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## United Methodist Church Case Study



 **Hitachi Solutions**





## Church Uses Hitachi Solutions Ecommerce to Reach Out to Members Worldwide

### Customer Profile

Nashville-based United Methodist Communications is the global communications agency for The United Methodist Church, which has more than 11.5 million members internationally and 8.1 million members in the U.S. With about 35,000 churches, it is the second largest Protestant denomination in the U.S. UCom.org is the information and Ecommerce site for United Methodist Communications

### INDUSTRY

Global Communications Agency

### LOCATION

United States

**“We drafted a set of functional requirements from the user perspective that would ultimately drive the selection of a vendor partner. We were impressed by how Hitachi Solutions was able to meet our complex requirements at an affordable price point.”**

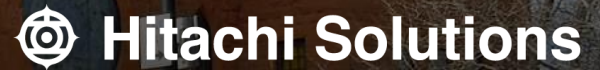
**Sean McAtee, Techshop Director, United Methodist Communications**

United Methodist Communications, the international communications agency for the 11.5-million-member United Methodist Church, needed to update its e-commerce website, UCom.org. After a detailed and careful selection process, United Methodist Communications chose Hitachi Solutions Ecommerce for its flexibility, customizability, and integration with its existing ERP system, Microsoft Dynamics GP. With Hitachi Solutions Ecommerce, United Methodist Communications was able to manage its various storefronts in order to give each its own look and feel. United Methodist Communications was also able to integrate its back office systems, Microsoft Dynamics GP and its CRM system, with its front-end websites, allowing for real-time exchange of information. With all these improvements in website functionality, United Methodist Communications was able to continue the growth and importance of UCom.org as its central online e-commerce hub for its ministry.

### CHALLENGE

As the communications agency for the 11.5 million member United Methodist Church, United Methodist Communications works to convey information about the denomination to a large global audience. "It's important that we use technology effectively to expand the church's reach around the world. As the denomination's leader into the digital age, we must ensure that our Internet presence is easily accessible and user-friendly," said the Rev. Larry Hollon, the agency's top executive. "Our agency website is an integral part of our communications operation."





**“Hitachi Solutions Ecommerce has rich functionality and proven ability to deliver large volume transactions in an integrated environment. The company also has extensive experience in Microsoft Dynamics, including Great Plains. These items were critical in our selection process.”**

**Bruce Bonner  
Development Manager  
United Methodist Communications**

UMCom.org serves as the agency’s primary information site and online store. While United Methodist Communications already had an e-commerce site, launched in 2004, it was slow and incapable of managing increased visitors or business. The technology was dated and clunky, operations were technical and difficult to change, and the site could only support a limited product catalog. Also, while the previous site had integrated somewhat with the ERP system, there was no way for United Methodist Communications to easily manage orders once they had been placed, such as when employees needed to identify problems and fix orders by line item. “Although the system in the past worked, you had to jump through many hoops,” said technology director Danny Mai. United Methodist Communications sought a solution for UMCom.org that could easily update both the customer and operational experience.

## **SOLUTION**

United Methodist Communications initiated an extensive RFP process in which they reviewed proposals from 15 e-commerce vendors. Hitachi Solutions’ Ecommerce solution was selected, after much analysis, for its flexibility and customizability. Hitachi Solutions Ecommerce also integrated with UMCom.org’s ERP system Microsoft Dynamics GP, as well as its CRM system. Hitachi Solutions was also able to leverage its presence in Nashville, Tennessee—close to one of the United Methodist Church’s largest administrative offices as well as the headquarters for UMCom.org—to provide near-site support to the client both during the project and especially around the go-live and stabilization phases of the project.

Hitachi Solutions deployed its Ecommerce solution to a newly designed user interface, and automated and integrated as much as possible with the accounting system. Hitachi Solutions leveraged a Microsoft SharePoint-based project collaboration portal, helping to streamline the communication processes. With the experience that comes from deploying Ecommerce at over 150 companies, Hitachi Solutions was able to add value by bringing new features such as “Best Sellers” and “Featured Products” to United Methodist Communications. “The store manager and marketing module increased the manageability of our products. That’s been huge,” said Sean McAtee, technology procurement director for United Methodist Communications. “We are able to control how our products are portrayed to our customers. Multiple images, coupon codes, videos, and cross-selling are all new features to us.”



Hitachi Solutions Ecommerce has six modules that allow customers to the perfect Ecommerce solution that fits their needs:

- Core Module, which includes one storefront as well as fraud detection and real-time reporting
- Merchandising Management Module
- ERP Integration (Basic) Module
- ERP Integration (Advanced) Module
- Business to Business Customer and Reseller Management Module
- Marking and Promotions Management Module

United Methodist Communications chose to implement all six Hitachi Solutions Ecommerce modules. “Hitachi Solutions’ Ecommerce solution has rich functionality and proven ability to deliver large volume transactions in an integrated environment,” said Bruce Bonner, United Methodist Communications development manager. “The company also has Extensive experience in Microsoft Dynamics, including GP. These items were critical in our selection process and will serve to benefit our global experience.”

