

Talking Shop

TRANSACTIS TRANSFORM SHOP DIRECT GROUP CATALOGUES TO A DIGITAL CUSTOMER SERVICE TOOL FOR CONTACT CENTRES

SHOP DIRECT GROUP (SDG) IS THE UK'S LEADING ONLINE AND HOME SHOPPING RETAILER, WITH A CUSTOMER BASE OF OVER 5 MILLION AND SALES OF UP TO £1.6 BILLION. HEADQUARTERED IN SPEKE, SOUTH LIVERPOOL, THE GROUP'S NINE BRANDS INCLUDE: LITTLEWOODS, ADDITIONS DIRECT, EMPIRE STORES, CHOICE, GREAT UNIVERSAL, KAYS, LITTLEWOODS DIRECT, LITTLEWOODS IRELAND AND MARSHALL WARD.

SDG is renowned for its commitment to customer care and since 2005 has implemented a dedicated initiative called Customer 1st to ensure that customer service remains at the heart of the enterprise. With a business model based on distance selling, it is vital to deliver customer service to a high standard when a customer does get in contact. Contact centres are therefore important links with the customer and in 2008, as part of continuous improvement, SDG looked at ways to further improve the service provided through this channel.

The Challenge

As an industry leader, it is important that SDG continues to present the right merchandise at the right price. To support the growing number of products on offer, SDG publishes different types of catalogue a year across all its brands to inform consumers of the variety products and services on offer. The publications are classified as main book, mid-season book, leaflets and brochures.

With an impressive one in three households in the UK owning one or more of SDG's catalogues (Autumn/Winter and Spring/Summer issues), contact centres needed to have numerous copies of the catalogues across all the company's brands. Contact centre agents require access to all printed materials to answer enquiries effectively,

reinforce brand reputation and up-sell or cross-sell products.

Briony Cole, Process Improvement Project Manager at SDG, explains, "Our seven contact centres would need to receive the hard copies of publications following the print run. However, with hard copies, they can go missing, pages become defaced after regular and long-term use, pages may begin to drop out and it is costly to house the numerous publications in each contact centre."

SDG runs seven contact centres based in Sunderland, Preston, Worcester, Bolton, Burnley, Newtown and Crosby, as well as a small group of home-workers. Ensuring printed catalogues are housed at these sites (across the nine brands and in all their different forms), creates an added logistical burden, whilst also posing a storage problem for home-workers.

Importantly, the use of printed catalogues to answer customer queries meant that contact centre representatives had to physically find a copy of the relevant publication from a central storage point, bring it back to their desks and manually sift through it to locate the right product. "We estimated that it was taking our advisors approximately 50 seconds just to access the correct product in the relevant publication," adds Cole.

The Solution

To resolve these challenges the idea of producing searchable digital catalogues was developed. Cole comments, "In September 2008 we were ready to start developing the virtual books and selected Transactis because they provided us with a solution that gave us the look and feel that we wanted. They also manage the production of our hard copy catalogues and digital assets which meant that we were able to deliver a pilot in only two months – an impressively fast turnaround."

Transactis works closely with SDG's marketing and publishing team to put together the catalogues for publication throughout the year. In order to do so, the marketing solution provider has a dedicated print management and creative team who utilise the latest technology for online proofing, digital asset management and production print.

Cole explains, "Once the catalogue is signed off to be printed in hard copy, it is at this point that the digital file is produced by Transactis which will eventually become the virtual book. Programming the file to allow photographs to be magnified, pages to be flickable and text searchable is all carried out by the team at Transactis. The digital catalogue is then checked by us and it is made available to all the contact centre advisors across SDG's intranet."

The virtual book is identical to the printed version in every way and was launched internally as 'Virtual Books' in January 2009.

The Result

Since using Virtual Books, SDG has seen a numerous benefits in contact centre service provision. The greatest impact has been on the ease of providing relevant information to the customer. Customer service representatives are now able to access the relevant page in real-time without having to leave the customer on hold or schedule a call back in order to find a hard copy publication.

