

Revamped e-commerce platform boosts conversion rates for Atlanta Falcons

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By Craig Guillot

From hats and jerseys to flags and bumper stickers, football fans love to show their pride and support for their favorite teams. While merchandise sales generally represent a small portion of a team's revenue, it can play an important role in building support among the fan base, which can lead to increased ticket sales and revenue from other sources.

Officially licensed merchandise is sold at all manner of retail outlets, but more and more, teams are driving sales through their own websites. For the Atlanta Falcons, optimizing its online presence with an upgraded platform and more interactivity has resulted in higher customer satisfaction and conversion rates and a better web experience.

The Falcons run two shopping mall stores and more than 20 stands at the Georgia Dome, its home stadium in downtown Atlanta. With the recent decision to change internal processes and bring fulfillment in-house, the Falcons needed a website that could easily integrate with internal systems and present an exciting, easy-to-use format for fans.

"We wanted a package that could provide that nice storefront but also integrate with the systems we already had without doing development work," says Don Norton, the team's manager of business information systems and executive support.

The Falcons enlisted the services of Cerritos, Calif.-based Ignify, a provider of ERP, business intelligence, CRM and e-commerce solutions for mid-size businesses. President Sandeep Walia says Ignify's goal is to bring together disparate accounting, logistics, marketing and web systems to create a seamless environment where orders flow smoothly from the web to the customer's door.

For the Falcons, that meant integrating the e-commerce store with Microsoft Dynamics GP, resulting in real-time information on merchandise availability and order fulfillment.

"It can almost create what we call 'zero-touch' orders, where you actually don't touch the order until it is on the floor of the warehouse," Walia says. "You just pick, pack and ship it."

The Falcons' marketing and promotion departments can gauge merchandise sales trends by using targeted promotions, real-time inventory reports and key metrics such as site visits, browser history, click-throughs and customer purchasing patterns.

The Falcons365.com storefront also has several new features to induce repeat visits, including multiple options for team apparel, direct-to-consumer promotions and newsletters that alert fans to new gear and in-store player appearances.

Greater shopping interactivity

A new "Coach's Choice" feature highlights head coach Mike Smith's favorite gear, and cross-channel features will allow for the purchase at participating retail stores of gift cards that can be used to buy Falcons gear online.

Together, the new features "help us better serve fans by giving up-to-the-minute details on the latest product lines and team promotions while delivering a much greater degree of shopping interactivity," says Chris DiPierri, the Falcons' director of retail.

Benefits of employing the Ignify e-commerce solution include a reduction in the amount of manual intervention required in order processing, thereby improving turnaround times and customer satisfaction. Other results include higher traffic because of search engine optimization and higher conversion rates because of a better experience.

The Falcons' web sales tend to be seasonal — most purchases occur during the height of football season — and Norton says that the near auto-drive capabilities of the new web platform will allow the team to focus on other merchandising opportunities.