Crown Automotive

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>
> **Ron Gerber** | President, The Mod Agency

With so many of today's e-commerce platforms focused on the consumer market, B2B companies have a hard time finding a provider that can understand and accommodate their needs.

Crown Automotive discovered that Miva offers the power of an enterprise-grade e-commerce platform and the ability to craft solutions that meet the unique requirements of doing business as a wholesale company.

Problem

» Wholesale companies can feel left out when it comes to online commerce since current providers focus mainly on consumer businesses.

Crown Automotive manufactures and distributes replacement parts for the iconic Jeep® brand of vehicles. The company started more than 50 years ago in Boston, and their commitment to providing high-quality parts and excellent customer service has expanded their market worldwide.

Today, Crown Automotive's warehouses in the United States and Europe stock over 9,000 unique part numbers for all popular Jeep® vehicles. They offer parts for everything from current models to vintage Jeeps dating back to 1942, and their inventory includes many factory-discontinued parts. Crown Automotive is now a recognized name in the auto parts industry and the company recently expanded into accessories for Jeeps under their own RT Off-Road™ brand.

Moving Past a Basic Web Presence

In early 2010, Crown Automotive started to consider entering the world of e-commerce. They had a website at the time, but it was very basic, and they still conducted all of their business using a traditional phone-based sales model. They began looking for someone to help them rebuild their site and add an online sales component.

Ron Gerber is the founder and president of The Mod Agency, an e-commerce and digital marketing firm specializing in web design and e-commerce development for business-to-business (B2B) clients. Crown Automotive contacted Gerber and his team when they were still in the early phases of their deliberations.

"When we started working with Crown," Gerber recalls, "their website was very simple." He describes a static HTML site that was primarily informational. "It was really just an online brochure designed to get customers on the phone," he says. "There was no e-commerce, and they didn't even have their full catalog of parts listed."

» "Crown Automotive sells exclusively to wholesale accounts," Gerber says. "So the prevailing notion within the company at the time was that since they were strictly

Solution

» Miva works with B2B companies to understand their business and provide enterprise-grade solutions to their e-commerce needs.

wholesale, there wasn't a need to have an e-commerce platform." Nonetheless, he says there were people at Crown who knew e-commerce could become an important part of their business.

Gerber met with the leadership team at Crown and described the benefits of moving forward and making an e-commerce website available to their customers. "A few things came into focus for them," he says. "They started to view sales via the website as an opportunity, and at the same time, many of their own larger customers were showing them what could be done online." After considering the benefits, Crown decided to go ahead with their website rebuild.

Wholesale E-Commerce

Once Crown Automotive decided to launch a true e-commerce website, Ron Gerber and his team at The Mod Agency set out to choose a platform that could accommodate the needs of a wholesaler. "Not many e-commerce platforms that cater to the consumer market are able to fulfill the requirements needed for B2B companies," Gerber says.

"In the first place," Gerber continues, "we knew this would have to be a platform that could handle a massive number of SKUs. Crown has over 9,000 unique parts, so we needed a catalog manager robust enough to deal with that type of inventory." But he also knew that B2B companies interact with their customers in ways that can be unique to wholesalers.

» "I've worked on many different platforms," Gerber says, "so I have a pretty good feel for what's available out there. We were looking around for certain e-commerce features

that would accommodate B2B business needs, and it was very hard to find what we needed."

Ultimately, Gerber chose Miva as the platform for Crown's new website. "I've been familiar with Miva for quite a while," he says, "and during this process with Crown we just kept coming back to them. We realized the platform could handle Crown's requirements, and I really liked the direction Miva was headed in as a company." Gerber talks about three main features uniquely required by B2B clients that Miva was able to offer.

Restricting Access to Authorized Customers

As a wholesaler, Crown Automotive is in the position of wanting to provide information about their products to the public without revealing pricing or current inventory levels. "Since Crown sells exclusively to wholesale accounts," Gerber says, "we needed to have pricing and inventory masked from the general public, but available to the wholesale customer after they have logged in. This might sound basic, but many of the platforms out there couldn't do it for us."

"And it goes beyond hiding pricing and inventory," Gerber continues. "We needed the ability to restrict access to other data, features, and specific parts of the website to authorized customers only." He lists things like price sheets, promotional materials, and the ability to add product to the shopping cart. "Miva allowed us to do this without custom programming," Gerber says.

