

schoolblazer

A great fit

Schoolblazer is a perfect example of a successful direct commerce business that is providing a viable alternative to a traditional retail service. But this is not the usual story of a web based business that competes on price with high street retailers. It required some highly innovative thinking which brought together online expertise, new supply chains, consumer insights and a scalable infrastructure to meet the demands of a highly seasonal business.

As the name suggests Schoolblazer supplies school wear focusing exclusively on servicing contracted, independent schools throughout the UK. From a true start-up in 2003, Schoolblazer is now a business with a multi-million pound, annual turnover. In the independent school sector alone, the total market value is estimated at approximately £200m - most of which is realised during this peak trading period in mid-summer.

As many parents know, school uniforms are still obligatory for most pupils – especially in the independent sector. These uniforms have mainly been supplied by local independent outfitters during a mad rush in July and August before the new school year gets underway. Not only do parents have to drag their reluctant offspring to a shop that's definitely not 'cool' but parents are then faced with the task of sewing name tags into various items of school clothing. And it's not just uniforms, most schools also require pupils to have seasonal sportswear in the school colours.



Key Facts

- ▶▶▶ Live with MNP since 2003.
- ▶▶▶ User of OrderActive and WMSActive.
- ▶▶▶ Processing over 1000 orders a day through the MNP systems.
- ▶▶▶ Counting of stock automated using the RF system for ad hoc and cycle counts and smart PI features such as automatically forcing a count when there has been a short-pick.
- ▶▶▶ Reduced headcount and time saved with automated picking using hand-held terminals with MNP's WMS.
- ▶▶▶ Integrated into Royal Mail, Netdespatch and DPD.
- ▶▶▶ The ability to prioritise purchase order receipts based on back orders and greater control over item replenishment in the warehouse using MNP's WMS.
- ▶▶▶ Multiple orders on the same task automatically packed and dispatched using WMS.



Schoolblazer wanted to rethink the process used by independent retailers and the existing supply chain. Choosing to source from top brand manufacturers in the Far East rather than UK wholesalers they were able to offer high quality machine washable garments which 'raise the bar without raising the price'. There was also a need to create a flexible infrastructure that could apply high levels of resource and capacity in mid-summer to fulfil 80% of their annual orders. Again, some innovative thinking brought about a symbiotic relationship with a fashion re-processing house that structures their workload to provide a complete outsourcing service for Schoolblazer's name taping, pick/packing and distribution requirements.

As Robin Horsell, Co-Founder, Schoolblazer, comments "We wanted to offer a credible alternative that provided parents with the convenience of an online store, better products, and the provision of name taping as part of the service. This level of service also enhances the reputation of the school as they are seen to be embracing online as part of their ethos."

Schoolblazer selected MNP's Order Management software to handle their sales orders right from their initial set up in 2003 and Robin acknowledges, "MNP has been with us throughout our journey and our relationship with them has been one of the major factors that has underpinned our strong growth."

"Our software, provided by MNP, has been very scalable with a very high return on investment. In our first year we took less than 200 orders. Six years later we are processing up to 1,000 orders a day with very little additional investment in licences and support."

Schoolblazer is now forecasting additional sales growth of £1m per year and this in turn has required investment in a new 35,000 sq. ft. warehouse which will future proof their operational needs for the next few years. At the same time they are installing MNP's WMSActive warehouse management system to achieve further optimised productivity, utilising workflow automation and system generated task driven activities.

With a customer base of 150+ schools and 25,000 school uniforms, there is a constant drive to optimise stock levels to guarantee availability without affecting cash flow. MNP's WMSActive will meet this demand and enhance the operations even further.



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