MULTI-CHANNEL SUCCESS FOR LESLIES

Leslies of Luton sell a wide range of angling equipment and accessories. In 2007, the company approached CTS Retail to integrate its existing bricks and mortar store with a well established e-commerce solution.

Microsoft Dynamics RMS was the obvious fit for the business, providing a stable and scalable solution using Microsoft's powerful SQL technology. The combined capabilities of Microsoft Dynamics RMS along with a familiar Microsoft look and feel enabled users to feel comfortable with the system.

"We loved the idea of online selling however our old online system offered no connection to our physical store," says Leslies director, Ian Crawley. "The problem was all the inventory maintenance, going from one to the other. When you are operating across the Internet and doing mail orders it has to be slick and if it's not slick, it isn't worth doing."

Leslies' main focus was to bring the retail and Web elements of their business closer together to create one complete solution. Nitrosell's e-Commerce solution was the final piece of the jigsaw allowing Leslies' to facilitate a smooth integration within a very short time frame, effectively providing them with an off the shelf solution to meet all of their business needs.

"Microsoft Dynamics RMS and Nitrosell's eCommerce solution help retailers handle all sales transactions from both their physical and online stores," says Scott Storey, managing director at CTS. "The stock control functionality means that the WebStore updates availability information almost instantly, removing any risk of disappointing customers by cancelling orders. Having access to detailed and timely sales information helps assist with product ranging and stocking levels, increasing profitability and customer service."

"Now that the site is up and running and we have most things up there, it looks really wonderful," says Crawley. "We had great support from NitroSell's implementation team, and I think it's the best decision we've ever made. I love our WebStore because it's a real selling site and the more people view it, the more we're going to sell. Our previous site was a selling site but nowhere near as good as we have now. The old site was seven or eight years old, but technology has moved on in that time."

The Web channel is where recent interest in multi-channel began for high street retailers who realised that Web-only stores were stealing a march on them. Information Web sites quickly became transactional e-commerce sites but the next phase is now with us. Tim Barker, business development director at Unipower Solutions says that Web 2.0 now delivers increased functionality such as forums, product reviews and user reviews, all with 'buy now' functionality. He emphasises the use of scalable images so that items are easier to visually review.