Unique Pricing and Availability per Customer

"Many B2B companies, Crown included, want the ability to have different tiers of pricing for their different levels of customers," Gerber says. Miva's platform incorporates the concept of price groups, which Gerber utilized to achieve this functionality for Crown.

» "B2B companies typically have different price levels for their customers," Gerber explains. "Many times it's based on the size

and purchasing power of the customer. Starting with a form of MSRP, the company can create levels of percentages off MSRP and assign groups of customers to each price level."

» "With Miva," Gerber continues, "We can also assign unique pricing to customers for specific products. This allows Crown to offer a customer a special price on a part (or parts) that they buy in high volume. This unique price is different than the customer's standard MSRP-based group pricing."

Finally, Crown needed the ability to make certain products available only to certain customers. "This is especially useful for Crown," Gerber says, "since they sell a number of products restricted to certain international markets."

"Overall," Gerber says, "Miva allows us to be very flexible with the pricing and product availability. This helps Crown serve their customers in a more efficient and effective way via their website."

Open Account Payment

"Another problem with the majority of e-commerce platforms," Gerber says, "is that payment options for the customer are typically limited to credit cards or other online consumer payment options. This makes sense since they're primarily dealing with consumer accounts, but for Crown, limiting payment to credit cards wasn't going to work."

As a wholesaler, Crown Automotive needed to allow for an open account payment method. "Wholesale customers are not usually interested in paying with a credit card," Gerber explains. "Many of Crown's customers are set up on open account which allows them to place orders on the account using a purchase order number. They can then pay later when they are invoiced. With Miva we were able to include this functionality."

In addition to building a site that met Crown's specific B2B requirements, Gerber and his team also took the opportunity to update the look and feel

of the company's online presence. "Our approach at The Mod Agency," Gerber says, "is to develop a site that goes beyond the typical canned e-commerce look. The site we built gave Crown true wholesale e-commerce functionality along with a fresh, custom look and feel."

The Next-Generation Site

Crown Automotive launched their first Miva website in 2010. "This was a big change for them," Ron Gerber says, "because they went from a company with no online sales at all to a company with the ability to serve their customers directly from their website." As the sales activity on the website began to pick up, Gerber says Crown was thrilled. "It was eye opening for them to see that even though they are in wholesale, e-commerce could have a significant place in their business."

Over the next two years, Crown Automotive closely watched the activity on their new site. They learned how their wholesale customers were using the site, and they began to think of ways to further optimize their operations around web-based sales. In late 2013, they again approached Gerber and The Mod Agency about building a second website.

> "It was really the success of the first site that led them to the next step," Gerber says. "They were getting orders online, which was great. But all these orders that were placed through the website still had to be manually entered into the back-end systems." Crown employees also had to update pricing and inventory manually in both their back-end enterprise systems and on the website.

> » "With the next version of the site," Gerber says, "integration with the enterprise system was the most important thing. The main goal was to make day-to-day operations easier and reduce the double entry needed to process sales and maintain the site."

Once again, Gerber looked into the available e-commerce platforms. "We weren't sure if Miva would be able

to integrate with the Crown back-end enterprise system," he says, "so we took a look around just to make sure we were moving forward with the best platform available." Gerber says his search was eye-opening. "It was similar to what happened in 2010," he says. "There are just not that many platforms available when you're talking about integrating with an enterprise-level system."

Gerber and his team considered their options. "We looked into Magento," he says, "but didn't really see the flexibility and functionality we needed." They found themselves in discussions with Miva to see if the platform could integrate with Crown's back-end system.

> "It was interesting talking through the challenges with them," Gerber says. "In 2010 when we built the first site, we chose Miva because they were able to meet the needs of a B2B company when none of the other platforms really could. This second time around, integration with a back-end system was the main feature we were looking for, and we again found that not many of the other platforms available can clear that hurdle."

> » "We chose Miva again," he continues, "because they are committed to building the sites that others are not able to do. With Miva we can get the functionality we need, and we can be confident in their ability to execute because of the team they have on their end to do custom development."

Gerber and Crown Automotive have been working with Miva to develop Crown's second-generation website.

