SAIL to SABLE

Learn how Integrated Systems provided omnichannel growth and turned the tide for this leading resort wear brand -->

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Sail to Sable specializes in sophisticated women's resort wear with a whimsical twist. The brand does not hold back when it comes to femininity and flounce. Its ladies' fashions are known for their colorful stripes and prints, bell sleeves and fun trims, from fringe and feathers to tassels and bows. The Little Ladies girls' collection gives moms, godmothers, aunts and friends a wonderful way to outfit the younger generation in complementary classic designs with a touch of spunk.

Drawn by a love of fashion and inspired by beach resorts of the eastern seaboard, founder Jennifer Stocker left a New York City publishing career to launch Sail to Sable, originally focusing on home goods. When she introduced a classic tunic to her offerings, customers responded with so much enthusiasm that it was a natural evolution to move the company into apparel. Today the business designs, sources and distributes dresses, tops, shorts, rompers, skirts, pants, coats and jackets. It produces spring, summer, fall, holiday and resort collections.

Riding the Growing Pain Waves

Since its inception, Sail to Sable has seen steady increases in e-commerce website traffic as well as expanding order volume from wholesale customers. In percentage revenue growth, the company has doubled in size every year since its start in 2012. A move to Shopify's e-commerce platform three years ago made managing the front end of its website more user-friendly, but the firm was still relying on the QuickBooks off-the-shelf accounting package to manage both inventory and orders.

"From an apparel standpoint, an accounting system can become an inventory nightmare," says Victoria Brigida, director of operations, Sail to Sable. "It's just not designed for that."

As customer orders surged year-over-year, the firm's lean management team and network of sales representatives began to feel the pressures and see the pitfalls of having to manage more and more data with poor visibility to key information. For example, salespeople would take orders from retail customers at trade shows, not realizing which styles were already sold out. "We never really knew what our inventory numbers were unless we stopped to spend several hours analyzing our data," Brigida says.

Processing wholesale orders, as well as online consumer purchases, required repetitive data entry. "Every order was being touched at least four different times, presenting four separate opportunities for people to make mistakes," she says. "Data had to be entered manually when the order was taken, when it was entered into the accounting system, when it was charged and when it was entered at our third-party warehouse provider."

Sail to Sable kept track of UPC codes on a spreadsheet and stored corporate credit card numbers for many boutique clients in a safe. These card numbers would have to be entered manually each time the company processed an invoice.

Then when Sail to Sable added Belk and select Bloomingdale's stores as customers, this new business brought new requirements for EDI communications.

"You really have to have a system that can handle those orders," Brigida says. "The first time we tried it manually, it was a horrible experience."

Around mid-2016, Sail to Sable had reached a tipping point. On the bright side, its fashion collections were more popular than ever, as evidenced by lively e-commerce sales and growing orders from wholesale accounts. At the same time, it faced a trifecta of challenges:

- Sail to Sable's small workforce was fast becoming overwhelmed by the daily demands of running a thriving omnichannel business, from managing inventory to processing individual consumer returns. With a patchwork of processes built around QuickBooks and spreadsheets, there was a real risk that important information would start falling through the cracks.

- To support the strong omnichannel growth, Sail to Sable had made a strategic decision to transition to a new 3PL warehouse partner, and it was critical the switchover go smoothly.

- With the initial batch of department store orders due to ship in February 2017, there was a dire sense of urgency to implement automated EDI communications.

And while it did not seem like a cause for alarm at the time, Brigida was expecting her first child and planning to hire and train someone to manage day-to-day operations while she was on maternity leave.

Turning the Tide

Having had some preliminary discussions with RLM Apparel Software in prior years, Brigida asked the fashion business solutions provider for a comprehensive proposal. Sail to Sable was impressed and decided to move forward with a rollout of RLM's enterprise system.

Originally budgeted to start in early 2017, the project was fast-tracked to kick off in fall 2016 so that the system could support those EDI-intensive shipments by February. Within a busy three-month period, RLM worked with Sail to Sable to:

- Migrate product information, UPC codes and other business data from QuickBooks and spreadsheets to the RLM solution

- Build integrations between RLM and the new 3PL partner for seamless fulfillment of both B2B and B2C transactions

- Integrate with the Shopify e-commerce solution, building additional interfaces with the 3PL

- Activate automated EDI connectivity with department store clients

- Automate the credit card charging process for specialty store customers so that their cards were automatically authorized at pick-ticket time and charged upon shipping.

In particular, RLM's integration with Shopify has alleviated many manual touch points that previously consumed an inordinate amount of time and resources for Sail to Sable. Today, this is how quickly and easily B2C e-commerce is managed:

- Styles are pushed from the RLM item master into Shopify directly.

- When an online shopper places an order, RLM automatically retrieves the order from Shopify, updates it as an order in RLM, generates a pick ticket and updates this information with the 3PL.

- After the 3PL fulfills the order, the tracking number and information is retrieved by RLM from the 3PL's warehouse system. The pick ticket is closed out, and sales and invoices are created in RLM.

- After this information exchange, RLM automatically updates the order status to "fulfilled" in Shopify, triggering an email to the end consumer notifying her of the shipment and supplying tracking information.

- As any returns are processed by the 3PL, the information is retrieved by RLM, the inventory is put back into available stock, and the customer's credit card is refunded in Shopify.

"RLM's Integrated System allows us to be a lot less involved in handling single orders. We technically don't have to do anything," says Brigida. "Everything takes care of itself."

Beyond streamlined e-commerce, as a result of its RLM implementation, Sail to Sable has much greater real-time inventory visibility all around. Now field sales representatives can confidently take orders with available-to-promise inventory details at their fingertips. Plus, new sales team members have access to historical information to help them hit the ground running with their customers.

Sail to Sable's leadership also has more time to devote to strategic planning. "We're able to give important priorities more attention because we aren't wrapped up in the detailed minutia of all of the orders and manual administrative tasks," she says.

This automation and process control proved to be mission critical just months after "go live". Brigida, who had planned to go out on maternity leave in July 2017, had to be rushed to the hospital for an emergency delivery in April. Suddenly, she was out of the picture dealing with her medical crisis, not having had a chance to formally cross-train anyone on her responsibilities.

"Our summer orders were about ready to be shipped, and we had a good amount of product coming in from overseas. It was like the perfect storm," she says. "Without a system like RLM's, I don't know how we would have been able to get our orders out during those first couple of weeks of me being in the hospital. But as it was, our owner quickly got involved with RLM and the support team, and they were able to get her up and running so that we could continue business as usual."

Now it's smooth sailing for this entrepreneurial fashion business as it prepares for the next growth wave — business as usual.

Do you have issues like those that faced Sail to Sable? Visit us online at RLMApparelSoftware.com or call (201) 531-5959 to learn more about how RLM Apparel Software can support your growth.

About Sail to Sable

Founded: 2012

Headquarters: Darien, Conn.

Ownership: Privately held by founder Jennifer Stocker and investors

Business Focus: Women's lifestyle brand with coastal resort wear roots, Little Ladies girls' collection

Wholesale Customers: 400+ specialty retailers, better department stores, U.S. and Caribbean

Website/Social:
www.sailtosable.com, #sailtosable