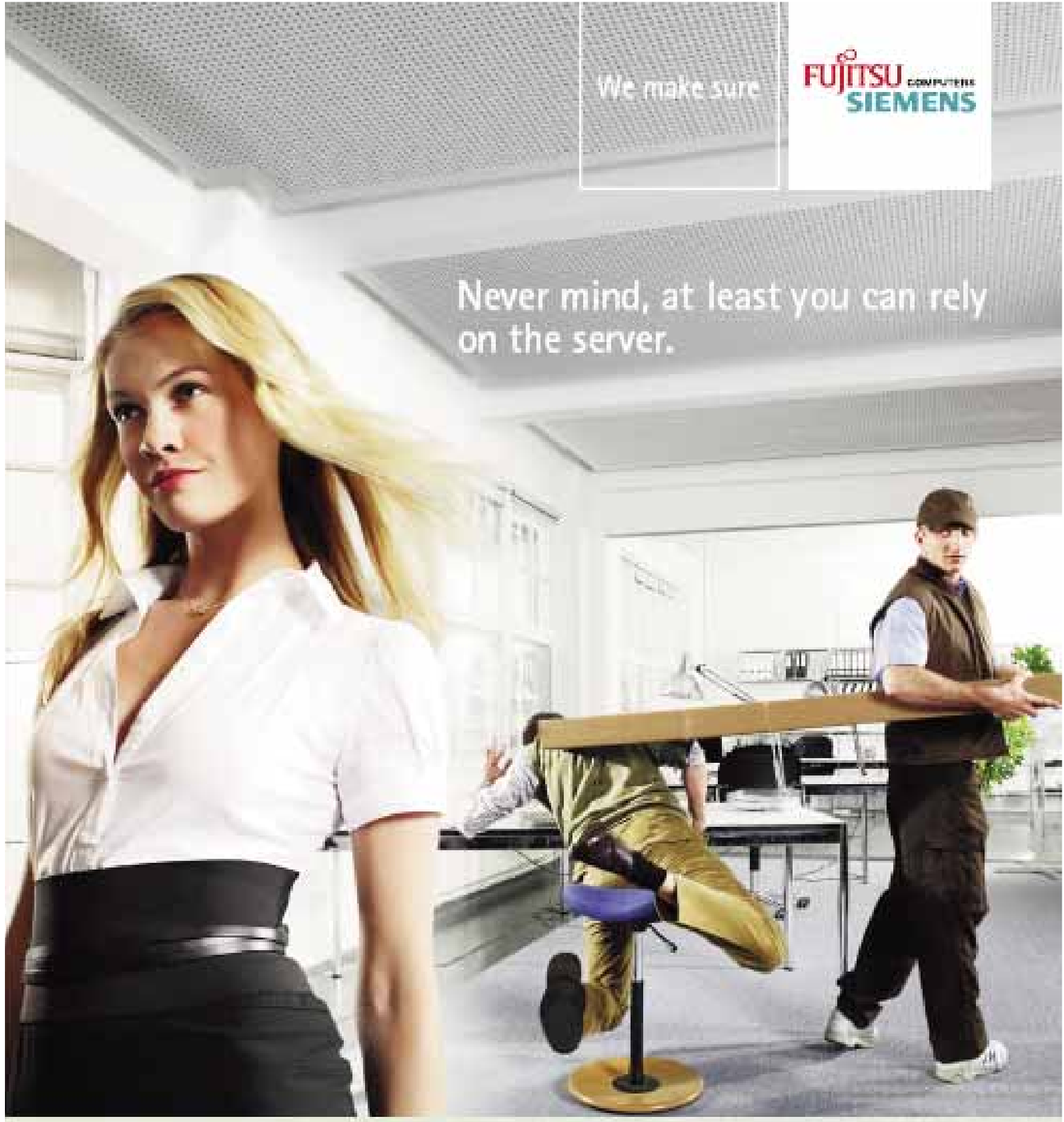
Barker adds that advanced content management systems now make maintenance of single or disparate sites easier, facilitating 'related product' cross and up-sell techniques. Unipower Solutions' Microsoft Dynamics Nav-based retail solution is designed with multi-channel retailers in mind, supporting store, Web, catalogue and call centre on one platform.

Sucharita Mulpuru, a Forrester Research analyst and lead author of a report on the increase in online retail in the US, says that the rise in online shopping is being driven by two types of consumers: "The first are the price-sensitive shoppers who appear to be buying more items online as they look for better prices. And then there are the more affluent customers, who have been increasing their online spending because of the convenience and vast offerings."

Tom Keane, president of NitroSell adds: "While Forrester is correct regarding the macro online trends, we are also seeing a significant number of NitroSell-powered retailers benefiting from customers who love shopping online with those retailers with whom they already have an in-store relationship. Retailers leveraging NitroSell's multi-channel tools can achieve online conversion rates that are higher than with online-only merchants."

Keane points out that with the Dynamics RMS and NitroSell combination, retailers can use pay-per-click search advertising to drive traffic to their Web sites. NitroSell has tight e-commerce integration with industry-leading analytics engines, which is critical to any successful AdCenter or AdWords campaign. It also integrates with e-mail marketing provider Constant Contact. What's also clear from the Forrester/Shop.org report is that some of the bigger players are beginning to experiment with new initiatives, such as social marketing through community Web sites. This is something that NitroSell-powered retailers have been able to do for some time, says Keane, via features such as Facebook integration and RSS feeds.

Lester Aderem from UCS succinctly sums up multi-channel: "It's about the right integration of applications in the retail chain, POS with ERP and supply chain, for the seamless movement of merchandise." He adds: "A key issue with multi-channel is to minimise the number of integration points because complexity equals



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