Solution: **Watson Customer Engagement**   Industry: **Retail**

Augusta Sportswear Brands

Boosting digital sales through seamless customer journeys

When sports leagues are designing their uniforms, a wide choice of colors, fabrics and fits is crucial to create a winning look. To make it easier than ever for customers across the US to shop all its apparel brands, Augusta Sportswear Brands consolidated them to a single store powered by IBM® WebSphere® Commerce.

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Business challenge

To nurture customer loyalty and attract incremental sales, Augusta Sportswear Brands wanted to offer a seamless, consistent experience when online customers shopped any of its apparel brands—but how?

Transformation

Building on its years of success with IBM WebSphere Commerce, Augusta Sportswear Brands migrated all of its brands to a single, centralized instance of the e-commerce platform.

Results

4% rise

in the number of online visitors by enhancing the digital experience

5% increase

in sales through the digital channel since launching the new site

Fast

and seamless upgrades of the IBM solution by using out-of-the-box functionality

Business challenge story

Dressed for success

Whether it's a junior high league or a college sports team, everyone remembers the thrill of receiving their first uniform. Augusta Sportswear Brands knows that personalized apparel turns individual players into a united team—and for more than 40 years, the company has provided custom sporting uniforms across the US. Offering a white-labeled service, many of Augusta Sportswear Brand's clients are sporting goods stores that design and order uniforms on their clients' behalf.

"Augusta Sportswear Brands—consisting of Augusta Sportswear, Holloway, High Five, and Russell Athletic—has the product diversity needed to meet the challenge of providing uniforms across a vast array of popular sports," says Nathan Maxwell, Senior Director of Digital Experience at Augusta Sportswear Brands.

"Today, B2B buying behavior is becoming increasingly similar to direct to consumer [DTC], with customers purchasing more and more of their inventory through digital channels. From the beginning of this trend, we've been right there, seeking out opportunities to offer the speed and convenience of the digital channel to our B2B customers. Since opening online stores for each of our brands, digital sales have grown to contribute more than 63 percent of our annual sales."

In the past, Augusta Sportswear Brands operated each brand as a separate company, and each had its own e-commerce storefront. The company realized that consolidating its businesses would enable it to increase efficiency and protect its margins. Augusta Sportswear Brands was also confident that enabling customers to shop all its brands on a single site would help streamline its user experience and drive additional sales.

"We saw centralizing product and service management as key to creating a superior omnichannel customer experience," Maxwell says. "Combining our suite of brands on one site would empower our customers to shop a wider range of value, mid-range and premium lines, and adopting a single freight pricing model could streamline the customer's journey even further. Our goal was to to reimagine the digital experience from the customer's perspective, and make it as fast and simple as possible to shop our extensive product range."

" Giving customers the ability to shop all our brands in one place is also inspiring many of them to make incremental purchases, and we've seen a five percent increase in our revenues since we consolidated our businesses. "

— **Nathan Maxwell, Senior Director, Digital Experience, Augusta Sportswear Brands**

Transformation story

Enhancing the digital experience

Based on its positive experiences with IBM WebSphere Commerce, the company decided to use the platform as the basis for the new, central e-commerce platform.

"We've relied on IBM WebSphere Commerce to support online retail for our B2B channel for many years, and we consider the solution one of the world's leading e-commerce engines," comments Maxwell. "Over the years we'd been using the platform, we had made a number of customizations to deliver functionalities such as integration with inventory data from our ERP platform and mouseover effects for enlarged product images. As time went by, these changes made it difficult to deploy updates—and we wanted to limit the number of customizations in our new version."

Debee Khadanga, Director of E-commerce Systems at Augusta Sportswear Brands, continues: "We have been using IBM Websphere Commerce over the past 11 years for our B2B channel. The re-implementation with version 8, coupled with the merging of all of our brands onto one website, was a big success. The out-of-the box B2B capabilities of this platform are crucial for complex scenarios like contract pricing, available-to-promise [ATP] inventory models, special promotions, payment terms and user organization structure. The checkout function of the platform handles complex order entry processes for just about any possible scenario.

"Downtime or slow site performance are simply unacceptable in our competitive industry. The former may get more attention at first, but the latter is just as insidious. The reliability of our Amazon Web Services platform, the scalability of IBM Websphere Application Server and the robust architecture of our commerce solution play a vital role in ensuring we're always on for our customers."

