



CLIENT

Hill & Markes, Inc.



LOCATION

Amsterdam, NY



INDUSTRY

Foodservice, Janitorial
and Office Supplies,
Industrial Packaging



PROJECT

eCommerce
Implementation and
Product Enrichment

PROBLEM

Hill & Markes, a distributor of foodservice disposables, janitorial supplies, office supplies, industrial packaging, and clean/natural foods, has been a mainstay in upstate New York and the surrounding areas for more than 110 years. With a mission to provide each customer with an extraordinary customer service experience, Hill & Markes realized in 2015 their legacy website platform did not live up to that commitment. As a result, they brought on eCommerce Manager Mike Powers to help identify their current site issues and future needs, and then determine whether to update or replace their existing platform.

Immediately, Powers noticed what he considered glaring issues with the company's existing eCommerce site. First and foremost, it lacked accurate product content and taxonomy. In addition to missing product images and incomplete descriptions, the product hierarchy and taxonomy framework made it difficult for buyers to find products and view important attribute information. Next, the site was not built with a mobile-responsive design, so shopping from a smartphone or tablet was both difficult and inefficient. Furthermore, an increasing number of customers such as colleges and universities started to inquire about punchout capabilities on bids, which Hill & Markes did not offer.

“ The important criteria for me – the robust platform, the data enrichment services, punchout capabilities and the ability to provide a responsive design – were all checked off my list when it came to Unilog's platform and services. **”**

Mike Powers

eCommerce Manager

After deciding an update to their Storefront platform would not solve their immediate and future needs, Powers focused his efforts on identifying an eCommerce company that not only offered a comprehensive digital commerce solution and content enrichment services, it could also easily integrate with their existing ERP, Infor SX.e. Besides the immediate requirements of the company, Powers also needed a solution that could be run by a very small team effectively.

SOLUTION

While attending a TUG Connects conference for Infor users, Powers sat in on a session by Joe Bennett, Unilog Content Solution's Senior VP of Sales. His presentation focused on the importance of rich product data, which hit home with Powers, so they discussed how Unilog could help with their enrichment efforts. That discussion then evolved into a conversation about replacing Hill & Markes' web platform with CIMM2, Unilog's all-in-one eCommerce platform.

Bennett explained how CIMM2 gives distributors the functionality and flexibility they need to run a successful online business, including:

- A **streamlined checkout** that provides different payment options, including punchout integration
- **Custom software to integrate with different ERPs** and other back-end systems
- **Powerful search and filtering capabilities** to help buyers find products easily
- A **strong content management system** (CMS) that offers personalization features like product recommendations for customers
- A **robust product information management** (PIM) system that allows for customer-specific product catalogs and easy-to-use related item mapping
- A **responsive design and native mobile app** to give buyers a great shopping experience on any device

"When I went down my checklist of things we needed to accomplish with a new B2B eCommerce platform and product data enrichment, in my analysis, Unilog hit all the marks," said Powers. Hill & Markes made the decision to partner with Unilog, and soon began their journey to create a better online experience for their customers, which included better content and customized functionality.

RESULTS

What started as a project to help customers shop online easier, turned into an eCommerce platform overhaul complete with data enrichment, custom functionality and user-friendly features. Together, these enhancements transformed HillnMarkes.com into a highly successful sales tool and opened the door to future marketing opportunities.

Dedicated eCommerce team

Soon after going live, Powers brought on Andrea Toole as a Digital Product Specialist to manage and implement the analytics and product data management of the platform. Between the two of them, they can cover all aspects of their eCommerce and digital marketing initiatives with CIMM2. Having such a small team making such a big impact is one of the key successes of the Unilog implementation.

Product enrichment and taxonomy

It was very important for Hill & Markes to ensure they had the correct product images and accurate product descriptions displayed on their new website. An emphasis was made to highlight their 15,000 stock items to drive increased sales and conversions versus their non-stock product offerings. This priority allowed for Unilog's content services team to optimize their stock SKUs by creating more robust product descriptions and features, as well as additional specifications. Unilog also provided supporting documentation like safety sheets and manuals, making them readily available on the product detail pages for customers.



"When Unilog enriches our product data, in many cases the data is more in-depth and has more information than the product content we are receiving from our supplier, which makes our stock items really stand out," commented Andrea Toole, Digital Product Specialist at Hill & Markes.

