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FEATURES

CenterStone Keeps The Shelves Stocked

By Matthew Kreitman

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CenterStone Keeps The Shelves Stocked Need a reorder now? New B2B options helps retailers connect with their vendors.

Sitting on hold with a phone jammed in your ear listening to elevator music while some distant customer-service person searches their warehouse for the availability of a certain item seems so tedious and passé. E-mail and fax are just as over—especially when more and more action-sports vendors are opting to sign up with the Web-based CenterStone Technologies.

CenterStone is succeeding because it offers something really useful for both dealers and vendors: a complete business-to-business online ordering system. Once a vendor signs up with CenterStone, the brand's stock information is open to its dealers 24/7. They can immediately see availability of stock and track orders once placed.

So far, 53 brands are leasing the various CenterStone software options such as iVendi™ and Escape. These include Adio, Planet Earth, Smith Optics, O'Neill, as well as mainstream sports brands such as The North Face and Helly Hansen. Meanwhile, more than 10,000 dealers now have access to the system via the brands they sell.

CenterStone's software integrates with vendors' ERP software, which automatically provides pricing, availability, and catalog information. Any established dealer and all reps have access to the system. Dealers place orders using the ordering and payment terms that have already been established.

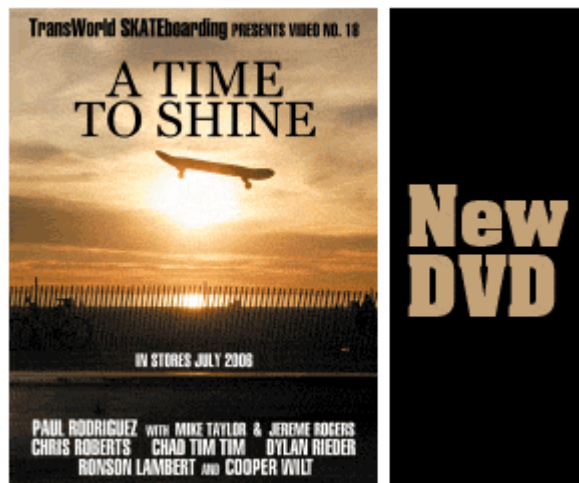
Initially, it costs a vendor between \$10,000 and \$20,000 to have their systems integrated with Centerstone's. After that, fees are based on the number of dealers' accounts and volume of orders.

"Vendors also get a big additional benefit: exposure to dealers that are not yet working with them," says Peter O'Neil, CenterStone executive vice president of sales and marketing. "We have a number of log-in screen opportunities that introduce dealers to a other vendors in their product mix.



CenterStone EVP Peter O'Neil.

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“Another interesting result we can demonstrate is that dealers are spending thirteen percent more with CenterStone-enabled vendors,” continues O’Neil. “They have more time to look at product because they typically do so after-hours, they get to see a wider selection of product, and they vote with their wallets with brands that make it easier to do business with them.”

Between January and May, 2006, CenterStone registered 99,000 dealer log-ins, resulting in 55,000 orders generating 266.6-million in orders. Evidently success breeds success.

“We needed to provide even faster access to our products and great customers service to our dealers with an online solution,” says O’Neill COO Tom Bost. “We went with CenterStone because they already had an established retail community—many of whom were also our dealers—that was already comfortable with and actively using their systems. Obviously this gives us a huge head start in terms of adoption and overcoming any sort of learning curve.”

Of course, a mere twenty years or so after the widespread adoption of PCs, not every action-sports dealer is yet comfortable with doing their ordering online. Peter O’Neil suggests the biggest immediate challenge is to get more dealers to use the system: “We want dealers to understand the system is not only free to use but helps the bottom line. It means more time on the sales floor with customers, it changes the way orders are placed by enabling dealers to adjust buys during the season or to chase popular items midseason. It’s a challenge, but as more and more vendors sign up, it is starting to get easier.”

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