As its consolidation project moved forward, Augusta Sportswear Brands had just a few months to launch the new e-commerce experience. To accelerate its work, the company engaged Royal Cyber.

"One of the key reasons we chose Royal Cyber was the depth and breadth of their IBM WebSphere Commerce experience: it was clear they knew the solution inside out," Maxwell recalls. "Royal Cyber put together a detailed project plan which clearly laid out the work that needed to be done by each project milestone. We also appreciated the Royal Cyber team's plain-speaking approach. If they felt that something we'd proposed wasn't going to work, they were never hesitant to speak up and suggest an alternative."

Working together with Royal Cyber, Augusta Sportswear Brands successfully completed the e-commerce project before its deadline. In parallel, the company engaged digital agency WPromote to help audit the user experiences for its new site.

"Royal Cyber went above and beyond to help us, which was a key factor in going live with our new site on time," says Maxwell. "For example, as part of the project we'd planned to migrate our IBM WebSphere Commerce platform from a co-located data center into the Amazon Web Services cloud. Although we'd intended to do the majority of the work, the Royal Cyber team took the initiative and carried out much of the migration work themselves. Royal Cyber was always looking for ways to help us achieve our goals, and also offered us a route to purchase new software licenses to help reduce our operational costs."

Khadanga adds: "We utilized Royal Cyber as an implementation partner to provide additional resources to deliver an on-time and successful project. We're looking forward to working together with the Royal Cyber team again as we gear up for our next big e-commerce project."

Results story

Inspiring more customers to buy

With a single instance of IBM WebSphere Commerce delivering a seamless experience across all its labels, Augusta Sportswear Brands is making it faster and easier for customers to shop online.

"By upgrading, we've gained capabilities such as mouseover product zoom straight out of the box," explains Maxwell. "Avoiding the need to customize our platform will reduce the cost and complexity of future upgrades. Crucially, navigating the site and checking out an order is more seamless and intuitive, which is helping us attract more customers to the digital channel. In fact, within just a few weeks of the launch we saw a four percent increase in the number of online visitors."

As more B2B customers recognize the benefit of the e-commerce channel, Augusta Sportswear Brands is seeing a reduction in the numbers of customers placing orders over the phone.

"Serving customers via the digital channel is not only enabling us to reduce our cost per order, it's also helping us offer them a faster and more straightforward shopping experience," comments Maxwell. "Giving customers the ability to shop all our brands in one

place is also inspiring many of them to increase the size of their orders, and we've seen a five percent increase in our revenues since we consolidated our businesses."

Because its products tend to be highly personalized, Augusta Sportswear Brand's B2B customers typically work on their orders throughout the day. In the past, the company lacked the ability to share real-time inventory information. If an item went out of stock after a customer had added it to their cart, they would only find out after they attempted to check out—potentially causing them to miss the deadline for next-day delivery. To solve the challenge, the company uses REST APIs to tightly integrate IBM WebSphere Commerce with its ERP platform, enabling it to immediately inform customers if one of their chosen items goes out of stock.

With a single e-commerce engine driving its business, Augusta Sportswear Brands is setting its sights on growth.

"We recently signed a partnership to add Russell Athletic to our portfolio of brands," concludes Maxwell. "Thanks to our single instance of IBM WebSphere Commerce, the process of creating a new storefront to market Russell Athletic products on our site will be a simple and straightforward one, meaning we'll be able to realize the commercial benefit of this partnership quickly. IBM WebSphere Commerce is a key enabler of that success."

AUGUSTA SPORTSWEAR BRANDS

About Augusta Sportswear Brands

Founded with three employees in 1977, Augusta Sportswear Brands has grown into one of the leading sports apparel manufacturers in the US. With more than 800 styles, ranging from blank team uniforms to corporate apparel, Augusta Sportswear Brands serves individuals, sports teams, fans and corporations across the country.

Solution components

- WebSphere Commerce as a Service

Take the next step

To learn more about IBM WebSphere Commerce, please contact your IBM representative or IBM Business Partner, or visit the following website: ibm.com/marketplace/websphere-commerce

Founded in 2002 and headquartered in Naperville, Illinois, Royal Cyber is an IBM Gold Business Partner and specialist in IBM Watson, Internet of Things, B2B integration and mobile solutions. Serving a wide range of industries across North America, Asia, Europe, Africa and the Middle East, Royal Cyber helps its clients reduce costs, streamline their business operations and compete more effectively in the global marketplace. To learn more about Royal Cyber, please visit: royalcyber.com

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