



KEEPING PACE WITH THE FAST MOVING CONSUMER GOODS INDUSTRY UNIEK'S DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

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Uniek

HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS

Founded in 1988 in Madison, Wisconsin as a photo frame supplier, Uniek has since become one of the largest designers, manufacturers and importers of home decor accents in North America.

Today, the company maintains operational headquarters alongside a 12,000 square foot research and development facility and supplies leading American retailers like Wal-Mart, Target, Bed Bath and Beyond, and Wayfair with what Julianne Brickl, Vice President of Marketing and Merchandise Management, calls “a full home decor solution – anything from furniture to wall art, and mirrors to desktop accents”.

A SHIFTING CONSUMER GOODS INDUSTRY

Like other industries, the consumer goods market has evolved considerably in the last decade. Statistics reveal that an average of 32% more products are brought to market each year, while profitability per product has declined by almost a quarter.*

Retailers and their suppliers are now faced with the compounded challenges of introducing new products, compressing lead times and lifecycles, and innovating constantly – all without increasing operating costs.

“Traditional brick and mortar stores have begun to transition from very tight category departments to wanting to provide consumers with more of a complete home decor solution,” Brickl says. “In 2011 we recognized that, beyond our core business of photo frames, we needed to compete across all things home – and to do this we needed to increase our product lines. We also knew that we had to make this change with the same or fewer resources, from a profitability standpoint.”

*Source Gartner White Paper: Take Six Actions to Improve Product Life Cycle Management in Consumer Products.
Published: 8 March 2016



“ We’re now twelve months into adding direct-to-consumer online as one of our channels and Centric has been instrumental in helping us keep up the pace of development we need to do that. ”

Challenges

- + Market pressures demanded a quicker pace of new product introduction
- + Profitability required an increase in product variety without an increase in internal headcount
- + Disconnected systems created significant administrative overhead
- + Inflexible database solution could not be configured for new product categories

INTRODUCING FLEXIBILITY TO MANAGE THE INCREASE IN PRODUCT CATEGORIES

With the mandate of increasing its Stock Keeping Units (SKU) count without doing the same to its headcount, Uniek then began to re-evaluate its existing product design and development systems.

“All our product specifications were stored in an Access database,” explains Brickl. “This made it difficult to communicate with our vendors, but a far larger problem was inflexibility. The system was set up to manage a single product category – photo frames – and it emerged that it was going to take considerable IT resources to adapt the database to any other category we wanted to source or manufacture. Resources we simply didn’t have.”

In addition, Uniek’s teams were storing essential supporting information – for compliance, quoting and other purposes – in Excel, which was not integrated in any way to the existing specification system.

“At the time, we referred to all our disconnected systems as balls that the team had to juggle,” says Brickl. “We knew that we needed to consolidate all that information in a single location if we were to be as efficient as we needed to be with the resources we had.”

THE PUSH FOR PLM

To support this business model evolution and remain relevant in a rapidly-changing and competitive industry, Uniek turned to PLM. Brickl and her team auditioned several vendors who specialized in manufacturing, before settling on Silicon Valley-based Centric Software, whose experience is in fashion and fast-moving consumer goods.

"A lot of the solutions we evaluated were pre-built for manufacturing smaller ranges of products, which didn't really apply to us," Brickl explains. "Centric PLM, on the other hand, had a level of configurability that was really going to help us introduce all these different product lines."

This perception also carried through to the final assessment stage, with Centric's team presenting a tailored demonstration. "Centric presented the software with our products in mind, making it immediately obvious how everything was going to translate," Brickl explains. "We could see how invested they were in our company, and we felt their balance of commitment, configurability and size was the right fit for us."

A RAPID IMPLEMENTATION

Uniek went live six-month after signing with Centric and users throughout the American company's extended supply chain, including online vendors have been using Centric PLM for many years.

This smoothness and speed are something Brickl credits to Centric's Agile DeploymentSM methodology. "We had dedicated resources from Centric working with us throughout the implementation; and they worked tirelessly to keep us on schedule and make us successful right out of the gate," she says. "Together, we documented our processes and planned our PLM project extensively in the early stages, but it really became apparent in the last sixty days just how quickly the system could be configured and come together once our needs were defined."

As a managed services partner, Uniek also benefits from Centric's high-uptime hosting, which Brickl calls "terrific, since it doesn't require any IT resources from our teams to keep the system operating".

DRIVING STRATEGIC FUTURE GROWTH

As a long-term user of Centric PLM, Uniek has documented clear, concrete benefits that have allowed the company to keep pace with change.

"Because all the information we need is now centrally located, in one system, our item creation team has easy access to everything from specifications to quotes to sample requests," says Brickl. "This has reduced our item set up time, for individual products, from a week down to just two days."

In line with customer and consumer expectations, Centric has also allowed Uniek to dramatically increase its product variety without administrative overheads. "Our final SKU count is up 50% over where it was prior to implementation," says Brickl, "and core team members are able to add entirely new product categories with simple attributes, meaning that we don't need to involve I. in the new product introduction process at all."

In keeping with Uniek's published commitment to "fierce compliance to American standards and regulations," Centric PLM now allows the company to manage critical supply chain processes in a single collaborative environment. "Prior to Centric, comparing and contrasting supplier costs required us to lay multiple Excel sheets side by side, whereas today we can go into the system, review responses from all the vendors who have quoted, and easily select the one with the right combination of quality, cost, and compliance," Brickl explains.

And although Uniek initially adopted PLM to manage the growth of its product ranges, Centric PLM has also supported another unexpected change in direction. "We're now twelve months into adding direct-to-consumer online as one of our channels and Centric has been instrumental in helping us keep up the pace of development we need to do that," says Brickl. "In addition, we have also found Centric invaluable in helping us manage the content master data we need to provide to online retail partners as well – none of that would have been possible with our old system."

Uniek is currently evaluating the possibility of extending its use of Centric solutions to new modules and the vendor's innovative mobile apps, with Brickl adding that, "we want to use the system to the best of its abilities, because we see our partnership with Centric as an investment in the future of the broader business."



Results

- + New product set up time reduced from 1 week to 2 days
- + Product variety increased by 50% at the SKU level
- + All essential information centralized in a single collaborative environment
- + New product categories can be added by super users, with no IT intervention
- + Establishment of new, direct-to-consumer online channel directly attributable to PLM project



ABOUT UNIEK

Uniek is a premier designer, manufacturer and supplier of picture frames and home decor accents and furniture. We are a proud U.S. Manufacturer of polystyrene photo frames, canvas and framed art from our facility in Waunakee, Wisconsin. Uniek also supplies globally-sourced home décor products across materials, décor styles and categories to mass-market brick and mortar stores, and top online retailers.

ABOUT CENTRIC SOFTWARE

From its headquarters in Silicon Valley and offices in trend capitals around the world, Centric Software builds technologies for the most prestigious names in fashion, retail, footwear, luxury, outdoor, and consumer goods. Its flagship product lifecycle management (PLM) platform, Centric 8, delivers enterprise-class merchandise planning, product development, sourcing, business planning, quality, and collection management functionality tailored for fast-moving consumer industries. Centric SMB packages extended PLM including innovative technology and key industry learnings tailored for small businesses.

Centric Software has received multiple industry awards, including the Frost & Sullivan Global Product Differentiation Excellence Award in Retail, Fashion, and Apparel PLM in 2016 and Frost & Sullivan's Global Retail, Fashion, and Apparel PLM Product Differentiation Excellence Award in 2012. Red Herring named Centric to its Top 100 Global list in 2013, 2015, and 2016.

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