



CLIENT

Hirsch Pipe & Supply



LOCATION

Van Nuys, CA



INDUSTRY

Plumbing, Heating, and Industrial Supply



PROJECT

Digital Commerce Growth and Content Enrichment

PROBLEM

Since they opened their doors in 1933, Hirsch Pipe & Supply's motto has simply been "Hirsch has it..." From product selection and customer service to promotions and incentives, they have always prided themselves on having everything their customers want. However, when it came to their digital branch, there were two things the plumbing supplier admitted they didn't have: a modernized eCommerce platform and better product content.

From a usability perspective, their outdated eCommerce technology lacked the functionality and flexibility to best manage their site and serve their customers. With limited user features affecting their efficiency and anticipated security issues coming into play, an upgraded eCommerce platform was a business necessity.

Adding to Hirsch's inefficiency was their manual process for product content curation. Together, their two content creators spent nearly 40 hours a week searching for product information for their online catalog, relying on manufacturer and third-party sites for product descriptions and images. Brian Whitehead, eCommerce Operations Manager for Hirsch, said the process was both laborious and time-consuming.

"Our team would go to manufacturer sites first, thinking that it would be the most reliable source, but they had a difficult time finding content, especially when it came to generic rough plumbing supplies. Plus, it was a nightmare trying

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Digital Marketing Manager
Hirsch Pipe & Supply



to keep up with manufacturer updates and discontinued items," Whitehead admitted. "We knew we needed to get away from this cumbersome process."

SOLUTION

To help tackle their digital branch challenges, Hirsch looked to Affiliated Distributors (AD) for assistance. As the largest contractor and industrial products wholesale buying group in North America, AD provides its members tools and support to grow their business. In 2015, AD partnered with eCommerce and content services provider, Unilog, to give members a competitive edge in the digital arena. Through their partnership, AD members can subscribe to their enormous product catalog – over 3.5 million unique, enriched SKUs – which they can sell on their website. In addition, members can launch or enhance their digital branch with Unilog's all-in-one eCommerce platform. This dual-combination eCommerce platform and product content solution gives AD members everything they need to advance in the marketplace.

"When we started our investigation into an upgraded eCommerce platform, a big selling factor was that Unilog's platform integrated the AD catalog so easily," explained Colin Harbut, Digital Marketing Manager at Hirsch. "It was a fitting combination, and the primary reason we went with Unilog."

Harbut said another benefit that sealed the deal was Unilog's mobile app offering that gives Hirsch customers convenient ways to find and purchase products using features on their mobile device, such as an image search using the phone's camera or the barcode scanner to identify a specific item.

When Hirsch's enhanced website – complemented with enriched product data from AD's catalog – went live in March of 2019, the difference, according to Whitehead and Harbut, was night and day.

RESULTS

Hirsch's new digital branch has become their key differentiator in the distribution marketplace. It's much more than just another sales channel for the plumbing supplier; it's also a trusted resource for their customers and staff. Hirsch.com allows them to research and compare products, see store availability, access manuals and spec sheets, check account and promotional activity, plus get the latest news and updates.

Whitehead said, while their previous site was functional, the Unilog platform provides a host of features that greatly benefits customers and helps their staff service them much more efficiently. "From a usability standpoint, we

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love everything about the platform: the layout, the search filtering, and the number of tools to help manage our customers on the backend."

Their enhanced product content is also a game-changer. With so many rich attributes available now, site visitors can use the filter function to quickly drill down product results. Whitehead acknowledged their previous platform didn't handle attribute filtering very well, but the bigger problem was the fact that their product data lacked those rich attributes in the first place. "Being able to filter product results on category and search result pages is a huge added benefit for us," he remarked.

In fact, he said more employees are now using Hirsch.com when they're assisting customers at the counter. "The real testament to the quality of our content comes from our own staff," asserted Whitehead. "They use our site to locate products for customers rather than Google searches or even our own ERP system because the content is that much better."

The positive business impacts from their upgraded site and content run the gamut – from time savings and fewer data errors to more site traffic and conversions. But probably their biggest gain is with their average order value (AOV), which has skyrocketed over the past year. "With the AD content and Unilog platform working together, we've more than doubled our average order value," Harbut said. "We couldn't be happier."

