



Powered by **MIVA**

Essential Depot

“On Miva we can dream up things and implement them in a day. We can do things we never imagined with other ecommerce providers.”

— **Derek Hodges** | President & CEO, Essential Depot

Have the complexities of your business outgrown the capabilities of your ecommerce platform?

Essential Depot realized it was time for a change, and they chose Miva for a powerful solution that boosts revenue, saves time, and supercharges company growth.

Problem

- » Cookie-cutter platforms can't handle the complexities of your business, but some enterprise-level solutions can be overkill.

Solutions with Miva

- » Miva offers the flexibility and power you need to integrate with the rest of your systems and fuel your company's growth.

Results

↑ **20%** INCREASE IN ONLINE SALES

↑ **52%** FASTER SITE LOAD TIMES

When Derek Hodges wanted to build an online ecommerce business, he knew exactly where to start. As a writer with a network of sites focused on the natural health industry, he saw a clear opportunity to provide ingredients for the hand-made soap making community. In 2009 he launched Essential Depot and started selling high-quality food-grade sodium hydroxide (commonly known as lye) to soap makers.

Today Essential Depot sells a wide variety of premium materials for the production of soap, perfume, and other bath and body care products. The company now also offers their own pre-made soaps, and their experience with selling chemical components online has led to them becoming a trusted provider of key supplies for the e-cigarette and hydrogen fuel cell industries.

Closing ProStores

To launch the first Essential Depot website, Derek Hodges used ProStores as his ecommerce platform. “I wanted a store that would easily integrate with eBay,” Hodges explains, “and since

ProStores was owned by eBay it made a lot of sense at the time. The shopping cart was fairly pedestrian, but the implementation was quick and it was pretty easy to use.”

In the summer of 2014, eBay announced they were closing down both ProStores and Magento Go, their other ecommerce platform aimed at small business owners. Hodges says the closure was disruptive, but ultimately instrumental in helping Essential Depot move forward. “My business had grown,” he says, “and there was functionality I wanted that ProStores couldn't provide. When eBay announced the shutdown I took the opportunity to look around at other providers.”

For ProStores customers in search of a new ecommerce solution, eBay had two platforms they recommended. “They were trying to push customers to Magento Enterprise,” Hodges says, “or for shops like mine where Magento Enterprise was overkill and way too expensive, they were working with Bigcommerce to port stores over.”

"I don't want a cookie-cutter approach, I want a tool kit to build my business."

—Derek Hodges
President & CEO, Essential Depot



Finding a New Platform

"Hodges hired developers to build test implementations of the Essential Depot site on Bigcommerce, Volusion, and Magento. "ProStores tried to push us to Bigcommerce," he says, "but I figured out pretty quickly they don't have the functionality we need on that platform. They have a cookie-cutter approach to building sites and we wouldn't have been able to customize what we wanted."

After encountering the same issue with Volusion, Hodges saw that neither platform would work for him. "The problem with these platforms is that customizability is very limited," he explains. "For instance, we have customers all over the world, so the ability to handle the complexities of international shipping is an important capability for us. Bigcommerce and Volusion couldn't even compete here because they didn't have the capability to handle what we needed."

"With Bigcommerce and Volusion," he continues, "you're stuck with limited features and a limited ability to customize the platform. I don't want a cookie-cutter approach, I want a tool kit to build my business."

On the other end of the spectrum, Hodges also considered Magento. "Magento has the tool kit," he says, "but it's just so much more expensive. When it became clear Bigcommerce wouldn't work, I was really close to having Magento give us a quote. But I knew the price would be steep and I knew they didn't have an in-house development team to help us build the site. We're a relatively small company without the resources to build the site ourselves."

Hodges then looked into Miva and was pleased with what he found. "Miva fills the void for someone like me," he says. "I spoke with them, and after the initial conversation I knew right away there wasn't really any question. Miva was the right platform for us for a whole bunch of reasons. They had all the features we needed, a professional services group that would be able to help with our build, and a cost of entry that made much more sense than the other options we were considering."

Upgrading to Miva

Derek Hodges first spoke with Miva in the fall of 2014, and started development on the new Essential Depot site in November. "Miva was very easy to work with," he says, "and their professional services team was excellent. We worked with them to get a design we liked, and then we added all the checkout logic. They were remarkably accommodating during the build, and we appreciated being able to rely on their expertise. I loved the fact that Miva has a professional in-house design team. This allowed us to put our faith in them for the conversion instead of relying on a third-party for the whole process."