Back-End Integration

In order to eliminate the double entry of orders placed online, Crown's new e-commerce website will integrate with their back-end enterprise management system. The integration will achieve the near real-time communication of data and orders between the two systems.

> "This integration will work both ways," explains Gerber. "Of course, orders placed on the website will be pushed automatically into Crown's system, which will do away with the manual double entry. But also, product data like pricing and inventory levels will now update on the website automatically in near real-time."

The integration means that when Crown creates a new product in their system, it will create a corresponding product automatically on the website. "They still can make changes to how the product appears on the website," Gerber says, "but as soon as it's created on the back-end, it can be ordered from the website."

Express Order Form

Like other B2B companies, Crown Automotive has a number of large customers that consistently place orders with tens or hundreds of line items per order. "With the current site," Gerber says, "these customers do not place their orders online because they would have to navigate from one product page to the next and click the 'Add to Cart' button for each product."

> "We hired Miva to create a fully-functioning express order form so these customers can add multiple products to the shopping cart at one time. They can do this by manually

entering the product codes all at once, or by uploading a CSV file with their product codes."

While the back-end integration is important for streamlining Crown's operations, Gerber predicts the express order form will have the largest impact on e-commerce sales volume. He believes the current difficulties involved with placing large-volume orders are keeping these key customers off the site, and he expects the express order form to remove that friction.

"There's also a cost savings component for Crown," he says, "because right now they pay a third-party site to help facilitate orders for these larger customers. When the express order form goes live with the new site, they will be able to eliminate that additional expense."

Multi-Warehouse Inventory

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» "We wanted a way," continues Gerber, "for a customer to see the inventory currently in their assigned warehouse. So a customer tagged to the Massachusetts warehouse will see inventory in that warehouse, while a customer tagged to the Nevada warehouse will see inventory in that location."

» "We even went a step further," adds Gerber, "and added the feature that if a customer's warehouse is out of stock for a particular item, the customer can see inventory in the other warehouses and order the part from a different warehouse.

It works beautifully. I don't know of any other e-commerce platform or company that can offer this level of customization and achieve what we've achieved with Miva."

Custom Shipping with UPS

Miva is a UPS Ready® provider, which means that Crown has the ability to process and print shipping labels from within the platform. They can also access UPS ratings and a number of other advanced features UPS makes available through the UPS Ready® Program.

"Orders from Crown's customers can vary widely in size," says Gerber, "so it's important that their e-commerce platform has the ability to handle custom shipping requirements." He explains that for orders up to a certain size, customers pay a flat rate, while orders above the threshold pay a percentage of the order amount.

» "These are custom shipping requirements that are more often seen in the B2B sphere," Gerber says. "Sometimes Crown also needs to ship oversized products at the actual freight cost, and at other times they will offer special shipping rates in order to match their competitors. With Miva and UPS we have the power and flexibility to do all this, and we can provide accurate shipping information for our customers at the point of sale on the e-commerce site."

Power, Flexibility, and Stability

When talking about the impact Miva has had for Crown Automotive, Ron Gerber recalls what the website was like before the e-commerce site launched in 2010. "It's like night and day," he says. "Before we launched the first Miva site, all of Crown's sales were

done over the phone and there was no real way to track if any of those sales had originated with the website."

"When the new site launched," he continues, "it gave Crown the ability to start looking at metrics and website performance and tie that to actual sales numbers. They didn't have any metrics before, but now everything is trackable and they can see what works and what doesn't."

Since 2010, Crown has watched their web sales grow, and at this point approximately 35% of their daily orders are coming through the website. Gerber says they expect that number to swell when the new site launches later this year. "They predict online sales will increase significantly once the new site launches, mainly due to the back-end integration and the improved express order form."

Gerber says the most recent website rebuild has given him greater confidence in Miva's ability to deliver what Crown needs. "Through this process," he says, "we've come to see that whatever it is, Miva can do it. Miva can integrate with the major enterprise-level systems, and Miva has the resources, the talent, and the team to really service wholesale B2B companies."

"Another thing I've come to admire is that with Miva, the platform itself is powerful, flexible, and dependable. It is very stable, and it is very fast. I know that with Crown, in any given year, we hardly have any downtime on the site. And I see Miva handling Crown's future sales growth without any issue at all. With what they were able to do for us this time around, in my mind, they can do almost anything." M