

Multichannel approach delivers business growth



Aurora Fashions' brands are strongly differentiated

BT Expedite has helped Aurora Fashions launch transactional web-based stores for its brands, providing customers with innovative service options

Client

UK-based Aurora Fashions is the parent company of six well-known fashion brands including Karen Millen, Oasis, Coast and Warehouse. The individual brands are managed as distinct businesses, each with its own product development, merchandising, and retail operations teams. While the brands are strongly differentiated all benefit from Aurora Fashions' shared services policy in areas such as ICT, property, and accounting.

Aurora Fashions (previously Mosaic Fashions) are a long time customer of BT Expedite – BT's specialist retail solutions business – and use a wide range of BT Expedite Connected Retailer applications both in stores and at head office. These include Merchandising, Store, Sales Analytics, Sourcing, Planning, and Customer Relationship Management applications. This integrated, shared services approach has improved supplier collaboration and reduced support costs for the group.

Challenge

Change is a way of life in fashion. Trends and styles come and go but, until recently, the high street store remained the shoppers' primary focus. But this is changing with

more and more people now choosing to browse virtual store rails and buy online. Aurora Fashions believes that despite the tactile nature of clothing and the social aspect of high street shopping, online and off-line channels can work hand-in-hand.

Ishan Patel, Strategic Development Director at Aurora Fashions, explains: "Many people like to do their research online and then come into stores to buy, so we see them as being complementary channels." It also works the other way with some customers choosing to buy online after having seen a fashion item in a store. Aurora Fashions (then Mosaic Fashions) recognised the business potential of this shift in customer behaviour and set itself a target of ensuring all its brands were online with transactional web sites by the end of 2007.

John Bovill, Group IT Director at Aurora Fashions, observes: "It was very important to create a seamless multichannel experience for our customers, so the e-commerce platform needed to integrate fully with our existing BT Expedite store and head office systems." Spending several years developing a platform for the sites was not an option.

The BT Differentiators

- BT's hosting and network capabilities
- BT Expedite's comprehensive portfolio of multi-channel enabled retail specific applications
- The track record of the BT Fresca Commerce platform in delivering successful e-commerce transactional web sites
- Consultancy and services to create a fully integrated seamless customer experience across multiple channels

Case study

Aurora Fashions

“With BT Expedite and Fresca we have delivered our multi-channel strategy by successfully launching transactional web sites for all our brands in just 18 months.”

Richard Glanville
Chief Finance Officer
Aurora Fashions

Instead Aurora Fashions chose to outsource web site design and hosting and selected a solution from BT Fresca – the e-commerce division of BT Expedite – to create the web stores for its brands.

Solution

BT Expedite offered the BT Fresca Commerce proposition. This is a fully managed and hosted service with an impressive 99.9 per cent availability guarantee. BT Fresca develops, integrates, hosts, manages and supports the e-commerce website and provides the necessary hardware and software. There is also an optional web site design service.

The BT Fresca Commerce platform offers complete web store flexibility. Multi-channel support is built-in; as are the links to back office systems for customer ordering, call centre, and fulfilment processes. The platform is feature rich and covers all key retail functions such as campaign management, catalogue management, and trading analysis.

For more information on BT Expedite visit:
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A highly developed content management system enables quick and easy generation of appealing ‘magazine style’ editorial content such as style notes and latest fashion news.

Implementation started with the Oasis and Warehouse brands. The primary point of integration is with Aurora Fashions existing BT Expedite buying and merchandising application. This integration enables online shoppers to verify product availability in real time resulting in a much more satisfying shopping experience. The integration also enables rapid and easy management of the online catalogue, an important feature for maximum customer satisfaction.

Ishan Patel says: “The whole task was well planned and executed and we had very few integration issues. It certainly helped that we had a common merchandising platform, but we have been very impressed with the competence of the BT Fresca development team.”

Whilst each brand has a lot of autonomy over the look and feel of its site, each is underpinned by the BT Fresca Commerce platform and a common integration methodology with existing BT Expedite systems. This approach simplified and speeded up the deployment process and greatly reduced business risk.

Value

Adopting a consistent platform across the group greatly accelerated the implementation process and provides consistency and economy of scale. This has been achieved within a framework that allows the autonomy necessary to reflect the values of the individual brands in the look and feel of each site.

Richard Glanville, Chief Finance Officer at Aurora Fashions, says: “With BT Expedite and Fresca we have delivered our multi-channel strategy by successfully launching transactional web sites for all our brands in just 18 months.” Aurora Fashion brands will all now be able to tap into the ever-expanding online shopping market, enhance customer satisfaction, and encourage repeat business with a multichannel market offer.

“This year (2009) we’ve consolidated the Oasis, Whistles and Coast warehouse operations within our in-house distribution centre to fulfil e-commerce orders using the BT Expedite Mercatus Customer Order Management (COM) solution. The transition has been seamless to date, and established a broader foundation for the Group’s multi-channel offering that will allow us to deliver cost synergies.”

John Bovill
Group IT Director
Aurora Fashions

Business growth is already being delivered. For example just five months after implementation the Coast online store is set to become the brand’s top trading store in the same way as has been achieved with the web site of its sister brand Warehouse.

John Bovill comments: “The integrated solution from BT Expedite enables the group to operate in harmony and provides total visibility of critical management information across all of our brands. Soon our online stores will be delivering around five per cent of group revenue which is a fantastic achievement in such a short time.”

But having established the sites there is more work to do, as Ishan Patel explains: “It is always an ongoing development – not just the design or creative elements of the sites – but keeping up with best practice in terms of functionality.” An example is the latest Whistles web site, which features a virtual boutique that attempts to replicate the in-store customer experience. Shoppers can visualise the fashion outfits and brands in room settings against brand, style, size, colour, and other attributes.

Core BT services

- BT Fresca Commerce
- BT Expedite multi-channel merchandising solution