



CASE STUDY

College Outside



Automate, Scale Up and Improve Customer Experience: The Case of College Outside Adopting TrueCommerce Drop Ship and eCommerce Solutions

Background

College Outside is a members-only online retailer of outdoor gear for outdoor education groups and college students. This innovative company leverages a drop ship business model to sell products from over 50 leading outdoor brands at a deep discount to their customers.

Working with so many brands presents huge daily challenges around exchanging order and inventory data in multiple forms, as well as keeping product availability up-to-date on College Outside's online storefront. This time-consuming manual activity constrains business growth and can negatively affect the customer experience by introducing errors and delays.

More Connected, with Unique Integration and Automation

To gain more regular and accurate inventory updates, as well as more timely shipping and tracking data, College Outside took advantage of a cloud-based integration made possible by TrueCommerce's eCommerce platform and customizable supply chain collaboration tools.

“The automation takes a big load off our team and enables us to scale as we add new vendors and grow our sales. Even more importantly, it enables us to create the best customer experience that we possibly can.”

Sarah Lockwood
Founder and CEO, College Outside

Benefits

01

Operational costs reduced significantly: automated invoices and purchase orders (POs) exchange streamlines the order-to-cash cycle for both College Outside and its brands

02

Responsive customer support becomes a growth factor through innovation, reduced business risk and costly custom software development elimination

03

Timely inventory updates purge out-of-stock worries from the company web storefront

04

Customers happy they can actually buy what they see, always know where their shipments are

TrueCommerce worked directly with College Outside's vendors to link their systems with the retailer's eCommerce platform. The integration automates the exchange of critical supply chain data to accelerate fulfillment, eliminate errors and reduce out-of-stocks.

Sarah Lockwood, Founder and CEO, explains: "The TrueCommerce portal's cloud-based technology acts like 'middleware' between our TrueCommerce Nexternal eCommerce platform and our vendors' systems. It delivers automation that ensures we get proper inventory updates, that our vendors receive our orders, and that we get timely order status and tracking information back from vendors—it's very cool!"

The new integration also benefits College Outside's vendors, by helping to eliminate manual effort, delays and errors on their end as well.

The retailer launched the new program with two key brands in October 2019. They plan to migrate more brands to the new, integrated workflow over time.

"The TrueCommerce supplier enablement team has been incredibly responsive and professional, We've trusted them to represent us with our vendors, and that experience has been entirely positive."

Sarah Lockwood
Founder and CEO, College Outside

Objective

Streamline drop shipping relationship with key vendors by eliminating manual bottlenecks and errors through order and inventory data exchange automation

Solution

Connect College Outside's TrueCommerce Nexternal eCommerce platform directly to vendors' order management systems through a unique, cloud-based supply chain integration from TrueCommerce supplier enablement platform

More Prepared for What's Next, with End-to-End Drop Shipping Automation

When a customer places an order through College Outside's web storefront, it is processed automatically at the line item level and POs are sent to each of the brands involved.

"Unlike most eCommerce platforms, TrueCommerce Nexternal can process orders at the line item level out-of-the-box," notes Ms. Lockwood. "With our new integration, some line items are now routed through the TrueCommerce supplier portal and then on to the brands as POs."

The two brands that integrate through the TrueCommerce platform receive POs directly into their order management systems. The vendor then

automatically sends back an order confirmation. When the vendor drop ships the order, the solution automatically sends back shipment and tracking data, which updates College Outside's Nexternal eCommerce system. Nexternal then automatically notifies the customer that their order has been shipped and provides tracking data. College Outside also automatically receives an invoice for the shipped order, including shipping and freight costs.

"It's all very clean, transparent and organized," Ms. Lockwood states. "Under the hood the data is exchanged using electronic data interchange (EDI), but our team receives the documents in human-readable PDF or CSV formats."

Creating the Best Possible Customer Experience

Integration with its vendors through the TrueCommerce supplier portal and eCommerce solution provide critical support for College Outside's unique business model.

"The automation takes a big load off our team and enables us to scale as we add new vendors and grow our sales," Ms. Lockwood emphasizes. "Even more importantly, it enables us to create the best customer

experience that we possibly can—by making sure that our website accurately reflects what's in stock, accelerating our shipping timeline, and ensuring that customers get their order and tracking information quickly."

Instead of being forced to hire a team of engineers to build the supply chain platform we need, we get to work with TrueCommerce — and that’s really wonderful. I would certainly recommend this solution.

Sarah Lockwood
Founder and CEO, College Outside



More Supported, with Responsive, Dedicated Customer Service Teams

College Outside’s commitment to streamlining its drop ship order processing is matched by TrueCommerce support.

“The TrueCommerce supplier enablement team has been incredibly responsive and professional,” relates Ms. Lockwood. “We’ve trusted them to represent us with our vendors, and that experience has been entirely positive. Anytime an issue comes up they respond immediately and dig into solving the problem.”

College Outside has been a TrueCommerce Nexternal customer for over five years, and the experience has been similar.

“Our TrueCommerce Nexternal account manager and support team have been incredible,” Ms. Lockwood reports. “We’ve worked with them through many

iterations of our site. They’ve gone above and beyond to create tools that we need or help us customize our eCommerce platform, to support our unique business model and help us grow.”

The combined platform helps College Outside to be a more agile and efficient team.

“Instead of being forced to hire a team of engineers to build the supply chain platform we need, we get to work with TrueCommerce — and that’s really wonderful,” Ms. Lockwood shares. “I would certainly recommend this solution. Especially from cost and ease-of-use standpoints, it’s a great option for any company in the drop ship space that is working with multiple vendors.”



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