

Automotive Parts Supply

WebD 495

Larry Lugnut started an automotive parts supply company nearly 50 years ago. Upon his death, he left the business to his granddaughter Patty Lugnut. The business had grown into a local and regional success. However, Larry eschewed the advances in communications technology, preferring to do business face-to-face, in order to develop long-term customer relationships. Larry previously retained an IT consulting company to set-up and maintain a small ERP system. At its heart was an inventory and MySQL parts database.

Patty, as the new CEO, had a background in marketing. Her primary experience with her family's automotive parts company primarily was listening to long customer and vendor stories during family get-to-gathers. She knew that for the business to survive she would have to provide the leadership to change company culture and embrace Web.

Consequently, she decided to retain a local IT company, specializing in commercial web development. She would ask them to prepare a market analysis, cost estimates, and a time to delivery of a commercial professional Web site. If the research resulted in the recognition of a solid opportunity, then she would contract with the firm to develop an e-commerce Web site, fully integrate the Web site with the MySQL database, provide on-going maintenance, and assist in training employees.

Her marketing background provided her with the knowledge necessary to compete, but she did not know who the competitors were, nor whether it would even be possible to integrate her grandfather's belief in developing long-term customer relationships, using the Web. She realized the entire future of the company, and its many employees, some with over 40 years of experience, was at stake. A misstep could spell disaster.

She knew that the Web site would have to demonstrate uniqueness. She was willing to invest up to \$150,000 to conduct the research, retain the development company, contract the full development of the site, provide simple tools that would allow her company to perform most updates, and lease the necessary servers (preferably from a commercial hosting farm). She wanted to incorporate actual customer feedback from long-time customers in an effort to maintain her grandfather's vision and embrace this important differentiation. Patty realized it was critical to understand the competition and incorporate expected competitive response into the design. The Web development company would have to develop a site that could weather the economic mood of the region and the country, based on responsible maintenance strategies. Timing was important and the entire project must be complete, in all regards within 15 weeks. She was certain she would have sufficient continuous cash flow to support the completed site; however, the first two years of operation must present no surprises, especially those involving security.

The product database can be found at <http://www.mysqltutorial.org/mysql-sample-database.aspx>.