M&S go global with Stibo Systems

Background

No high street store will ever be quite as British as Marks and Spencer (M&S). Founded in 1884 and a ubiquitous presence in towns and cities ever since, M&S now employs over 80,000 staff in 852 UK stores and in its international territories. With 57% of the company's £10.3bn group revenue in its quality food division and 43% in its home wear and clothing, M&S has become the go-to venue for generations of shoppers whenever they're looking for something that's a little more stylish or luxurious. And while the English might joke that every single true Brit buys their underpants and socks from M&S, there's an element of truth to even this – M&S remain market leaders in both women's wear and lingerie.

Challenges

Although well known and much loved on the British high street, M&S is also a force in international retailing. It has 480 international stores across 59 territories and £1.1bn – almost a tenth of its revenue – comes from abroad. With £800 million of revenue coming through digital channels, M&S are focusing on consolidating their position as a leading international, multichannel retailer.

Their website was relaunched on a new platform in February 2014 and currently has over seven million registered users. However, the challenge was to migrate over to this new iteration from their previous Amazon-based system without losing users or sales and while also keeping track of the 20,000 products on offer. Additionally, with technological investment putting tablets in the hands of store staff and smartphone apps in the hands of customers, this renewed website also had to work for everyone, in every country.

Customer Details

Marks and Spencer
www.marksandspencer.com

Industry

International, multichannel retailer

Challenge

- ◆ To successfully migrate 20,000 online products over to a new website
- ◆ To tailor product availability to nine different international versions of the website
- ◆ To make savings by reducing internal complexities and removing pain points.

Solution

- ◆ Stibo Systems' STEP chosen as the new website's product information management (PIM) system
- ◆ STEP adopted a year before the website launch in order to put product data in place
- ◆ A period of dual running, with new products continually added to the new website as it ran alongside the old.

Continuing Benefits

- ◆ A significant reduction in manual entry, and therefore in input errors
- ◆ An ability to manage product content for multiple websites in multiple languages
- ◆ Increased automation due to STEP's definable business rules and tailored hierarchies.

M&S

EST. 1884

Solution

"A new PIM gave us the opportunity to actually address some of the pain points we had in the business relating to our existing product information," says Rebecca Chamberlain of M&S.com's development team. "We'd had problems with data quality and there was an awful lot of unnecessary double keying in. By introducing STEP, we could see we were going to have structured attributes to give us more consistent data as well as a big reduction in all that manual keying."

M&S went live with Stibo Systems' STEP system a full year before their new website launched because the same 20,000 products that featured on the old website needed PIM attributes adding as well as to be integrated into the new selling hierarchies. This led to a period of dual running, with one team adding hundreds of products each week to the new website, as the existing one continued to trade. "We also utilised STEP's workflow functionality as we launched the website," notes Rebecca. "By designing the workflow to manage the enrichment and publication of products to our selling channels, it gave us both efficiency and control."

With STEP as the source of all ecommerce product data, product information appeared in a consistent manner, even though M&S required 585 different product attributes to cover their inventory. Business rules also now prevent inconsistent data from appearing. For example, clothing can't be published online until all the sizes have appropriate customer-facing labels.

Less than six months after the successful launch of the UK website, there was an international deployment of STEP to support the eight M&S international sites, using five languages. It was at this point that M&S could start using a single system for all product data instead of two, with all the efficiencies that come with a significantly streamlined process.

"STEP gave us the ability to tailor the product range for each country," says Alison Taylor, business analyst in M&S's product information group. "That's important to us because we sell some things in the UK that we might not have the license to sell elsewhere, or that are problematic or simply not cost effective when it comes to shipping."

Additionally, even though all content is managed in English, the selling hierarchies automatically flag which products are sold internationally and send only this text to an external contractor for translation. This then appears on the international sites 24 to 48 hours after publication in the UK.

"STEP is an integral part of getting products onto our website," says Rebecca Chamberlain. A single, well managed source of data and increased automation have resulted in a system with reduced input error that's capable of dramatically reducing the time it takes for M&S to publish products on its website.

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>
> Rebecca Chamberlain
> Product Owner – Product information, M&S.com Development

About Stibo Systems

Stibo Systems is the global leader in multi-domain Master Data Management (MDM) solutions. Industry leaders rely on Stibo Systems to provide cross-channel consistency by linking product, customer, supplier data and other organisational data. This enables businesses to make more effective decisions, improve sales and build value. During the last 30 years, Stibo Systems has helped leading companies to develop a trusted source of strategic information. A privately held subsidiary of the Stibo A/S group, which was originally founded in 1794, Stibo Systems' corporate headquarters is located in Aarhus, Denmark.

For more information visit www.stibosystems.com