## **BENEFITS**

### **New Store Look and Feel**

Part of United Methodist Communications’ site overhaul included a new design for its various sites and storefronts. Hitachi Solutions worked with United Methodist Communications’ branding vendor to ensure that both the websites’ look and feel as well as their functionality remained unchanged. In order to achieve this, Hitachi Solutions made sure its code allowed for separation between these two aspects.

A more streamlined look and feel was also needed for back-end system administration. The United Methodist Communications staff now has web-based access to the back-office management system, including an easy-view dashboard, which offers a snapshot of current order statuses. This back-end management system is user-friendly; members of the staff can quickly pull up customer or order reports by using clearly marked tabs.



**“With over 150 deployments, Hitachi Solutions was well-prepared to solve United Methodist Communations’ Ecommerce challenges. We are proud to have been chosen to improve online customer service for United Methodist churches, members and employees worldwide.”**

**Sandeep Walia**  
President  
Hitachi Solutions Asia Pacific

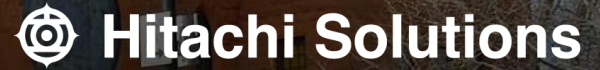
### **Automated Integration with Microsoft Dynamics GP**

One of Hitachi Solutions Ecommerce’s key advantages is its out-of-the-box integration with Microsoft Dynamics ERP systems. As a Gold Certified Microsoft Business Solutions partner, Hitachi Solutions has the knowledge needed to ensure detail oriented, full integration with ERP systems. United Methodist Communications was already using Microsoft Dynamics GP for its sales order, inventory, and pricing management. Hitachi Solutions Ecommerce integrated these processes with their front-end stores, allowing for two-way, automated, near-real-time information exchange.

United Methodist Communications chose to implement both the basic and advanced ERP integration modules of Hitachi Solutions Ecommerce. With the basic module, Hitachi Solutions was able to pull sales order, shipment, inventory, and pricing from Microsoft Dynamics GP. The advanced module allowed for the two-way integration with UCom.org and Microsoft Dynamics GP for invoicing, shipment, and payment information. Using eConnect and a Hitachi Solutions order pipeline management system, Hitachi Solutions Ecommerce integrates with Microsoft Dynamics GP to send sales orders from Ecommerce into Microsoft Dynamics GP and to update Ecommerce if any records in Microsoft Dynamics GP have changed. Hitachi Solutions was able to validate integrity of sales orders and reports any errors as well as maintains a list of records that have been changed or added to Microsoft Dynamics GP. Any changes to Item pricing, inventory quantity, and invoices are integrated from Microsoft Dynamics GP into Hitachi Solutions Ecommerce.

### **Automated Integration with CRM System**

In addition to back-end ERP integration, Hitachi Solutions Ecommerce also allows for automated integration with a customer’s CRM system. United Methodist Communications maintains its master customer database exclusively in a separate CRM system, so it was important to have integration between the CRM with Hitachi Solutions Ecommerce as well as Microsoft Dynamics GP. With the integration of its Ecommerce and CRM systems, United Methodist Communications was able to keep track of customers who registered at their storefront sites. Returning customers who logged in could be validated by United Methodist Communications’ customer database. As a result, United Methodist Communications was able to provide faster, more automated service to these customers, keep track of their customers’ characteristics, and expand its user base. In addition, with its cookie based system, Hitachi Solutions Ecommerce-powered



## WHY HITACHI SOLUTIONS?

Hitachi Solutions is one of the largest, most qualified and highly experienced Microsoft Dynamics consulting firms across the globe, capable of handling complex tier-one displacement projects. Our company's caliber of expertise and commitment to customers is evidenced through our consistent recognition from both Microsoft and industry analysts. Contact a Hitachi Solutions expert to discuss how our Microsoft Dynamics Solutions can help improve your productivity.

UMCom.org is able to provide each visitor with a unique shopping experience based on customer class information found in the CRM system.

### Automated Credit Card Charging

Hitachi Solutions Ecommerce also integrated order processing with United Methodist Communications' credit card processor, Payflow Pro from Paypal. With the integration, a credit card order placed through UMCom.org is authorized for approval when the order is placed. The authorization code and credit card details travel with the sales order from Hitachi Solutions Ecommerce into Microsoft Dynamics GP. The card is then charged when the order is shipped to the customer.

These functionalities increased UMCom.org's efficiency, ROI, and customer service. "This is a better website for our customers, and overall it has made all our processes easier," says Danny Mai. "Our store managers are able to upload to the site day-to-day and add text and pictures, so that the technology team can focus on the technical aspects of the system. The customer receives the benefits of the streamlined processes and has a better shopping experience." This has resulted in an increase in online orders, which reduces the time spent by the customer service department helping customers confused by the online ordering process. In addition, site administrators and store managers can easily update and monitor online transactions, which now require less management by United Methodist Communications employees and less oversight by the IT department.

