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Bare Bones Broth

“Miva has been flexible and powerful enough to do exactly what we need our website to do.”

— **Mark Patterson** | Co-Founder, Bare Bones Broth Company

The costs of your free e-commerce platform are adding up, and the pain is making it harder to sell online. What's next?

Bare Bones Broth switched to Miva for a website that improved operations, offered a better customer experience, and helped fuel the rapid growth of their business.

Problem

- » With a “free” e-commerce platform, the real costs can start to add up.

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The Bare Bones Broth Company got its start when classically-trained chef Ryan Harvey realized there was real demand for a product he created every day. At the restaurant where he worked as a chef, Harvey would make beef or chicken stock to be used as a basic ingredient in many of the dishes he prepared. When he started seeing bone broth for sale at local farmers markets, Harvey knew it was something he could produce and offer to modern health-conscious eaters.

Along with his wife Kate and long-time friend Mark Patterson, Harvey founded Bare Bones in November 2013 and began producing bone broth out of a commercial kitchen in San Diego, California. They focused on using only non-GMO ingredients from pasture-raised animals along with organic produce to create the most natural, wholesome broth possible.

Bare Bones began offering beef and chicken bone broths directly to customers via their website (www.barebonesbroth.com) and they watched sales explode over the first year of business. They recently moved the company to Medford, Oregon, where they now have a larger facility

that will allow them to expand and keep up with growing demand.

Bare Bones with WooCommerce

While Ryan Harvey manages company operations and production of the bone broth, Mark Patterson is responsible for building and maintaining the Bare Bones website. When the company launched in 2013, he chose to build their first website using WooCommerce, a free e-commerce toolkit for WordPress.

“At the time,” Patterson recalls, “I was finishing up a college course on e-commerce, and we were working mainly with WordPress. I came across WooCommerce and knew that it was something we could use to get going. We were trying to bootstrap the company, so we didn't really have the funds to do anything else.”

- » “Another free option was OpenCart,” he says, “but I ultimately went with WooCommerce because the WordPress community is bigger and has more resources for people using the platform. Plus, I was in a class where I had a lot of WordPress support and first-hand help.”

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Solution

- » Simplify online operations and fuel your company's growth with the power of Miva.

» "WooCommerce was great for us at the time," Patterson continues, "because it was a free cart that we just had to install as a WordPress plugin. It felt like all I had to do was click a few buttons and then we were selling online."

But while getting started with WooCommerce was relatively simple, the Bare Bones team soon began to encounter major issues with the platform.

- "WooCommerce doesn't come with very many of the features we ended up needing," Patterson explains. "It's a very basic platform," he says, "and since it doesn't have a lot of things out of the box you have to start using plugins all over the place."
- » "That wasn't something we thought about when we were starting out," he says. Launching with WooCommerce allowed Bare Bones to get up and running quickly and at a very low initial cost. But as soon as the business started to grow, they ran into problems.
 - » "WooCommerce got us started," Patterson says, "but we kept running into issues with the platform that were causing us real pain. Yes it was free, but it took so much work just to get the site to a functional state that we began to wonder if it was worth the hassle."

He gives three examples of things that were frustrating about the WooCommerce platform.

Cumbersome Order Management

- » "Order management with WooCommerce is not the best," says Patterson. "Because you've essentially built your store on WordPress, you have to use the blog style admin to do everything. So

while this may be fine for running your actual blog, it means that you're running a store on a platform made for blogging."

- » "For instance," he explains, "that means that the page listing you use to manage your blog pages is the same interface you have to use for managing orders. Since it's not built to handle a high volume of orders, it becomes burdensome right away."

Ryan Harvey was busy running the operations side of Bare Bones Broth, and he attests to the pain order management caused. "It was really bad," he says, "especially for what we do where we're shipping hundreds of boxes every week. Once those orders were placed on the website it was such a problem to get the order data out of WooCommerce so that we could actually ship the product."

- » "Ryan had to pull each order out of the platform individually," Mark Patterson explains. "He finally came to me and said, 'I need to see every order we have to process this week on one piece of paper. Can we do that?' So I found a plugin that we could install that would extract the order data."

But even with the plugin installed, Patterson says the problem was far from solved. "All it did was export the information without formatting it in any way," he says. "And the plugin didn't allow any sort of customization on the export, so the file Ryan was getting had so much extra information."

With this plugin, Harvey didn't have to work with the WooCommerce back end anymore, but Patterson says it actually decreased his efficiency because he had to go through the export file every week and weed out the extra information that he didn't need.

Poor Customer Experience

Since WooCommerce is dependent on plugins for so much of its functionality, stores built on the platform can become bogged down and slow for the end users. "Load times on the site were obnoxious," Ryan Harvey says. "All the plugins we needed made everything so bloated."