The new Essential Depot site went live in January 2015, two days before ProStores shut down for good. "The transition was smooth and the launch was clean," Hodges says. He notes three key features of the new site that have helped fuel his company's growth.

Complex International Shipping

"Since our customers are everywhere," Hodges says, "one of the most important features for us is that

our ecommerce platform can handle international shipping. And it's not just the ability to have an international shipping address. Many of the products we sell are chemicals and the shipping of these materials is governed by hazardous materials laws." Hodges explains that these hazmat shipping policies vary by country. "We built things so that our main site is identical for all of our customers, but then the checkout process is customized based on the country we're shipping to."

He also explains that various countries have additional import restrictions and invoicing needs. "A good example is the UK," he says. "When someone in England orders a product, we have to ship with a commercial invoice that includes a special set of information for import and tax purposes." Specifically, he says the invoice must include the appropriate Harmonized Tariff code. "With Miva," Hodges continues, "this code gets added automatically to any international order that needs it. This is a feature we were able to implement with our initial launch, whereas with anyone else it would have been a one or two year job to build the capability."

Flexibility & Customization

"Miva's power and flexibility go beyond the international shipping piece we built," Hodges says. "We can specify an unlimited number of custom fields for our products and our cart, and we can present them in any order we want. The tool kit is great, the back end is great, and the flexibility is great."

Results With Miva

↑ \$480,000

IN NEW ANNUAL
INTERNATIONAL REVENUE

🕒 132

MAN-HOURS SAVED
PER MONTH

🚚 33%

DECREASE IN
SHIPPING ERRORS

Hodges says customizing the Miva platform is fairly straightforward. "On Miva we can dream up things and implement them in a day." He also expects to utilize Miva's Managed Account Program (MAP) for changes that are more complex. "Miva's in-house design support services are excellent," he says. "They are responsive and fast, which isn't something we would have had with a platform like Magento. We would have just been at their mercy for any post-deployment customizations."

Ease of Use & Site Performance

Hodges points out that the flexibility of the Miva platform does not come at the expense of day-to-day usability. "It was important to us that the site be user-friendly after the initial build," he says. "The new Miva 9 back end abilities are just excellent. Our marketing, shipping, and product departments are all linked, and anyone from any department can go in and make changes and do inventory control."

"The ease of use on the interface is great," he continues. "We have the ability to really apply any logic we want in the checkout process. With price grouping, inventory kits, and the limitless customization we can do on shipping rates, sales, and coupons, we can optimize our business and serve our customers in very specific unique ways. We've seen that with Miva we can do things we never imagined with other ecommerce providers."

Finally, Hodges praises the performance of the Miva platform. "The look and feel are amazing," he says, "and our customers have given us nothing but praise for the new site. The design and functionality we have now are above and beyond what we were hoping for in our original specification." He says that even with Miva's feature-rich platform,

"Miva fills the void for someone like me. They were the right platform for us for a whole bunch of reasons."

—Derek Hodges
President & CEO, Essential Depot

Essential Depot is seeing page load times that are 52% faster than on their old site. "Everything we have now runs so quickly and smoothly," he says, "from the integrated videos on the front page, to the 100-plus price groups we're able to use, to the full integration with our social media platforms."

Results with Miva

Essential Depot has achieved impressive results with their new Miva website. "Sales revenue is up 20%," Hodges says, "and we've seen an additional \$480,000

in annual international orders due to internationally enabled check-out processes that were not possible on our old cart."

"Miva's automation of the Harmonized Tariff codes saves us 32 man-hours per month," he continues, "and we've also seen around 100 additional man-hours saved every month due to other site customizations. These man-hours saved translate into roughly \$1,800 per month in cost savings."

Hodges says shipping errors have been reduced by 33% due to Miva's direct integration with ShipWorks. "We are also working toward achieving ISO 9000 compliance," he says, "and Miva's customizations and integrations help enable these efforts."

In the end, Derek Hodges is thrilled to have his site on Miva. "We feel like we have this sports car," he says, "and we're finally on the freeway. It's doing everything we want, and we have the ability to supercharge the engine to fit our needs." 





Join Tens of Thousands of Merchants Using Miva

Phone: 800.608.MIVA | Email: sales@miva.com | www.miva.com