CASE STUDY

How Rawlings Improved its Merchandising Game Plan for a Digital Playing Field

Major League Content Delivers Sales Success

Whether it's the season opener for Little League or the World Series final, every player reaches for their own glove and carefully selects just the right bat on game day. For over a century Rawlings Sporting Goods Company Inc. has made many of the balls, gloves, bats, and other equipment that teams take with them onto the field.

During that time the athletic brand's baseball, basketball, and football equipment has become more advanced and the consumers buying the equipment have grown more selective. Consumers now conduct detailed research for every product before determining which make and model will be the one that helps them perform best.

In the current era of distributed commerce - in which customers browse and buy wherever they are - Rawlings needed a way to consistently bring all the details of their high-performance sports equipment and protective apparel to life on any screen. The company started by looking at its existing product data in an effort to close some of the gaps, says Sally Vandegrift Yeast, Vice President, Customer Experience & Analytics for Rawlings.

Sally has been with Rawlings for nearly 30 years and has seen firsthand the powerful precision with which each glove is cut and stitched. "Our product guys know the perfect material and technique for glove lacing, but today's challenge is how to show that level of product craftsmanship across multiple retailer platforms so the end consumer can see that quality wherever they shop," she says.

Key Takeaways

PROBLEM TO SOLVE: Sporting goods retailers wanted Rawlings to provide them with more detailed product information to improve product sales online, but the brand had no fast way to source or organize all of the information that digital shoppers wanted to see.

SOLUTION: Rawlings had been storing their product data in their ERP system but it's lack of flexibility was not meeting the company's needs. They turned to Salsify to expand their PIM and DAM capabilities and ensure that their content was ready for all of the ecommerce and sales initiatives.

RESULTS: Using Salsify, Rawlings was able to:

• Begin selling their full 2017 product line in market 5 months earlier than before by arming sales teams with digital product catalogs

• Significantly improve response times to data requests from major and independent retailers

• Launch a new direct-to-consumer channel in September 2016

• Build internal transparency for its product information

A New Kind of Shopping

Over the last two years, Rawlings' go-to-market strategy has undergone significant change. Traditionally, the well-loved brand relied heavily on its well-established person-to-person relationships with teams and distributors to release the latest products. But now digital is the fastest growing part of the business. Initially, the 130-year old brand didn't have the technology or the complete product data in place needed to meet the demands of today's shopper.

"In the past, the focus was selling to teams at all levels - professional, college, high school and local leagues - but the emphasis has flipped," says Jessica Hendrix, Customer Data Specialist for Rawlings. "More and more individuals are doing the research and selecting their equipment. We have to be retail-oriented and control our brand voice to communicate to all the consumers out there in the world."

"Our old format wasn't consistent across all our products. Salsify has allowed us to structure our data in a more useful way."

Sally Vandegrift Yeast
VP, Customer Experience & Analytics
Rawlings

Changing Retail Expectations

The sporting goods retailers that sell Rawlings products and other athletic brands are also navigating the shift to ecommerce. Online sales surged to 17.2 percent of the total sporting goods industry in 2015, up from 11.8 percent in 2010, according to data from National Sporting Goods Association. For the first time, these retailers began to require product information, such as images, descriptions, and specifications directly from Rawlings to help populate and support their digital shopping experiences.

Rawlings had been using a JD Edwards ERP to store product specifications and merchandising information. The system was built for the in-store model and was not set up with today's ever-changing market in mind. In addition, Rawlings' internal data simply was not ready for the demands of ecommerce. Product profiles were not dependably complete or up-to-date. And without a consistent format and with no way to search, the company struggled to meet retailers' new requirements or provide the data needed to populate their own direct-to-consumer channel.

"We found we were duplicating work for each retailer. We didn't know what we needed. We just knew what we had wasn't working," says Sally. Her team faced the uphill challenge of creating, managing, and syndicating market-ready content for the first time across thousands of products.

Product Content Empowerment

In order to give digital shoppers and retailers the product details and digital assets they need, Rawlings licensed the Salsify Product Content Management Platform. The Salsify platform provided product information management (PIM) and digital asset management (DAM) capabilities to the brand. It also gave the team access to Salsify's Digital Catalog capability, which quickly creates accurate online catalogs to easily share with sales teams and independent retailers.

"In converting our existing data to a new platform, we quickly discovered what product information and assets we had been lacking," says Sally. "Our old format wasn't consistent across all our products. Salsify has allowed us to structure our data in a far more useful way."

For example, with the old system there was no easy way to answer a frequently asked question: "Which products are used by or associated with each professional athlete?" In Salsify, users can define and add data attributes that are needed. Jessica created a Pro Player attribute, so the athletes associated with each product could be stored and searched for easily in Salsify.

"The Pro Player lists are extremely useful to our marketing group. Creating that attribute solved a data problem we didn't even know was there.Salsify has helped us unveil what problems we could fix and then put us in a position to do it," says Jessica.

Finding the Perfect Fit

The Rawlings team has found that by implementing the right structure for its image and product data, it can be more consistent about updates and uncover which information is missing on a product-by-product level.

"Consumers expect a lot of education before making a purchase," says Sally. "The amount they already know because of online research is staggering. We want to make it easier for them to find answers about our products."

"By July, every tool the salesforce needed to hit the ground running for 2017 was loaded into Salsify."

