## Problem

» PrestaShop didn't easily integrate with other key business systems

» Tedious to add and update product information

» Simplistic cart checkout created problems for customers

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# Coolest Shoes in California

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— **Christine Davis** | Owner, Coolest Shoes in California

If surging sales reveal scalability problems with your e-commerce infrastructure, it may be time for a platform upgrade.

Coolest Shoes in California realized PrestaShop was holding them back, so they switched to Miva for an elegant platform that will fuel current and future growth.

It was when sales took off in 2013 that Christine Davis knew she had a problem. Her company, Coolest Shoes in California, was having its best summer season ever. Online business was booming and store traffic at her retail location in Carlsbad, California, was climbing into record territory.

But since her e-commerce systems relied on labor-intensive processes, Davis saw that growth would mean pain. It took just one summer with that pain to convince her it was time for Coolest Shoes to make a change.

### The Coolest Shoes in California

In 2008, Christine Davis came across a French-made shoe she had never seen before. The Glagla ("glah-glah") was light-weight and comfortable, and it combined mesh ventilation and a beachy style to create the perfect lifestyle footwear for southern California's coastal towns.

Davis realized no one in the U.S. was selling these shoes, so she struck a deal with the manufacturer and started vending them at farmers markets and

street fairs on the weekends. They grew to be a strong seller in the San Diego area, and within two years Davis launched the Coolest Shoes in California website so that customers and street fair attendees could learn about and purchase the product online.

### Limited E-Commerce Needs

When she launched her website in 2010, Davis had not yet opened a brick-and-mortar retail location. "My inventory was actually very simple at the time," she explains. "I only had one shoe, the Glagla, and it came in just 12 colors." Because she had a simple inventory list and didn't need to integrate the website with operations at a physical storefront, Davis looked for an e-commerce option that would get her up and running as cheaply as possible.

She chose to build her site using PrestaShop. "It worked for me at the time," Davis says, "mostly because it was free. I still think they are okay for some people," she continues, "but in my case, I eventually found that the platform wasn't keeping up with my growing business."

## Solution

» Coolest Shoes in California switched to Miva for a fully-integrated e-commerce platform they can grow with.

The company's sales continued to expand, and by the summer of 2011, Davis was selling 3,000 pairs of Glaglas a year at street fairs and through the website. She was confident in the market for her product, so she decided it was time to take the next step and open a retail location. Davis determined that downtown Carlsbad, California, was the perfect setting for selling the shoes, and she opened her store three blocks from the beach.

### Outgrowing PrestaShop

After opening the store, Coolest Shoes in California began to broaden its offerings. "When we opened the retail shop," Davis explains, "we started to expand our inventory to include other shoes that fit our lifestyle look and feel." Over the subsequent two years, Coolest Shoes grew to the point where the store carried footwear from 14 different brands with over 2,000 unique color, style, and sizing combinations.

As her retail location grew, Davis began to recognize ways in which her basic PrestaShop webstore was unable to keep up with the growing complexities of her business. Her available product was no longer limited to just the Glagla line, and she now had to coordinate inventory between the retail location and the online store. She identified three main pain points that emerged as a result of her e-commerce platform.

### Manual Inventory Management

"When we didn't have the retail location," explains Davis, "it was very simple to keep inventory counts current on the website." But when they added the retail component, PrestaShop didn't have an easy way to integrate with the physical store's inventory. To deal with this functionality gap Davis relied on a manual workaround. "Whenever we sold a pair of shoes in the store," she says, "we had to go in and manually update the website's inventory levels."

Davis also points out that inventory management issues weren't limited to keeping stock counts accurate. Shipping online orders, for example, required multiple manual steps. "Since things weren't integrated with PrestaShop," she says, "the order fulfillment process required 14 steps from receiving the order through shipping the product."

Furthermore, Davis points out that retail foot traffic often will disrupt manual processes. "You have to keep in mind that we were running a retail store at the same time," she says. "So if a customer came into the store while we were in the middle of processing an online order, we would break away to help the customer. And then, inevitably, you'd have more people walk in, and before you knew it, you'd been distracted for an hour."

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>
> —Christine Davis
> Owner, Coolest Shoes in California

At that point, she says it was common to come back to an online order and make a mistake somewhere in the 14-step manual process. "We had a lot of errors," Davis explains. "These included operator error on the process sequence, incorrect data entry in the inventory or accounting systems, or simply forgetting to perform one step or another."

"Because our systems weren't integrated," Davis says, "we needed to rely on the manual processes to make sure inventory counts matched between our physical and online stores." But since those manual processes were often interrupted, Coolest Shoes suffered from inventory issues. "We were continually running out of things in the store or online."

### Difficulties Adding New Product

As Davis expanded the offerings at Coolest Shoes, she often needed to add or update product listings on her website. But on PrestaShop this process was very tedious. "It wasn't very user-friendly," she says, "so I'd usually save up a bunch of new product and give it to my website database administrator in huge batches." The business was suffering because at any given time the website didn't have all of the shoes that were actually available in the store.

### Unsophisticated Cart Checkout

PrestaShop offered limited options for customizing the final pages of the cart flow. For instance, Davis points out that her customers frequently use multiple addresses during the checkout. "Technically there was a way for the customer to specify different billing and shipping addresses," she says, "but the process wasn't straightforward and I was getting calls from people on a regular basis who were having trouble checking out with their order."

