



Agri Supply agri-supply.com Expand into the Catalog /Internet Channel



Challenge

Agri Supply was expanding into the catalog/internet market and wanted to find an order management system and company that could successfully handle this opportunity and grow with it.

Solution

It implemented Data Management Associates' MACH software system as its catalog and Internet order management software.

Results

Agri Supply has experienced substantial growth in their catalog/internet sales and customer base. More than 17% of all orders come from the internet.



Agri Supply is a family owned group of retail farm stores in the Southeast United States. Started in 1962, they have grown their product line to include supplies for home, garden and farm. Agri Supply had an inside the store catalog business, which had continued to grow. In 1999, they recognized the opportunity that a full fledged catalog channel could mean to their company's growth.

They were looking for several important attributes in the new order management software. Access to real-time inventory and ease of use were key. The ability to communicate with the central office system (including accounting) and view other stores' inventory also was a requirement. Credit card pre-authorization and after-sale posting was important. For the warehouse personnel, the system needed to include a form for picking orders by bin locations.

Knowing that the retail and catalog businesses were very different, the Agri Supply management wanted to increase their chances of success by finding an order management software company that not only met their feature requirements, but was an expert in the catalog industry and was willing to work with Agri Supply to meet their custom needs.

"Entering into the unknown was our biggest challenge. Our success was retail, but just because you're successful in one business was no guarantee for another," says Waverly Barnes, General Manager. "The two were and are two totally different animals. We needed a partner to help us make this a success."

By September of 1999, Agri Supply management determined that MACH had the built-in functions that would suit their needs and give them the ability to expand their mail-order business. Just as

importantly, they felt that DMA's management and programmers were very receptive to customizing the software for the communication feature the company required. DMA began training Agri Supply personnel in October and in November they began using MACH.

"The initial startup of MACH went very smooth. Our biggest challenge was the flow of data between MACH and the central office." Jerry Boswell, Mail Order Center Manager, says. "There were some issues that weren't anticipated in the planning stage. But we worked together to correlate the accounting functions and finalize the implementation."

The benefits of using the system have been extensive. In fact, it has been so successful that in 2001, the company decided to expand yet again into the Internet. By moving into this new channel, Agri Supply could provide customers a store that is open all of the time, and information on all of its 25,000 items, not just those listed in the print catalog. A web presence also saved expenses because customers could order via the web saving Agri Supply the expense of a phone call and a CSR's time.

Since the implementation of MACH, Agri Supply's sales have continued to skyrocket. With that have come challenges that the two companies have met together. For instance, the processing of motor freight orders has increased enormously in the past few years. Previously, Agri Supply was writing up each bill of lading by hand. DMA worked with it to solve the problem by enabling bills of lading to be printed through the system with the person processing the order keying in the information and printing out the bill. When the carrier picks up the shipment, it is manifested and posted to billing. This change has saved the company hours of personnel time.

Boswell says the advantages of the systems have been many. He cited the user-friendly software as one big advantage. Agri Supply employs CSR temps during their high volume months and can train them in order entry in a matter of hours. Though easy to use, its reporting capabilities also have been important to Agri Supply's growth. MACH's custom reports give the company the ability to review customer stats and product sales in a number of ways. That has greatly improved their mailing strategies and catalog planning. Boswell also pointed out the flexibility of the DMA staff.

"The company has worked with us on customizing the software to meet our needs," he said. "They work with us to find the best solution for our business."

In the future, Boswell said he looks forward to a continued winning relationship with MACH and DMA.

"We could not have had the increase in mail-order volume we have experienced without MACH," Boswell said, "I look forward to continuing that success together."