Overall, Hirsch has made tremendous strides with the adoption of the Unilog platform powered by AD content. Their digital branch has produced far-reaching effects above and beyond their expectations.

Better customer utilization

Hirsch has many different types of customers, from individual plumbers to larger organizations. Many use the site for more than just placing orders – they check inventory, pay invoices, compare products, and watch promotional activity. The fact that they're utilizing Hirsch.com for other purposes than just transacting means they're keeping their customer base engaged. "We're learning that our customers come in a lot of different flavors, and the great thing about our site is that it addresses each one's unique needs," said Whitehead. "The user experience and functionality feedback has been very positive from everyone."

Another reason their website adds value is because it allows buyers to do the research they want on their own and then choose how they want to transact – whether it be in store or online. "With our site, they can spend three hours researching product data online before making a purchasing decision," Harbut contended. "That's the beauty of rich content."

With their customers enjoying the richer content they've provided for their more than 38,000-item catalog, Hirsch hopes to further grow their web catalog through their AD partnership.

Significant analytics insight

To monitor their site's performance and to gain a better understanding of their customer's buying behaviors, Hirsch utilizes two analytics tools: Google Analytics to capture high-level metrics like number of sessions, time on site, and bounce rate, and Matomo to drill down to more customer-specific insight. Harbut said Matomo provides a more granular look at their buyers, such as the visitor path they've taken, what items they're looking at, and whether they've abandoned a cart.

Hirsch couldn't be happier with the results of their analytics findings. In addition to their average order value more than doubling, the distributor has seen nearly every metric rise since they launched their new site, including line-item order counts, number of visitors by source, and e-mail marketing campaign performance. A major catalyst in their rising metrics is their digitally engaged customers. Not only have they seen a 61% rise in users per month, they've also found visitors are spending more time on their site. As a result, total revenue for digital branch adopters is up 20%. Harbut added, "We're seeing more line items on orders from all categories with the Unilog platform. That indicates to us that our customers are having no trouble finding what they're looking for on our site."

Growing internal adoption

When Hirsch made their first foray into eCommerce with their original platform five years ago, they struggled to gain adoption. This time around they've focused heavily on creating awareness and advocates by showing employees the value of their new digital branch. Consequently, they're experiencing a higher rate of adoption across the organization, from their principals and regional managers to middle managers and in-store staff.

Whitehead said he hopes adoption will continue to grow throughout their organization, and especially with sales, so that eventually they can provide a richer transaction for customers. "My goal is to get to a place where our salespeople play a more consultative role," he explained. "We're working so that sales can access a customer's account, with their permission, to review their cart before they transact. With the ability to view a customer order before it's placed, they can suggest items that may be better for their application, or products they may have forgotten to add to their cart. It's just another way we want to be able to assist the customer and show them we have their back."

ONGOING SUPPORT AND NEXT PHASES

As part of their ongoing digital journey, Hirsch began planning phase two of their digital branch shortly after their initial go-live. This next phase accommodates custom development such as multi-user management for a job account, an estimator function for bids, and a module that allows customers to check their promotion trip points. They are nearly complete with their phase two integrations and are now finalizing their phase three "wish list" of items. With most of their core development complete, Hirsch is now focusing efforts on adoption, marketing, and growth.

"Overall, we have made tremendous strides in our eCommerce offering with the adoption of the Unilog platform powered by AD content," asserted Harbut. "There's no question we will continue to see more engagement and revenue driven through our eCommerce channel over the coming months and years."

ABOUT HIRSCH PIPE & SUPPLY

Hirsch Pipe & Supply has been providing quality plumbing supplies to the Southern California area since 1933. In addition to 23 branch locations and a central distribution center to serve local customers, they also provide sales and service to contractors and wholesalers across the U.S. and the Pacific Rim.

ABOUT UNILOG

Unilog is a global technology company that delivers powerful, affordable eCommerce solutions for the B2B marketplace. Our cloud-based eCommerce platform and product data enrichment services help distributors, manufacturers, and wholesalers increase online sales, reduce cost to serve, and enhance their digital channel. Unilog is an ISO 9001:2008- and ISO 8000-certified company with North American headquarters outside of Philadelphia, PA and international headquarters in Bangalore, India. For more information, visit www.unilogcorp.com.



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