The World of Ecommerce

Over the last few months we have delved into the world of the eCommerce merchant, their similarities to other types of businesses, and their unique challenges.

Over the years I have learned that these clients have had a difficult time finding CPA's, ProAdvisors, and Developers that are willing, or capable, of offering assistance and support. Typically it is because:

- They don't feel they understand the eCommerce business model
- They shy away because the concept overall seems 'mysterious'
- The terminology can sound intimidating
- Memories of the 'dot.com' days come flooding back, when many eCommerce businesses failed

In fact, eCommerce is alive and well, and getting stronger all the time. The Internet is here to stay, and so are the business owners. If you missed any of the articles, they are located in the Newsletter Archive section of the IDNAC site. You will find articles on eCommerce in general, and reviews of several industry specific programs, such as **Order Importers** and **Order Managers.**

We are wrapping up this series for now; however, we will continue to feature various programs that will assist eCommerce clients, as well as other industries, throughout the year. We are starting a wonderful series on Construction this month, and our resident Construction guru – Nancy Smyth – will be skillfully guiding the way!

Ecommerce Wrap-up

The needs of an eCommerce client are ever-changing, and always interesting.   As their company grows they will need to add different types of programs/services, or upgrade the product they are using. Probably just as important, they will rely on developers who are committed to changing and updating their products along they way; which is a challenge all of it's own since technology changes at the speed of light.

These clients must stay on top of new technology in a different way than most; for instance an update to their shopping cart, or QuickBooks, can easily 'break' their daily operations, the result is the same as closing the door to a retail shop – the result can be disastrous.   It's important when considering an add-on program to select ones with developers who are *committed to supporting their program* as technology changes, and preferably who understand a bit of eCommerce and are willing to grow their program as the industry changes. It is also important to understand that the typical eTailer may need more than one program, so an easy and flexible interface is also an important factor.

I can't stress enough how ***detrimental*** it is to the user if the program crashes because of a 'simple' update; I'll use Yahoo! in our examples. A few times a year Yahoo will change something to "make it better for their users." The change may be something as small as a new field or changing the placement, or much larger like a total redesign of their check-out process. I can't tell you how many times a small change, like a field changing position, will break the interface between programs; as I know all the developers reading this understand all to well. The difference with eCommerce, a 'break' can literally stop their business in it's tracks ... they can't 'work around it for a few days' like another type of business might be able to; it is costly, frustrating, and can put a company all but out of business in a very short time.

Whenever a new version of QuickBooks or an Add-On program is released, I strongly recommend that the client test it out on a separate computer for a few days before updating their live data. This isn't always possible of course, as in the case of an update to your website or shopping cart that may happen without prior knowledge. It is *VERY* important that the end-users perform daily back-ups of their data; preferably to an external or off-site location.

Using Yahoo as our example, let's look at a few recent changes that created a bit of havoc. In July they added a field to be included in their order downloads; company name. Adding the new field also shifted all the fields that came after that – *without any prior notification*, it simply happened one night. The next morning when store owners downloaded their orders using their Order Importers or Order Managers ... using the exact same procedure they have been following for years ... it didn't work! The developers of the various programs had to scramble to find out what changed overnight and get a fix out immediately.

A more critical change occurred just a few days later. However this time the change affected the ability to charge credit cards ... can you imagine having a day of sales where you can't process the credit card payments! I realize for some industries this is not a 'show stopper,' however for an eTailer it is; if they can't charge their orders, it is the same as closing and bolting the doors. Once again the developers scrambled to find out what changed in the middle of the night and released a fix within a few hours; for those that didn't, their clients went looking for another 3rd party program that worked.

What about new versions of QuickBooks? The most famous case of this is when the 2003 version was released and the order export from Yahoo to QuickBooks stopped working, with no more than an error on the screen in QuickBooks that made no sense to any of the users; including me. **What changed?** As you may remember from the first article, the Yahoo export is in the .IIF format; in 2003 the sales tax fields in QuickBooks changed and the .IIF file exported from Yahoo was no longer valid – it took me months to figure out how to work-around this change. Intuit blamed Yahoo and Yahoo blamed Intuit. In the meantime, no Yahoo store owner that upgraded to QuickBooks 2003 could import their orders; thus the famous *'Auto-Tax Fix'* was born. If you missed that article, click here.

Working with eCommerce is never dull; that's for sure! ☺

Program Updates

A few of the programs that we have profiled the last few months have released updates. First let me say, they all work! Here's a quick overview:

Stone Edge Order Manager: www.stoneedge.com

Stone Edge released Version 4.410 on September 14th, 2006. They had a major release on August 24th (4.406) and the recent release covers a few bug fixes and additional enhancements. Anyone with a current support contract can update at no charge. You will find a complete list of enhancements on their website. They are also working on a new Beta of their POS system and we will keep you apprised of their progress.

The SuperManager: www.thesupermanager.com

The **SuperWare** development team has been busy adding functionality and improving the **SuperManager** order processing software; both the **Lite** and **Full** Versions. August 17th, 2006 was a major new release, version 1.1.20; they also have a new beta that is being tested now and will probably be released shortly.

Here are a few highlights of the 1.1.20 release:

Dropship emails can now be sent to dropship suppliers automatically. Users can setup preferred suppliers by product with custom email templates which are sent when orders with dropship products are

received. The SuperManager can group dropship products with the same supplier and it will also send dropship emails to multiple suppliers if applicable.

Several QuickBooks enhancements have been included in the latest full release:
(Release Notes - http://www.thesupermanager.com/release_notes.html)

- Added support for item groups in QuickBooks
- Corrected an error with linking product options in orders to the appropriate defined QuickBooks alternative code

The highlight of the latest development is the inventory management features of the SuperManager which are currently being Beta tested. The groundwork has been laid to support local inventory management with real time inventory availability on storeowners' Yahoo! Store. Further development will include a Purchase Ordering system to allow storeowners to manage their inventory purchasing and receiving.

Additionally, the team at SuperWare also offers services in personalized customization.

T-Hub by Atandra: www.atandra.com

The guys at **Atandra** have released a new product called '***The Credit Card Charger'*** http://www.atandra.com/Prod_CreditCardCharger.htm and have made a few enhancements to their T-Hub product as well, be sure to check it out: http://www.atandra.com/Prod_THub.htm. They also offer customization services, and have expanded the list of carts they interface with.

New Program

We've recently come across a program that we have not yet featured; however, I wanted to mention it this month. I've been quite impressed with a product from **Simple Business Solutions** http://www.appdev.simplebsinc.biz/osc/ called KwikPal. It is a web-based program that imports PayPal payments into QuickBooks; http://www.appdev.simplebsinc.biz/osc/kwikpal.php. We will bring you more information next month.

Conclusion

As I mentioned earlier we are starting our **Construction Series** this month, however, we will also continue to feature products that will fit nicely within eCommerce and other industries along the way. *eCommerce is gearing up for the Holiday Season*, so I hope everyone has their **Order Importers** or **Order Managers** in place!

Until next month,
Rox ☺