Whitehall Garden Centres Grow 15 Percent Annually, and Perennially Expand Web Sales

Overview

Country or Region: United Kingdom
Industry: Multichannel retail

Customer Profile

UK's Whitehall Garden Centres had grown to three robust stores in southwest Britain. An exhaustive inventory moved briskly.

Business Situation

Success outstripped automation. Troubles loomed in accurate stock counts and wise purchasing. Online sales seemed unlikely.

Solution

Microsoft Dynamics RMS, as enhanced by Davidson-Richards, fully resolved retail chain management. NitroSell Integrated eCommerce brought Web sales online, and now keeps profits growing.

Benefits

- NitroSell boosted inventory turnover 15 percent.
- No designers or consultants required.
- Online marketing began frugally and grew by proving its success.
- NitroSell's intuitive navigation and one-page checkout bind visitor loyalty.
- Besides shipping, online goods can be picked up in stores, raising store traffic.

> "In 18 months, NitroSell boosted inventory turnover 15 percent. As our Web business has grown, NitroSell has more than paid for itself several times over."
>
> Adam Simpkins, IT Manager, Whitehall Garden Centre

Whitehall Garden Centres in United Kingdom thrived and grew, rain or shine, for four decades. Three locations housed plants, garden tools, clothing and accessories, even a restaurant and butcher. But in front, this growth slowed checkouts. In back, purchasing and inventory became less precise. Davidson-Richards, a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner, provided Microsoft Dynamics Retail Management System (RMS). Their Promotions and Loyalty package completed RMS as an end-to-end retail chain management solution. Web sales beckoned but concerns about initial cost, implementation problems and even viability loomed. NitroSell Integrated eCommerce software and services proved an economical, yet highly attractive webstore that integrated perfectly with RMS and required no new staff or designers. Now, Web visitors proliferate and buy more every season. Stock turns over faster, revenues are up, and Whitehall sees NitroSell as a profitable investment.

Microsoft Dynamics
Retail Management System

NITROSELL
Integrated eCommerce

The Company

Whitehall Garden Centre is a family-run business with more than 40 years of plant and customer knowledge earned by serving home and professional gardeners. With three physical locations— large garden centers in Wiltshire and Lacock, and a smaller village shop—as well as a highly successful webstore, Whitehall has one of the largest selections of outdoor plants and related stock in Britain's southwest. Annual sales are comfortably in the millions of pounds sterling.

Inventory and sales have expanded over three generations to include gifts, casual clothing and shoes, houseplants, pots, ornaments, and garden furniture. Whitehall's award-winning Farm Shop shows off local produce. A butcher shop stocks a very wide range of local meats. And its Wild Poppy Restaurant refreshes shoppers.

Business Needs

In 2004, Whitehall found that checkout lines weren't moving as crisply as they might. Tracking thousands of inventory items required long hours, but good memories and intuition were no longer adequate for estimating next month's needs. Paperwork and tax reporting demands seemed to grow faster than the business.

Besides that, IT Manager Adam Simpkins says, "We needed a no-risk way to sell online. We'd heard the theoretical benefits of doing it—but also the costs and other stores' false starts and disasters. We weren't fully sure garden goods would sell well online. I needed cash-safe solutions, but everything that was adequate required high initial expenditure— often in the form of new technical staff."

Solutions

Automation's benefits came in two stages. First, Davidson-Richards of Derby provided the widely used Microsoft Dynamics Retail Management System (RMS) in October 2004. Simpkins explains, "We reviewed many alternatives. Ultimately, the benefits of a Microsoft product, as tailored to us by Davidson- Richards, offered us the most flexible package.

"Specifically, Davidson-Richards' Promotions and Loyalty package manages complex promotions and our Garden Club database of 20,000 customers, their buying histories and allocation of redeemable points. It's a soft-sell money-maker that customers tell us they like." Using past trends, this Davidson-Richards enhancement reports buying patterns and creates detailed analyses to help plan future marketing.