- » "When you're selling anything," Harvey says, "you want to give people a purchasing experience that is enjoyable all the way through to the moment they open up their



package and pull out that product. If you're selling online, that experience starts when the customer hits your website. So if the site has slow load times, you're giving the wrong impression before the customer even gets to try your product."

Mark Patterson also says they would get calls from customers who were having trouble checking out. "Those feel like the worst calls to get," he says, "because instead of providing a smooth experience for someone, they're having to take the extra step of calling just to finish their transaction. And from an operations standpoint, we have too much going on to be dealing with an issue like this that should just be automatic."

Simplistic Shipping

» "We probably chose one of the more challenging things to sell online," Ryan Harvey says. "It would have been easier if we had decided to sell t-shirts, but instead our product is perishable and has to survive the shipping process without spoiling."

Bare Bones sends their broth frozen, and they include dry ice in the packaging to keep the broth cold while it is in shipment. "This presents some unique challenges for the e-commerce platform," Mark Patterson says, "because now you need to account for the added weight of the dry ice before calculating shipping."

» "Also, if you add dry ice into the equation," he continues, "the number of units in a shipment becomes very important. If you ship five units instead of four, the weight ratios

change and the amount of dry ice needed in the packaging changes."

» "With WooCommerce," Patterson explains, "there wasn't an easy way to account for those shipping complexities. It was very difficult to have the site automatically calculate the amount of dry ice needed, which impacted the final shipping weight, which in turn impacted the final shipping price."

» "On our WooCommerce site," he says, "the customer would get a price for shipping added to their order, and then they would check out and pay. But then sometimes we would realize the actual shipping price was higher once we added the correct amount of dry ice. Since the customer had already paid, we were just eating the price difference on the shipping for those orders."

Another issue Patterson brings up involves the plugin they needed to interface with their shipping vendor. "We were using FedEx for our shipping," he explains, "and on WooCommerce the default plugin for FedEx had very limited functionality. We had to go out and buy two different plugins before we found one that could meet our needs."

» "Even then," Patterson says, "it was very common for WooCommerce to accept the customer's zip code but then assign the order to the wrong shipping zone and therefore display the wrong shipping price. That again touches on the customer experience problem. We learned very quickly that if you get started in a business doing e-commerce and you don't have your shipping ready to go, you're just looking for trouble right away."

» "So here we were on WooCommerce because it was free," Patterson concludes, "but then any time we had to buy a new plugin, it's not free anymore. It always felt like a big hassle. When the site still wasn't providing a good experience for our customers after all that, we began to wonder why we were sticking with the platform."

The Tipping Point

"For some of these issues," Mark Patterson says, "I know that we ultimately could have built a work-around. I could have figured it out eventually, but our company was young and growing quickly. We didn't have time to build work-arounds for every little thing, and it felt like this just kept happening on WooCommerce. We were always trying to come up with another solution to solve something that was caused by a plugin or by WooCommerce itself." Finally, Bare Bones Broth encountered an issue that pushed them past the tipping point.

» "WordPress publishes periodic updates to their platform," Patterson explains, "and those updates mean that all of the plugins you're using now have to be updated too. For us, this obviously means WooCommerce needs an update. But the plugins don't always get updated at the same time as WordPress, and even when they do get updated, they don't always work perfectly with the other plugins you may have installed."

» "There was a WordPress update that came along, and WooCommerce issued an update to their core plugin as well. When we deployed this new version of WooCommerce onto our store, it broke everything. Just, the entire site broke. It was terrible."

Patterson says the problems were extensive. "The update broke functionality across the site, it broke the checkout page, and it made things look all kinds of crazy." Patterson discovered that when WooCommerce updated their plugin, many of their core functions had changed. "This meant," he explains, "that if the WordPress theme you were running on your site referenced any of those older functions, you had to update your theme in addition to all your plugins."

"So we came to find out that there's this double whammy whenever WordPress or WooCommerce issues an update. You have to update all your plugins, but then you also have

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to update your website theme and make sure everything is working correctly before you install the updates.”

- » “When our site broke,” Patterson says, “we had to roll it back to the earlier version of WooCommerce, and I realized at that point that we had two options. First, we could stay with WooCommerce and I would have to get everything up to date before pushing this new version of WooCommerce onto the site. This would also mean that we’d be worrying about compatibility and functionality every time there was an update to the platform or the plugins. Or alternatively, we could figure out a better option for going forward.”

Choosing Miva

At this point, Mark Patterson had finished his studies and was beginning his career as a website developer. “I was learning more and more about e-commerce platforms and their capabilities as part of my day job,” he says, “so I had a great feel for what different platforms could do.”

“After doing some research, Bigcommerce and Miva were the two options I saw out there that would be appropriate for us at the time. After exploring both platforms, I got the sense that Miva’s functionality was more advanced, and Miva’s pricing was better than Bigcommerce. So we chose Miva.”

