



Cashing in on technology

Independent wholesaler Savage & Whitten has enjoyed a surge in sales in recent years, trebling turnover. Managing growth of this scale and speed calls for an innovative IT solution and Savage & Whitten has achieved that with the Sanderson delivered wholesale solution, Swords.

Savage & Whitten is Ireland's fastest-growing independent wholesaler. The business was formed from the merger of Newry Cash and Carry and J and E Whitten in 2000. Managing Director Mark Windebank took charge of the business in 2005, and as joint owner brought a fresh perspective to the company.

When Windebank joined, the business had revenues of just over £14.5m. Today, Savage & Whitten is a £46m, 96-employee company with a new site and big plans. The company has used Swords, the specialist delivered wholesale and cash & carry system from Sanderson, for many years – and more recently the technology has been used extensively to support the company's expanded business activities. "We run our entire business on Swords, from order placement to

final accounts," says Windebank.

Savage & Whitten is now outsmarting its rivals, securing new business as well as growing revenues from its existing customer base. Windebank explains: "We are, for the most part, a delivered wholesale business with less than 5% of revenue from cash and carry, and we have expanded our reach since I came on board. Back then, most of the business was done within a 30-mile radius, but now that's extended to 100 miles."

The company has also focused hard on sales – its field sales force numbers 12, with a further six telesales reps in the office. "We had to invest in our sales capability to grow the business," says Windebank. "We now have significant marketing activity and promotions, too." A third of Savage & Whitten's £46m revenue comes from

Case study at a glance

About Savage & Whitten

A highly successful delivered wholesale business and Sanderson customer for more than a decade

Challenges

- Secure new business and grow existing customer base
- Improve efficiency of internal operations to support growth
- Increase warehouse productivity
- Expand sales capability - online and field sales

Solutions

- Swords Wholesale Distribution System
- Voice Order Picking
- Stock and Warehouse Management
- Web Ordering System
- Mobile CRM Solution

Benefits

- Streamlined warehouse processes, with lower operational costs
- Revenue growth of 17-20% during each of the last three years
- Voice technology boosted picking rate by 35%
- Full stock visibility and control
- Web revenue: zero to £7.5m in 18 months
- In-full delivery improved



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Mark Windebank
Managing Director

the 75 stores it has developed under the ‘Today’s’ brand. The remaining two thirds comes from a further 1,000 customers. “We have a strong degree of loyalty from customers operating under our Today’s brand,” says Windebank. “Although the economy has meant the market has been pretty flat, we have gained significant market share, growing revenue by between 17-20% during each of the last three years.”

Despite its rapid growth, Savage & Whitten is proud of the close relationship it has retained with customers. Crucially too, it has been able to make internal processes much more efficient: “The Sanderson system has allowed us to reduce our internal operations costs in the warehouse. It’s also helped us to be much more proactive in terms of sales,” he says.

Increased sales

Windebank cites online ordering as a case in point: “Sanderson helped us to develop online ordering within Swords. From a standing start 18

months ago, the web now accounts for 16% of our revenue – around £7.5m. We are really driving hard on this and have budgeted for 20% by the end of 2012 – though I’ve no doubt this can be exceeded,” he predicts. “We are pushing technology, pushing sales and pushing marketing – it’s very different to the traditional focus of a business in this industry, where price typically drives everything.”

However, finding new customers is only part of the equation, says Windebank. Equally important is the ability to deliver the right service for each and every one of them: “It’s about getting the service right and making it easy for the customer. We offer every method for ordering and we work with the customer to find the best solution for them. We still have to be competitive, but good pricing is a given and it’s all the other things we can do that really make a difference to customer retention.”

And it’s working. “I believe we offer a much more professional service than our rivals, because the Sanderson system allows us to



Swords voice picking technology enables Savage & Whitten to pick orders more quickly and more accurately

operate our business efficiently, accurately and in a very customer-responsive manner.”