In spite of these challenges, Davis stuck with her PrestaShop website for two years after launching the store in Carlsbad. "My programmer was used to the platform," she explains, "and we were able to get by." She points out that even though there were problems, they had been on PrestaShop from the beginning of the web store, so they didn't really know anything different. "That's just how running the site had always been."

"Another big factor was that I didn't think I could afford a different platform," Davis continues. "PrestaShop was free, so what could compete with that?" And finally, she

points out that a website overhaul can be daunting. "I was afraid of the disruption to my business."

But by late 2013, Davis realized she had to make a change. "In our business, the summer is the peak sales season," she explains, "and the summer of 2013 set new records for our company." Coolest Shoes experienced 120% growth in sales from the previous summer, and Davis says it just about killed her. "It was so stressful because the retail store was doing much more business than we had anticipated, and online sales were picking up as well."

All of a sudden, the issues Davis had been living with became critical. By their nature, the problems she was having were scalability problems, and without a modernization of her e-commerce systems the problems would be growth-constricting. Because online order fulfillment involved so many manual steps, doubling sales volume meant doubling the manual labor. And the inventory management issues inherent in her systems went from bad to worse as volume picked up.

Davis knew one option was to improve the functionality of her PrestaShop site using add-ons, but by the end of 2013's busy season, she was ready to look at a more integrated platform. "PrestaShop has some add-on modules that can improve the functionality of the basic product," she says, "but I was really looking for an all-encompassing solution. At that point I didn't want to try buying and installing piecemeal module updates to incrementally patch issues with my shopping cart."

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"Before that summer," Davis says, "I was afraid of the disruption to my business and the increased costs of moving off PrestaShop." But when she saw how painful sticking with the free platform could be, Davis changed her mind. "By the end of the summer," she says, "I realized I couldn't afford NOT to switch!"

## Moving Forward with Miva

When she set out to choose the new platform for her website, Christine Davis had clear criteria. After her experiences with non-integrated business systems, she knew it was very important that the overhaul would address her inventory management issues. "I wanted to use Atandra T-HUB for inventory management," she says, "so my new e-commerce platform had to easily integrate with T-HUB."

She also had an eye toward the future. "I only have one retail location now," Davis explains, "but I've thought about opening a second store someday. What happens if I open that second store, or even just grow the first location with more shoe brands and products? I need to be on a platform that will seamlessly grow with my business in the future."

"I looked at osCommerce, Volusion, and a few other shops," says Davis, "but I chose Miva because of their existing feature set and because of their integration with T-HUB for my store."

Davis worked with a team of Miva developers to build the site. "We built it using one of Miva's design templates, and the team at Miva did the customization work for things like the T-HUB integration." The new Coolest Shoes site went live at the end of February 2014, and Davis says that after a few weeks of fine tuning the site was ready for the summer season.

## A Transformed Business

Christine Davis is very pleased with her upgraded web store. "My new Miva website has completely revolutionized my business," she says. "The amount of time it saves me in the online order fulfillment process is phenomenal!"

Now that her Miva store is integrated with T-HUB, the Coolest Shoes online inventory is seamlessly connected with the in-store inventory. "The T-HUB integration has virtually eliminated the inventory issues we used to have between the two business units," says Davis. "And since Miva also integrates with our QuickBooks point-of-sale system, we've virtually eliminated the errors we had when dealing with shipments."

"Before," Davis says, "we needed 14 steps to ship an order. Now, when I have an order come in, it's as simple as printing a packing slip, pressing a button to post the transaction to QuickBooks, and then printing a shipping label from USPS."

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The new Coolest Shoes website also addresses the other issues customers were having with the checkout process. Buyers can now painlessly utilize different ship-to and bill-to addresses, and Davis has the flexibility to customize the checkout flow however she may see fit in the future. "Since going live with Miva," she says, "I haven't had a single phone call from someone who needed assistance with their addresses during the checkout process."

The process of adding new product is also much simpler on Miva. "I was not very involved with adding product on PrestaShop," Davis says, "because it was so confusing for me. Now with Miva, I am able to run the entire site myself. This means that new product gets added online the same day I get it into the store."

There are other benefits that Davis has noticed as well. "Since we've launched," she explains, "we're already seeing indications of improved site performance. Our SEO rankings have improved, and sales were up dramatically in our first few months on the site as compared to the prior year."

To underscore the transformation her business has seen, Davis tells the story of a former employee who came by the store to say hello after the new website had launched. "She had been with us on our old system," Davis explains, "and when she saw how simple things are now on Miva, she was just hooting and hollering! She couldn't believe how streamlined everything is."

## A Platform for the Future

Although the new Miva site has helped Davis solve many of the problems that plagued Coolest Shoes while on the old platform, she doesn't see Miva's benefits as solely remedial. "Miva is clearly sophisticated enough for my business today," she explains. "But the process of building this new site has given me great comfort that they are also a platform my business can grow with."

"We're very excited about this upcoming season," Davis says, "especially after what a trial 2013 was. Our enhanced SEO on the Miva site is driving additional traffic, and the new integration between all of our business systems puts us in a position to capitalize on the growth without having the workload smother us. With our new site, it feels as if, suddenly, we've arrived!" M

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