Marks & Spencer Goes Global with Stibo Systems

Company:

Marks & Spencer

Industry:

Retail

Region:

Europe

Solution:

Product MDM

Exective Summary

No high street store will ever be quite as British as Marks & Spencer (M&S). Founded in 1884 and a ubiquitous presence in towns and cities ever since, M&S now employs over 80,000 staff in 852 UK stores and in its international territories. With 57% of the company's £10.3 billion group revenue in its quality food division and 43% in its home wear and clothing, M&S has become the go-to venue for generations of shoppers whenever they're looking for something that's a little more stylish or luxurious.

M&S now has a single source of product data and automated processes for launching products on their website. This means fewer errors and a substantially reduced time to market.

The Business Payoff

"The Product MDM solution gave us the ability to tailor the product range for each country," says Alison Taylor, business analyst in M&S's product information group. "That's important to us because we sell some things in the UK that we might not have the license to sell elsewhere, or that are problematic or simply not cost effective when it comes to shipping."

The Customer Experience

Less than six months after the successful launch of the UK website, there was an international deployment of Product MDM to support the eight M&S international sites, using five languages. It was at this point that M&S could start using a single system for all product data instead of two, gaining the efficiencies that come with a significantly streamlined process.

M&S
EST. 1884

Challenge

Although well known and much loved on the British high street, M&S is also a force in international retailing. It has 480 international stores across 59 territories and £1.1 billion — almost a tenth of its revenue — comes from abroad. With £800 million of revenue from digital channels, M&S is focusing on consolidating its position as a leading international, multichannel retailer.

The company's website has over seven million registered users. However, the challenge was to migrate to this new iteration from the company's previous Amazon-based system without losing users or sales and while also keeping track of the 20,000 products on offer. Additionally, with tablets in the hands of store staff and smartphone apps in the hands of customers, this renewed website also had to work for everyone, in every country.

Solution

"A new PIM gave us the opportunity to actually address some of the pain points we had in the business relating to our existing product information," says Rebecca Chamberlain of M&S.com's development team. "We'd had problems with data quality, and there was an awful lot of unnecessary double keying. By introducing Product MDM, we could see we were going to have structured attributes to give us more consistent data, as well as a big reduction in all that manual keying."

M&S went live with Stibo Systems' Product MDM solution a full year before its new website launched because the same 20,000 products that were featured on the old website needed the PIM attributes added and integrated into the new selling hierarchies. This led to a period of dual running, with one team adding hundreds of products each week to the new website, as the existing one continued to trade. "We also utilized the solution's workflow functionality as we launched the website," notes Chamberlain. "By designing the workflow to manage the enrichment and publication of products to our selling channels, Product MDM gave us both efficiency and control."

With Product MDM as the source of all ecommerce product data, product information appeared in a consistent manner, even though M&S required 585 different product attributes to cover its inventory. Business rules also now prevent inconsistent data from appearing. For example, clothing can't be published online until all the sizes have appropriate customer-facing labels.

Even though all content is managed in English, the selling hierarchies automatically flag which products are sold internationally and send only this text to an external contractor for translation. This information then appears on the international sites 24 to 48 hours after publication in the UK.

"Product MDM is an integral part of getting products onto our website," says Chamberlain. A single, well managed source of data and increased automation have resulted in a system with fewer input errors and capable of dramatically reducing the time it takes for M&S to publish products on its website.

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— Rebecca Chamberlain, Product Owner – Product information, M&S.com Development

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