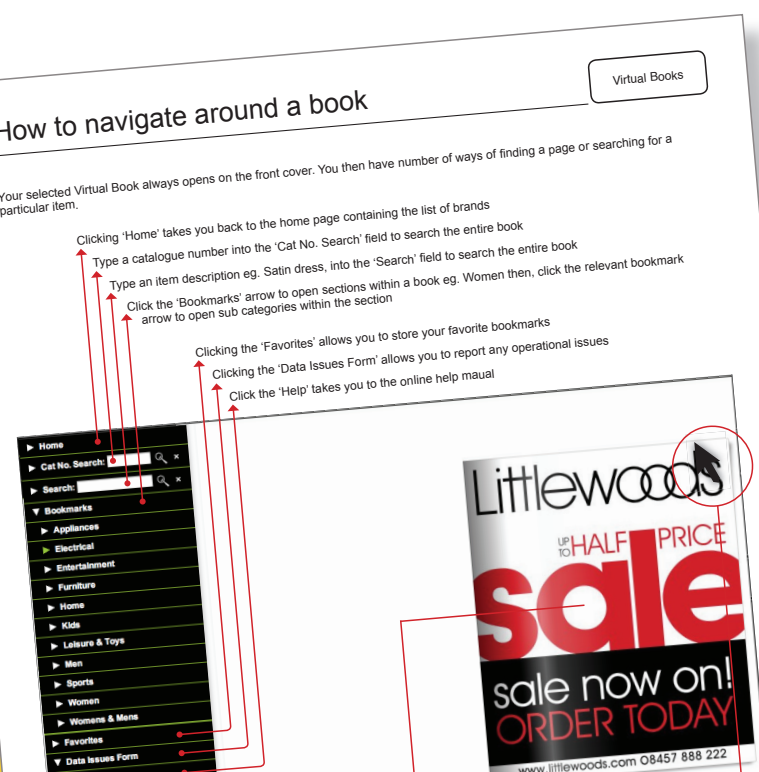
Moreover, the Virtual Book provides additional benefits which were not available with the print editions. These include:

- Simple navigation, bookmarks and the ability to search for products based on brand, product name, catalogue code or page numbers leading to faster call handling times
- Notes can be added to pages within the Virtual Book to allow for information useful to the advisor to be displayed alongside the product (previously the adviser would have to check against a hard copy list)
- The zoom facility on the images means that advisors can better describe the image to customers from their digital copy. Advisors can display detailed product knowledge such as what a motif says on a t-shirt, whether a top has diamante, what the neckline is like, whether the dress is trimmed with lace.

The ability to up-sell or cross-sell products is also achieved at the click of a mouse. Whereas previously the advisor would have spent time finding and riffling through a publication to answer a query, the time saved can now be spent on providing additional information and promoting different products that could be of interest. For example, an advisor can access stock availability (through a separate internal system) at the same time as looking at a product in the Virtual Book; if it is out of stock they can quickly find other similar products using the search function and potentially saving the sale.

The benefits to customer service operations has resulted in enthusiastic feedback from contact centre agents. Cole reports, "For us, Virtual Books is about being able to see a publication that a customer gets and be confident that what you're seeing is exactly what the customer is seeing. The positive response from our staff across the contact centres has been fantastic. Many feel that it is a positive evolvment as far as their work is concerned. Some have even said how relaxing it was to flick through the pages as you can turn the pages over interactively!

"The Virtual Book was designed to be easy to use. The training time we put aside for each agent was 30 minutes. We have found however that on average, agents have understood how to use the Virtual Book within 10 minutes so it is a very intuitive tool."



An additional benefit of producing Virtual Books is the significant reduction in environmental impact achieved through the paper savings. Previously, ten thousand copies a year of the main books (over 1000 pages) would be sent to the seven contact centres, as well as copies of all the leaflets (varying from 6-120 pages in length). "Good business practice dictates that we keep 10 per cent of this stock in contact centres for contingency purposes, nevertheless, there is a considerable paper saving now being made annually," adds Cole.

Print, postage and storage of these publications is also saved by the business. The cost of these savings is estimated to be £220,000 over the next year.

"The ease of electronic storage means that we are able to keep an archive of catalogues. We aim to have a rolling library of up to four years of publications to ensure that we cover all the queries that customers should have from previous items purchased. This archive facility once again has important customer service element to it."

Cole concludes, "Working with Transactis on Virtual Books has meant that we were able to deliver this project on time. They really do listen to what the customer wants, have a positive attitude which helps to continually push progress forward, yet can provide solutions that are creative in design and scope. Whilst it is early to measure customer feedback, the positive response from our contact centre staff is encouraging. Subsequently, the business is looking at ways to continue to develop Virtual Books for customer service delivery."

The flexibility of the solution created by Transactis means that there are a number of further applications for digital catalogues, including:-

- Creation of customer facing personalised publications. A smaller digital catalogue (known as part-catalogues) could be produced to present the products/services the retailer knows the customer is interested in. Not only does this produce a more targeted communication but also allows browsing of the catalogue to be more intelligent. Links can be embedded to lead the customer or prospect to a transactional website, moving images can be made available in the digital version and links to compatible products can be created to encourage cross-sell e.g. by viewing and considering a purchase for a digital camera, this product entry could link to a camera case, lenses or tripod.
- Preview catalogues for a particular line can be created easily through the use of digital publications. Its online nature means that for the marketer, the ability to track which products were viewed most will be a vital tool to gauging customer demand.
- When creating hard copy publications, digital proofing will be vital to speed up this stage and ensure a quality catalogue is produced. By producing an electronic version of the publication, retailers will be able to set page orders and determine the look, feel and flow at the click of a button, replacing the need to print drafts and produce boards.

shop direct group

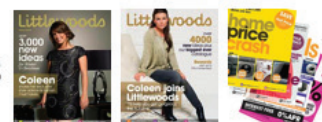


Please select a brand:



additions

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choice

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