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Plotting a New Path

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Aerosoles' new platform supports higher customer volume, fulfillment operations

Moving beyond its reputation as a leading designer footwear brand, Aerosoles Inc., has expanded into a multichannel retailer. Central to its retail strategy, Aerosoles is strengthening its online operations with a new online platform that can support increasing traffic volumes and data flowing across the site.

Edison, N.J.-based Aerosoles is a 20-year-old company that has transitioned from a well-recognized brand sold across major department stores into a footwear retailer with 130 stores in the United States (and additional locations worldwide). The privately held company also operates a direct channel comprised of a catalog and e-commerce site.

The company launched www.aerosoles.com in 1999, but last year Aerosoles realized the site was in need of an upgrade.

"The site was hosted by our technology partner, but this presented its share of challenges," Magnus Gustafsson, VP of direct marketing, Aerosoles, told *Chain Store Age*.

The configuration affected data-inventory upgrades and the company also lacked insight into customer information. "Most importantly, it was merely an order-taking vehicle," he said. "We were ready for a stronger Web presence, a better online experience, and a more seamless customer experience that mimicked the physical-store experience. It was time to relaunch the site on a new, more flexible platform."

A solution from Los Angeles-based e-commerce solutions provider Ignify helped Aerosoles achieve its goals.

"Ignify's eCommerce platform was better suited for our needs and corporate culture," Gustafsson said. "We began co-customizing the solution and launched the new platform in January."

One of the keys to Aerosoles' partnership with Ignify is the vendor's ability to support data as it flows across the site. This network support starts with the on-call functionality of three support providers, Ignify, Cyberverser and Hewlett Packard.

"If one provider's service goes down, the network is switched over to one of the other providers in less than three seconds so there is no disruption in service," he explained.

"The Ignify platform also monitors individual traffic and the individual user experience closely at the server level," he said. This ensures that product images and pages are loading at appropriate times, and that credit-card authorizations and payments are being flowed to payment gateways to streamline checkout."

With a secure network in place, Aerosoles had the support to add more functionality that can improve the customer experience. "We updated our previous site on a daily basis, so at the end of the day we had stagnant, old inventory," he explained.

As a result, Aerosoles merged Ignify with its catalog and Web channel order-fulfillment platform from CommercialWare, Westboro, Mass. Based on the inventory status codes CommercialWare feeds to the Web site, Aerosoles can instantly determine the availability of the merchandise.

If warehouse inventory for a certain style is either depleted or if the replenishment date is too far out, the system will fulfill orders from physical stores. "This backend process is transparent to the shopper," he said.

Ignify also supports more self-service functionality. In the past, for example, all orders were processed through a batch operation at the end of each day.

"If any orders were declined due to problems during checkout or credit-card payment issues, we were not alerted until the following day," he explained.

Real-time updates of the system enable shoppers to be alerted to issues due to transposed account numbers, missing address information or expired accounts.

Shoppers are also able to monitor order shipments, which is slashing inquiries into the call center by 25%, he said.

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