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- » “I rebuilt our site on the Miva platform,” Patterson says, “and we were able to complete the transition in around six weeks.” The new Bare Bones Broth site went live in September 2014.

Patterson says the new Bare Bones website on Miva solved some of their most pressing problems right away. “We had the opportunity on Miva to build things that just weren’t possible on WooCommerce,” he says. “In the first place, with Miva you are able to customize everything about your site, and this was so important for us. The ability to build logic right onto a page is a huge improvement, and you have access to these things directly from the admin panels.”

“As our site administrator,” Patterson continues, “I love Miva because you know exactly what you’re working on. With WooCommerce and Magento and some of these other platforms, the file structure can be very difficult to navigate. You have to pull down the files themselves to work on the site, and then you can get into trouble if you overwrite yourself. On Miva you can overwrite yourself, but there’s a version history that makes it very easy to set the clock back. If I go in there and mess something up, Miva’s revisioning makes it so easy to recover.”

Powerful Order Management

Addressing the problems they had with order management on WooCommerce was one of the highest priorities for Bare Bones with their new website.

“This was solved almost immediately when we got on Miva,” Patterson says, “because the order management system on the backend is just so robust. With Miva our website is running on a true e-commerce platform rather than on a plugin for WordPress.”

One of the first things Patterson did with the new site was build custom reports to support Ryan Harvey and his order processing needs.

“Miva has the capability to create custom reporting out of the box,” Patterson says, “so I was able to build a batch report in Miva that gives Ryan exactly what he wants.” He estimates this improvement saves six hours of Harvey’s time every week. “Custom order reports are so clutch,” says Harvey. “Order processing used to take me all day on WooCommerce. Now on Miva I can do it in just a couple of hours.”

Excellent User Experience

“We’ve focused on making customer service the top priority for our company,” Ryan Harvey says, “and I really think that is why people keep coming back. With Miva we can give our customers a better experience, and the website is no longer a liability for us. The site runs much more smoothly and page load times are much faster. The checkout process is a lot more intuitive and a lot more user-friendly.”

- » “One of the things we added right away,” Mark Patterson says “is the ability to request shipping pricing from any page on the site. With our

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product, the shipping was such a large portion of the total price that many customers were abandoning their carts at checkout once the shipping displayed. We knew that a better way to serve our customers would be to have the option for them to see the shipping price at any point during their shopping."

- » "So now," he continues, "when you add broth to the shopping cart, there's a little pop-up that shows the item in your cart. From that pop-up you can click through to view your cart and check out, but we also added a custom 'Estimate Shipping' button. This allows the user to see the shipping price for the current cart right at that point. This is a feature that we couldn't even build on WooCommerce, but with Miva it was a relatively easy customization."
- » "Another customer service issue we experienced on WooCommerce," Patterson says, "was that since WooCommerce did not have robust inventory management, the website would let people order product even if we had run out of stock. This created a lot of headaches for us because we'd have to notify the customer that their order couldn't actually be filled."
- » "With Miva," he continues, "we built the site so that as soon as we sell out of a product, we can show the customer that it is gone. But we also went a step further and set up a way for the customer to get notified when it's back in stock. We can now automatically send them an email when the product is available to purchase."
- » "This feature helps us improve the overall customer experience, but it also is a massive improvement

for us from a business perspective," Patterson says. "On WooCommerce, those orders essentially became lost orders. Now with Miva, we're able to still make some of those sales that could potentially be lost during the times when our production cannot keep up with customer demand."

Expired Baskets/Inventory Management

"WooCommerce had basic inventory tracking," Patterson says, "but the platform didn't have the ability to handle expired baskets. If customers abandoned their shopping carts without making a purchase, we couldn't track the expired carts or easily clean them out."

- » "There were times where our system was telling us that we were out of stock," Patterson explains, "but since some of that inventory was sitting in an expired cart, we weren't really out of stock. If there are units in a shopping cart that a customer lets expire, those units should go back into our inventory list. On Miva, we can automatically delete expired baskets and add those products back into the overall inventory list."

