

# Case Study: Retail Concepts

## Company Profile

Houston-based Retail Concepts is the parent company of Sun & Ski Sports, an outdoor outfitter with 25 locations across the nation. Retail Concepts also owns and operates five other retail stores, including Patio Place and Ski Stop.

As Retail Concepts grew its sales, store counts, and brands, the number of suppliers it dealt with increased significantly. Throughout that growth, the company was aware that the increasingly fast pace of warehouse activity and resulting management effort was leading to the need for a comprehensive approach to electronic data interchange (EDI). Company executives knew something had to be done.

The company's first inclination was to tackle the project in-house; it had a programmer on staff who had some previous EDI experience. When that programmer suggested a meeting with EDI solutions provider TrueCommerce for noncommittal conversation, Retail Concepts' VP of IT Shelly Nixon agreed to entertain the idea. "To sum it up, TrueCommerce came in, did a presentation, and changed our minds. They sold us on outsourcing the effort," she said. "It was a matter of ROI. We realized it would come more quickly and be stronger if we put it on a third party to make it happen, as opposed to struggling through it ourselves."

## Change Management: Behind-the-Scenes Work Lays Foundation for EDI

The next several months were spent preparing for implementation, with TrueCommerce providing

# RCI

## The Solution

Retail Concepts, Inc. recognized the increasingly fast pace of warehouse activity and resulting management effort required a comprehensive approach to electronic data interchange (EDI). TrueCommerce helped the EDI team at Retail Concepts:

- Define the necessary EDI documents
- Develop specifications and mapping
- Set up a compliance-testing platform
- Communicate the initiative to vendor community

on-site support to the EDI team at Retail Concepts. First, they effectively defined the specific EDI documents required to more effectively communicate with the brand's vendor community. Then they developed the specifications and mapping for the EDI X12 documents that would be sent to and from the supplier community within the Retail Concepts enterprise resource planning (ERP) system.

Additionally, TrueCommerce set up a compliance-testing platform to perform document testing for those vendors that had in-house EDI capabilities or were using other third-party services. Soon, it was time to communicate the initiative to Retail Concepts' vendor community. The retailer and TrueCommerce worked together on that effort, informing the supplier community that new processes were being implemented and compliance testing would soon follow.



experienced the benefits of EDI firsthand. Others were just getting started with EDI, and needed more personalized assistance through the process. "EDI vendor testing was one area where we felt absolutely confident in our decision to outsource," says Nixon. "I can't imagine any retailer who really has the manpower to handle that. It's very tedious, very time consuming, and takes a lot of effort. You need to dedicate a team of people to it, and we couldn't have done that part without TrueCommerce."

## Assessing the Impact of EDI

All transactions to and from Retail Concepts and its vendor community now move through TrueCommerce's trading partner network and are tested for accuracy, tracked, and reported to the retailer. While some might think that adding a management/control layer to vendor communication would cause inefficiencies, Retail Concepts experienced the opposite.

"After the implementation, thanks in large part to the advance ship notice (ASN) requirements in the new system, shipments that would have taken four to six hours to receive were being completed in 30 minutes," said Nixon. She also noted that vendor chargebacks have decreased dramatically with EDI due to the improved accuracy of orders, and that EDI is enabling more efficient direct store delivery (DSD) activity among its vendors.

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- Shelly Nixon, Retail Concepts' VP of IT

Many of the vendors the retailer does business with were already familiar with TrueCommerce and had



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