Accurate order picking

When Windebank joined, the business had already seen a leap in warehouse productivity and efficiency through the implementation of Radio Frequency technology. Further key changes took place in 2010, when Savage & Whitten moved to a new location and decided to upgrade technology for the new site. “The bigger players had already moved to voice picking. To make certain we were at the forefront and getting most from technology, I wanted us to move to voice picking too. Our business was continuing to grow and the alternative to voice was to put more people on the job – and that wasn’t the right thing to do.”

Sanderson worked with Savage & Whitten to specify the solution and appropriate hardware. Voice order picking enables warehouse operators to pick orders more quickly and more accurately. Operators wear a headset

and microphone; instructions are relayed to the operator on what and where to pick, and operators confirm picks directly without having to key or scan data to the system. Initially, there was some scepticism from the operators. “Some of them were convinced they could pick more quickly with the scanners,” recalls Windebank, “but I was convinced it was the right decision – after all, if the big players had investigated all options and chosen voice, it had to be the way to go.”

He was proved right and even the doubters couldn’t fail to be impressed by the figures; productivity has gone sky high since the implementation.

“Our picking rate went up by 35% last year – and we believe it can improve further this year,” says Windebank. And this was achieved in a warehouse already enjoying high productivity with RF technology.

Improved warehouse efficiency

The installation of voice technology went hand in hand with an upgrade of the Swords stock and warehouse management module, which Windebank believes has driven more gains by making processes more streamlined.

“The warehouse management software has helped improve the overall running of our facility,” he states. “It has helped us to boost the in-full delivery rate, improving service levels by 2%. This is not just because the picking activity is more efficient, but also because our control of stock is so much better. We now use Swords to manage every item of stock, giving us greater accuracy and full visibility.”

In fact, the data is so reliable that Savage & Whitten no longer carries out time-consuming stock takes. “We don’t do stock takes at all any more, not even at year end,” comments Windebank. “Our stock control is so good we just don’t need to. We only need to check out any abnormalities or exceptions.”

Every bin location is registered on

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Managing Director



the Sanderson system – not only useful for picking, but also for putting away. Each forklift driver uses the system to manage stock positions: “We know exactly where each stock item resides and each bin has date references.”

“Swords is a great system for this industry. The next generation of customers doesn’t want to deal with paperwork in the old way – and Sanderson enables us to stay ahead of the game.”

Mark Windebank
Managing Director

Increased service offerings

Savage & Whitten is continually striving to find ways to add value, increase efficiency and improve service. Windebank says the next stage is to extend Sword’s benefits out to the field. “A couple of our sales reps have a hand-held device with scanner pen, which they use to take customer orders. But this is now fairly old technology and we are about to equip all our sales reps with a new tablet, fully integrated with the Sanderson system, which will

allow everyone to have accurate, up-to-the minute information and will enable them to answer queries on the spot during customer visits.” Not only will it present a better image, it will also save each rep a lot of time, as they will no longer need to print off information for each visit.

Often, fast-growth businesses lose the personal touch. That’s far from the case at Savage & Whitten: the company is using Swords to drive internal efficiency improvements, but also to expand its service offering while retaining the one-to-one feel that customers really value.

“Sanderson has helped us to give our customers the choice of ordering by whatever means they find most convenient: by telephone, online or in person. By using Swords to its full potential throughout our business, we’ve been able to drive a three-fold expansion while still retaining the first-class service we are renowned for,” says Windebank.

Swords, says Windebank, is a cut above the rest: “It is a great system for this industry. The next generation of customers doesn’t want to deal with paperwork in the old way – and the Sanderson system enables us to stay ahead of the game.”

About Savage & Whitten



Savage & Whitten is Ireland’s fastest-growing independent wholesaler. The business was formed from the merger of Newry Cash and Carry and J and E Whitten in 2000.

Managing director Mark Windebank took charge of the business in 2005. Since he joined, revenue has trebled from £14.5 million to £46 million.

Using the Sanderson system, the 96-employee business is outsmarting its rivals and securing new business with a new online ordering facility, sophisticated voice picking technology and a mobile solution for field sales representatives.



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Sanderson Multi-Channel Solutions Ltd
Sanderson House
Manor Road
Coventry
CV1 2GF