Robust Shipping Capabilities

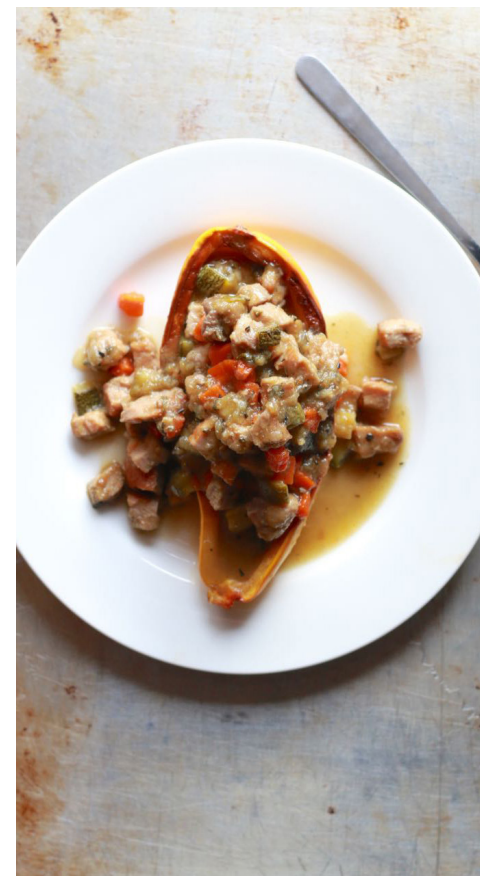
"From the beginning," Patterson says, "shipping has been a big issue for us. With WooCommerce, it was always tough to correctly account for the weight of the dry ice in our shipping and really solve that issue. When we switched to Miva, this was a high priority for us because it was something that directly impacted our bottom line."

He again points out that any time there was a shipping miscalculation with

WooCommerce, they had to absorb the price difference.

"With Miva," Patterson says, "we were able to get an accurate order count, then add the weight of the box and the dry ice to the total shipping weight. We then used Miva's free FedEx and UPS plugins to make a call to the carrier to get the exact shipping weight before the customer paid." He says this immediately eliminated the problem of incorrectly billed shipping.

- » "Using Miva we improved the shipping calculations on our end," Patterson says, "but we still encountered problems with people abandoning their carts due to the shipping price. We've recently reworked our pricing so that now we offer a flat shipping rate for all orders, and free shipping on all order over \$165. This is a system that is much simpler for our customers and we've seen a 27% decrease in abandoned carts since rolling it out. Through all these changes we've made, Miva has been flexible and powerful enough to do exactly what we need our website to do."



Results With Miva

↑ 400%

INCREASE IN ONLINE SALES

🛒 27%

DECREASE IN ABANDONED CARTS

🕒 64hrs

MAN-HOURS SAVED PER MONTH

⚡ 2.5x

SITE SPEED BOOST

Inventory Kits

The new Bare Bones site takes advantage of another useful feature available on the Miva platform. "We use the 'Inventory Kit' feature," Patterson says. "This isn't very widely known throughout the Miva community, but it's a key part of how we're able to make our flat-rate shipping and new product mix work."

"Before we set up the inventory kits," he explains, "we were using custom logic in our checkout cart that enforced a minimum order of five orders of broth. You could have less than five in your cart, but you couldn't check out until you hit that minimum."

- » "But we knew that this wasn't how some of our customers wanted to purchase the products. We knew that sometimes people just wanted to get a couple packets of broth so they could give us a try." Bare Bones decided to move away from requiring a minimum order and instead they now sell packages. "Now, you can order just one of something," Patterson explains, "but that base-level product is a two-pack. The two-pack can be made up of two beef broths, two chicken broths, or one of each."
- » "So now," he continues, "we needed the ability to sell a product that

deducts inventory correctly from each of our broth supplies. As it turns out, Miva has a great way to do that with inventory kits."


- » "Imagine you're selling t-shirts," Patterson says. "You have red and green shirts, in small and medium sizes. As far as your inventory is concerned, that's four separate and unique products. For the t-shirt company, it's pretty straightforward."
- » "At Bare Bones, we have two types of broth—chicken and beef—but we really sell many different products. We can sell a 2-pack of beef, a 2-pack of chicken, or a sample pack with one chicken and one beef. Then we also sell packs of 6, 8, 12, or 14 broths that you can get in whatever combination you like."
- » "Inventory kits allow us to set up our system so that the various products deduct from inventory correctly no matter the combination the customer buys." Patterson says this makes inventory management much easier. "Before, we had someone going in every day and checking the inventory to make sure that we weren't running out. Now, we know that whatever the inventory management system says, that's exactly what we have in the freezer."
- » "Having our inventory counts stay accurate, especially across multiple

product types, is huge for us," says Patterson. "The inventory kit feature is one of those things that once you know how to use it, it's very powerful. We estimate that the feature saves us over 40 employee hours each month."

A Platform for Growth

On their new Miva site, Bare Bone Broth has seen remarkable growth. Over their first four months on the site, they did approximately \$90,000 in revenue, and they saw sales start to consistently top \$25,000 per month. "A good month on our WooCommerce site was more like \$5,000 to \$6,000," says Patterson. "That's at least a 400% increase in our online sales."

"With Miva," he says, "our growth has been no problem at all. Traffic on the site has grown through all the shared hosting plans Miva offers. At some point, our traffic levels will put us on a dedicated server, and we're confident that Miva will scale with our business as long as we need it to."

- » "We see Miva as our platform for the long term," Patterson concludes. "Since we switched to Miva, we know that our website is working for us instead of against us." 

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