Both Garden Centres use the Microsoft Retail Management System Store Operations, a complete point-of-sale system for stores. For overall management, the chain collects Store Operations' data into Microsoft Dynamics
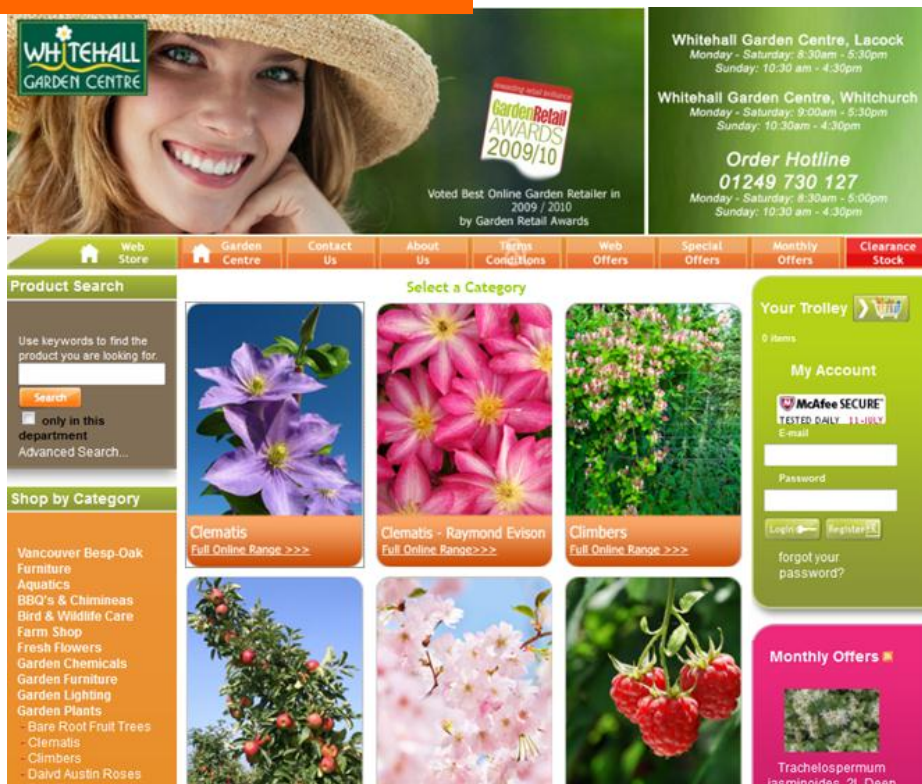
> "A NitroSell webstore also nurtures in-store sales."
>
> Adam Simpkins, IT Manager, Whitehall Garden Centre

RMS Headquarters. This top-level software keeps managers apprised of sales levels during the day, and advises which items need replenishing or purchasing. Headquarters also enables easy chainwide or item-specific price changes, discounts, and other specials.

"We saw that Microsoft Dynamics RMS could help us manage anything we wanted to do in a webstore," Simpkins says. "In 2006, we realized NitroSell eCommerce was the safest economical way to stick our toe in the water."

Business Benefits

"We credit NitroSell eCommerce for something you can't often do in retail," says Simpkins. "We experimentally and successfully opened up a new marketplace without adding staff. It was so well designed that it saved us from hiring a Web designer or IT people.

"In 18 months, NitroSell boosted inventory turnover 15 percent. As our Web business has grown, NitroSell has more than paid for itself several times over. Our webstore is now an efficient profit center of four staff who do Web work, order picking and packing."

"A NitroSell webstore also nurtures in-store sales," says Simpkins. 'Click and Collect' lets customers pay online, then come to the store's Customer Collection point to pick up their set-aside items. Or they may prefer reserving the item so it's put aside for their in-store final inspection and purchase. Online shopping reliably streamlines customer time with staff.

NitroSell eCommerce empowers Whitehall with the ultimate in customer courtesy by managing stock levels in real time. Customers see what's in—or out of—stock every minute. Whitehall even advises customers when the item will next be in stock based on its next purchase order and time of delivery.

For More Information

For more information about Whitehall Garden Centre products and services, call +44 (0)1249 730 204 or visit the webstore at:
www.whitehallgardencentre.co.uk
You can also visit them at:

For more information about NitroSell Integrated eCommerce, call:
US 1(619) 374-4111,
UK +44 (203) 355 9039 or
Ireland +353 21 4839182
Please visit the website at:
www.nitrosell.com

For more information about Davidson-Richards, Ltd. products and services, call +44 (0)1332 383 231 or visit the website at: www.davrich.co.uk

For more information about Microsoft products and services, call the Microsoft Sales Information Center at (800) 426-9400 or visit the website at:
www.microsoft.com

Software and Services	Partner
■ NitroSell Integrated eCommerce	■ Davidson-Richards, Ltd.
■ Microsoft Retail Management System (RMS)	