

Finding the right e-commerce partner helps retailers beat the competition

Online retailers are constantly being challenged to stay on top of their game. As technology advances and consumer demands evolve, retailers must strike a balance between offering the best shopping experience and ensuring their products have a wide but targeted reach—all while protecting customer data.

"It's more important than ever that today's online retailers can keep customer information safe," says Diane Buzzeo, president and founder of Ability Commerce, a provider of e-commerce services and software. "They also need tools that integrate to the most leading edge functionality available in areas such as email technology, shipping and marketplaces."

Marketplaces offer a great opportunity for retailers to expand their product reach, Buzzeo says, but they also are becoming more competitive. Email providers and technology are also changing, making it more difficult for retailers to truly engage with their audiences. "Retailers now really need to stay on top of what these challenges are," Buzzeo says.

For example, Buzzeo says the batch-and-blast e-mail technique, while still effective, has evolved. "It is not enough to just send an email to customers hoping they will engage," she adds. "Now more than ever, it's important to understand the metrics involved with email marketing and serve the customer with the information that is interesting to her as an individual. By providing that relevant information, the retailer will undoubtedly improve conversion rates."

These challenges, however, are difficult for retailers to take on alone, so Buzzeo recommends they partner with a vendor that can help overcome these and future hurdles by providing both software and a team of professionals who are experts in e-commerce. "Finding the right partner is the key to e-commerce success," she says. "Retailers need to look for experienced professionals that know the ins-and-outs of selling on marketplaces and partner with

best-in-breed e-mail service providers to integrate their solutions with software that best serve their needs."

That partner also needs to ensure it is keeping the retailer's customer data safe. "Customer information is paramount in building a trusted relationship with the customer and offering a good user-experience," Buzzeo says. "Data breaches are not only expensive, but they also can cost the retailer its credibility."

Ability Commerce provides these types of software and professional services capabilities to its clients. For example, when Fahrney's Pens

decided to expand from its brick-and-mortar store into e-commerce in 2005, it partnered with Ability Commerce. The fine pens company, which was founded in 1929, implemented Ability's SmartSite e-commerce platform to power its online store and keep its customer data safe. It also used Ability's SmartStaff digital marketing services, an in-house team of direct commerce professionals that manages Fahrney's email marketing, search engine optimization, web and creative design, web promotion management, and merchandising.

Fahrney's Pens has partnered with Ability since it first entered e-commerce and continues to power its online store with the platform. In 2015, the company implemented Ability's backend solution, Ability CCS, to improve their order management, warehousing, POS and overall fulfillment capabilities.

"Ability's breadth of direct commerce software, services and industry expertise is unmatched," says Christopher Sullivan, owner of Fahrney's Pens. "It was an easy choice and proven to be a great value."

To stay competitive, Buzzeo says retailers need a powerful partner. "That partner should provide leading edge, end-to-end software with personalized services to support the single or multi-channel marketer through all stages of the order lifecycle and the user experience," she adds. "And they should measure their success by the success of their clients."

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