Jessica Hendrix
Customer Data Specialist
Rawlings Sporting Goods Company Inc.
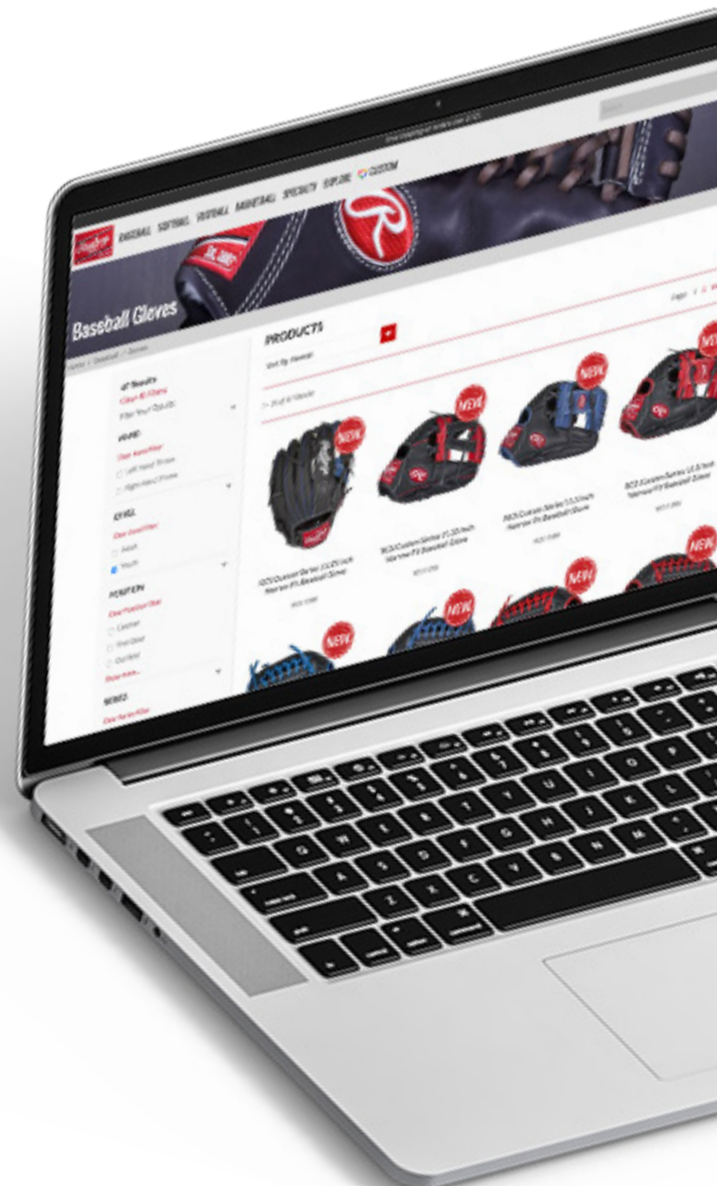
Direct to Consumer

Jessica and Sally agree that Salsify helps them manage the full product portfolio better. The software made it possible to keep product information consistent, up-to-date and relevant across multiple retail channels.

In September 2016, Rawlings went live with a new direct-to-consumer channel powered by a De-mandware and Salsify integration. The technology made it possible for the sporting goods company to seamlessly publish the latest product content and descriptions to the web.

This connection has allowed the brand to be consistent across customer-facing channel as well as all of its retail partners. "Customers ask the same questions that ecommerce partners like Walmart, Amazon, Target, Dicks Sporting Goods ask. Without Salsify, we'd be duplicating the same work over and over," says Sally.

In addition, Rawlings has created more than 30 digital catalogs with Salsify's Digital Catalog capability. There are separate catalogs for each pricing level. Rawlings has also created one-off catalogs that have been successful. One example is recently launched limited edition glove collection. Each catalog allows the sporting goods company to disperse the product information quickly and efficiently.

The digital catalogs have been hugely successful with Rawlings sales reps as well as customers on the team dealer side. Before digital catalogs, retail partners did not have a place to get information like UPCs, SKUs, pricing or images. All images were being held on a local network drive in different folders based on the business unit.

"With digital catalogs, Rawlings sales reps now have a much easier way to grab images and send them over to customers. More and more customers are getting the images themselves, freeing up the sales reps' time," says Jessica.

5 Months Faster to Market

Over a 30-day timeframe during the summer of 2016, Rawlings has had more than 400 unique visitors to their digital catalogs and 18K unique product views. More recently, the Rawlings team added additional marketing content including videos, Facebook banners and flyers. The digital catalog for marketing materials automatically displays content by type on the left hand side of the page, making it easy for sales and marketing teams to easily locate exactly what they are looking for.

With Salsify's Digital Catalog capability, the Rawlings sales team was able to start demonstrating and selling new products 5 months earlier than its usual sales cycle. Historically, accessing complete lists of the latest equipment with accurate pricing and relevant selections based on the sport, the team, and other attributes has been a logistical struggle.

"Every tool the salesforce needed to hit the ground running for the 2017 assortment was loaded into Salsify," says Jessica. "They were able to deliver all information on what's available to order to their accounts in July of 2016. In the past, that wouldn't have happened until December."

For Rawlings, the ability to manage, enrich and share its product content has been transformational. The sporting goods company is now able to equip its sales teams, retailer partners, and consumers with relevant images and product descriptions in a fast and convenient way.

About Salsify: Salsify's product content management platform is used by the world's biggest brands and retailers, including Mondelez, Bosch, Coca Cola, Rawlings, and GSK to onboard, manage, and deliver impactful product content that stands out on the digital shelf.