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Sewing Parts Online

What happens when a successful Brick-and-Mortar retailer chooses the wrong e-commerce platform to start selling online?

Sewing Parts Online discovered that their initial e-commerce platform hampered expansion and kept them from creating the right experience for their customers. They ultimately turned to Miva for a powerful, customizable platform that will facilitate their company's growth.

Problem

- » Limits on the number of store categories
- » Reactionary development plans
- » Unresponsive and delayed support

"With Miva we can provide our customers the best possible shopping experience."

— Steve Kocourek
Director of Web Development

The scenario is increasingly common in today's business world. A successful brick-and-mortar business opens shop online hoping to supplement sales and develop a new income stream. But instead of being a secondary part of the enterprise, the website takes off like a rocket. Online sales quickly outpace business done through the storefront, and what once was a regional, location-based business now becomes an e-commerce company serving customers world-wide.

For these types of businesses, scalability concerns rise to the top of the priority list. Can our production meet growing demand? Can our customer support team maintain high service standards? And perhaps most importantly, can our website scale as our business grows?

Tennessee-based Sewing Parts Online is a company that has lived this story and faced these questions. After successfully growing their vacuum and sewing retail store for eleven years, they launched their online business, in 2008, to address a void they saw in the online sewing community. While there were many websites selling sewing machine parts, no one site made the process simple and comprehensive. Now, instead of scouring various manufacturer and third-party websites, customers can visit Sewing Parts Online for one-stop access to over 14,000 sewing machine parts and accessories.

When owners George and Terri Kocourek launched their site, they saw it as a logical extension of the retail store. "We were trying to solve a problem we had with finding sewing machine parts online," said Steve Kocourek, Director of Web Development for the company. "We were just hoping to provide an online place to find parts, and for the first year our sales were really slow." During the first year of web operations, Sewing Parts Online received a handful of orders in a week. Now, five years later, they do over 200 orders per day.

To accommodate the growth they've experienced since their launch, the Sewing Parts Online team has expanded from three people to fourteen. They handle customer service and order fulfillment in-house, and have a dedicated technology team maintaining the website. The retail store continues to function as it did before, but the website now accounts for 80% of the company's total business.

Growing Pains

As Sewing Parts Online can attest, one of the most important components for an e-commerce website is the functionality of its shopping cart platform. So what happens when that platform becomes a constraint to the company's growth?

Solution

- » Sewing Parts Online switched to Miva for a platform that gives them complete control over all aspects of their store.

Sewing Parts Online met this constraint two years after they launched their online operations. "We originally built the site using Network Solutions for our shopping cart," said Steve Kocourek. "We chose them because they had a complete cart package available, and it was relatively easy for us to get going." But as traffic and sales grew, Kocourek and his team found themselves bumping up against the limitations of the Network Solutions platform.

As with many e-commerce sites, the shopping cart platform behind Sewing Parts Online supports much more than the final "check out" step of the customer's work flow. For instance, when customers search or browse the online catalogue, they are already interacting with the shopping cart. Since their inventory is so expansive, and since the typical customer's work flow will take place entirely in the shopping cart platform, the power and flexibility of this piece of the website was very important to Sewing Parts Online.

With Network Solutions, Kocourek and his team found themselves faced with some key limitations:

- » The shopping cart had a limit of 3,000 categories. This may provide enough headroom for other types of businesses, but with over 14,000 individual items, Sewing Parts Online needed a cart that didn't cap their category count.
- » To try and keep up with Sewing Parts Online's growth, Network Solutions was modifying its own product and development plans as frequently as every six months. This created problems in the product, as the platform updates were reactionary and haphazard.

- » Kocourek found the customer service with Network Solutions to be subpar. They were slow in developing new features, and slow in allowing Sewing Parts Online to develop their own new features on the platform.

After a year of trying to work with Network Solutions to improve their site, the Sewing Parts Online team came to a pivotal realization. "When we looked at everything we wanted to do to improve the shopping experience," said Kocourek, "we began to see that getting there with Network Solutions was not even possible. We felt let down and depressed that we couldn't support our customers the way we wanted to on the Network Solutions platform."

Moving Forward With Miva

Sewing Parts Online decided to leave behind the shopping cart platform that was constraining their growth. While the flexibility to handle 5,000-plus categories was a necessary criterion for their new platform, Sewing Parts Online also wanted to be sure that their new shopping cart provider would be responsive and willing to work with them to help implement and customize their site.

After short-listing a handful of vendors, Kocourek said that they ultimately went with Miva because of a combination of factors. Miva's platform did not limit the amount of products or categories, but again, the team behind the platform was equally important. "During our trial phase, Miva worked hard to answer all of our questions and find answers to all of the problems that we had," said Kocourek.

Miva's shopping cart platform does not limit the number of customers, products, categories, or pages a site can have. While companies can choose from a large assortment of professional, modern templates, the platform also allows for a wide range of customizations. Miva offers 24/7 support for their product, and also offers access to in-house developers who can perform customizations on behalf of clients.

For Sewing Parts Online, this additional development assistance was an

important part of why they chose Miva. As they were building their new site, Kocourek and his team wanted to retain certain aspects of how the site originally worked in order to provide a consistent experience for their customers. It was also critical to keep certain pieces that were necessary to maintain their search engine rankings. Even though Miva's platform wasn't natively compatible with the aspects Kocourek wanted to retain, Miva's team developed a workable solution.

Kocourek also had Miva's developers build a custom Quick Find feature for the site. "If a customer needs a part for their Singer sewing machine, there are hundreds of sub-categories in that brand," Kocourek explained. "Before we implemented Quick Find, customers had to scroll through a list of every model number to find their specific machine." Now, the Quick Find feature provides a search bar at the top of each category page that customers can use to quickly narrow their sub-category and part choices.

Sewing Parts Online went live with their new Miva website in early 2013. They saw immediate revenue growth after the conversion, and they believe the bump was directly attributable to the improved shopping cart platform. "That first month on Miva was our biggest sales month ever," said Kocourek. "Since then, we have seen improvement in our conversion rates, a decrease in bounce rates, and our average order value has increased by 10%."

Kocourek explained that the new site helped their business grow in these measureable ways because with Miva, they've been able to improve the buying experience for their customers. "These gains are primarily due to the increased ease-of-use for our customers, and to the improved organization we can accomplish without the category limits," he said. Kocourek also pointed out that their site runs measurably faster with Miva.

Switching to Miva positioned Sewing Parts Online for growth by giving them a powerful, customizable shopping cart platform coupled with the product and development support to help them make their vision a reality. 