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A supplier of customized work uniforms finds its fit in B2B e-commerce

By Nona Tepper

Since relaunching its site, Wildman Corporate Apparel has increased online sales, decreased errors and enabled customers with multiple worksites to enforce standards.

Wildman Corporate Apparel, a distributor of customized uniforms to some 2,000 retirement homes, hospitals and banks, is increasing web sales and offering customers added options since deploying a new e-commerce platform last year, says Casey Pepper, vice president of sales.

The recent success comes after years of struggling to effectively sell online by Wildman, a unit of Wildman Business Group. In 2007, the company deployed technology from SanMar Corporation, one of the distributor's main suppliers, for its e-commerce site. Sales quickly grew beyond the capabilities of the site. The company switched to sites built by its own developers, but these required Wildman employees to manually enter suppliers' new items and product data into the content management system. "We could not keep updated with the electronic catalogs," Pepper says.

Wildman fell behind in its product selection because the company couldn't enter all of its suppliers' data fast enough. There were also a growing number of data-entry errors. The in-house sites forced sales reps to manually retype customer orders from the e-commerce platform into the order management system. "There's so many details—French blue, versus navy blue, versus light blue—that the sales rep would often key in errors," he says. Physical reentry was a waste of time and money, Pepper says. He thought sales reps time could be more better spent assisting outside account managers with customer quotes.

Last year, Wildman again switched its e-commerce platform, this time to technology from WebJaguar B2B Commerce. Online sales have since grown from "less than 10% of total sales" to 22% of sales, or $75,000, every month, Pepper says. The number of data entry errors by Wildman employees, which resulted in errors in customers' orders, has shrunk from 20 to two errors per month. "We're hoping our online sales reach 60% of total sales next year," Pepper says. "Right now, the web site sales are growing at probably 6% month over month."

The new version of Wildmanimprints.com allows a client's corporate and procurement departments to log in and create a branded company profile. Expense department personnel, for example, can set up an approval process so employees can only purchase items up to a specific

dollar amount. They can also set up a process to deduct the cost of items above approved levels from individual employees' paychecks and standardize corporate designs.

"We have customers that have more than 20 locations, and they didn't have any control over their people," Pepper says. "One manager at one location would order shirts with the logo one inch tall, another would order logos two inches tall—the new web platform offers customers consistency in how their uniforms look and what colors are allowed."

To speed order fulfillment, the web site is tied into the networks of its three main suppliers—which Pepper declined to name. When a customer orders customized uniforms from Wildman, the order automatically schedules a screen printing job at the supplier. That has reduced the time required to fill an average order from 12 days to eight. The link to suppliers also allow those manufacturers to add new designs to the site, so Wildman employees no longer have to manually input the items. "With WebJaguar we have a live feed that is updated every day," Pepper says. "It helps us have more complete information available about our inventory."

Pepper says WebJaguar charged a one-time, $200,000 set-up fee. He did not mention the cost of annual maintenance fees, but said that WebJaguar charged an additional fee for customized features. The company expects to see a return on investment by the end of 2016.

"We feel WebJaguar was able to offer a platform with a solid base that we could use without having to totally customize everything," Pepper says. "We've never had the level of service support from a web store company like we've had with WebJaguar. They are very responsive to our service needs. They assigned an inside representative to our account and we've been working hand-in-hand to develop our program. Their owner has also actually sat in on many of our calls."

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