce platform not only met our near-term needs but also demonstrated the ability to easily incorporate new marketing and sales capabilities that would help us build for the future," said Brumback. "While their technical capabilities impressed us, it was the ATG management team's partnership with our business users that really won us over. When they showed us how their software would support our current business and where they believed our multi-channel business could go, it became clear that ATG was the right partner for us."

Scenario personalization is a trip worth taking

With their business specifications in place, the new ae.com was launched within the year. What's more, the transition to the new site was seamless – which was critical with the holiday season less than a month away. Commented Lou Pietragallo, manager of Information Technology at AE Direct, "There was no way we would take the site down for even a single day. And given that we were launching the new site in October, we could not risk interrupting our business just before the holiday season. ATG delivered. We had a smooth and controlled migration from our old architecture to the new ATG platform. In fact, AE Direct had a record holiday season."

Along with upgrading their online store, the AE Direct team also integrated ATG Commerce with its new ATG-powered call center application and order management system. The real-time data interchange between the Web site, call center, back-office and store systems make it possible for AE Direct to achieve a holistic view of the customer, enabling them to support all buying, ordering and service requests across all major channels. And they can now centrally manage those interactions through a single platform.

A foundation for the future

AE Direct moved from an outdated system with limited and cumbersome multi-channel business support to a sophisticated platform that enables dynamic, relevant customer interactions across all customer touch points. Moreover, they laid a foundation that enables them to manage their multiple channels and multiple businesses through a single platform. And with big plans for growing the American Eagle business and launching new brands such as Martin + Osa, having that foundation in place is critical. Concluded Brumback, "Through one implementation of ATG, we now have centralized management of our Web site, call center and order management, putting us in control of our existing multi-channel business and positioning us for success in both our existing brand and new ones."

American Eagle Outfitters is showing that they can both keep up with and lead the trends when it comes to selling to teenagers and young adults. Now, they're doing it with a commerce platform that will never go out of style.

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About ATG

ATG makes the software that the world's most customer-conscious companies use to create a more relevant and consistent customer experience, throughout the marketing, commerce, and service lifecycle, and across the Web, e-mail, call center, and mobile channels. Offering an alternative to the traditional silo-based approach to customer-facing applications, ATG delivers a seamless, more compelling, and mutually valuable experience to each customer and segment. The company fulfills this strategy by providing fully integrated best-of-breed product suites installed on-premise or delivered on-demand. ATG's solutions power over 600 major brands, including A&E Networks, Airbus, American Airlines, American Eagle Outfitters, Best Buy, Boeing, Cingular Wireless, DirecTV, France Telecom, Friends Provident, Hewlett-Packard, Hotels.com, Hyatt Hotels, HSBC, InterContinental Hotels Group, Kingfisher, Louis Vuitton, Merrill Lynch, Neiman Marcus, Philips, Procter & Gamble, Symantec, T-Mobile, Target, US Army, US Navy, Warner Music, and Wells Fargo.

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