In addition to building better product content, Unilog also refined the product hierarchy and categories for Hill & Markes' entire product catalog to create a more logical and relevant structure for their online buyers. "Many distributors like ourselves do not have the in-house technical skills or resources to enrich or

develop a taxonomy, so Unilog's data enrichment is a huge benefit to us," said Powers. "They have invested in a team of people who have the industry expertise and experience to build taxonomies that really focus on the end user and how they tend to navigate both B2B and B2C eCommerce websites."

Customized functionality

In an effort to migrate customers to their new website, Hill & Markes asked Unilog to implement custom tools to benefit their buyers and make their lives more efficient.

My Items

For years, Hill & Markes offered their customers a My Items page that provided a convenient list of all the products a customer previously purchased from them. Fed from their ERP API, My Items was a value-added feature they wanted to continue to include with their new eCommerce site.

With the new site, every account that registers online will have a My Items list assigned to them. In addition to listing the items they are currently purchasing from Hill & Markes, it also includes any items they've been quoted. The My Items list makes it easy for customers to reorder products online, and it's also downloadable for those who want to fax in an order. This custom feature has proven to be beneficial, as 15% of all their users go directly to the My Items page once they log in. "Some of our customers may not be buying online, but we're leveraging the website to help them with their purchasing decisions," remarked Powers.

Multi-Level Approver

Many of Hill & Markes' customers are organizations that have multiple buildings and locations, therefore, multiple managers who place orders. In order to help these businesses manage multiple orders, they had Unilog develop Multi-Level Approver functionality. This new feature allows a company to identify multiple approvers and levels of approvers into the order workflow. Once an order is placed by a building manager, the group manager is notified automatically, who then reviews and approves the order before it is sent to the next level of approver, and eventually to accounts payable. Once the final approval is made, a confirmation is sent to Hill & Markes and only then does CIMM2 talk to the ERP to process the approved order. This tiered approval feature gives businesses the power to track and manage orders efficiently while making sure the proper guardrails are in place.

Budgeting Functionality

Topping off their unique customized site features is a budgeting functionality that is currently in final beta testing stage. Set to go live by March 2018, it will give organizations the ability to allot budget amounts for their online users so they can track purchases and manage spending. The functionality will give businesses a high-level view of spending across the organization, as well as a detailed view of individual users' purchases.

Quantifiable success and new opportunities

As soon as the new site went live, Powers and Toole began using Google Analytics to measure and track the data collected from their site. With the platform's built-in reporting tools, they are able to view user sessions and conversions, as well as details about site traffic. Now, almost a year after going live with the CIMM2 platform, Hill & Markes has seen a 65% increase in users ordering online and a 60% increase in online registered accounts. Even more impressive, they've gained 11% more total revenue through the website and, by year's end, estimate at least 25% of their total revenue will be via the website. "Quantifying our site helps realize and justify that we're doing the right things," explained Powers. "The trajectory we're on is fantastic."

As their eCommerce journey continues, Hill & Markes is now focusing on their digital marketing strategy and building business programs to bring even greater ROI. Using the CIMM2 content management system (CMS), they are creating inbound marketing content that draws the attention of search engines and, as a result, attracts buyers to their site. Additionally, they are using the built-in keyword and meta functionality to help with on-page SEO initiatives.

They have also started approaching some of their larger manufacturers to discuss digital marketing opportunities with them. "We explain how we've invested in this great website, and now we have banner ads and the ability to use the site search to prioritize their items," said Powers. "In many cases, we're the first distributor to come to them and discuss how we can leverage our digital environment to grow sales and track conversions."

Overall, Powers says the Hill & Markes eCommerce site is ahead of the curve. "Our custom features – the My Items, Multi-Level Approver and the budgeting functionality – differentiate us from any other platform that our competitors are offering," said Powers. "We are providing the functionality and Amazon-like experience that the new Millennial B2B buyer is looking for."

About Hill & Markes, Inc.

Hill & Markes, Inc., located in Amsterdam, New York, is a third generation, family-owned wholesale distributor of foodservice disposables, janitorial supplies, office supplies, industrial packaging and clean/natural foods. Servicing New York state and parts of western Vermont, Hill & Markes provides a wide range of sustainable products and solutions to help businesses maintain a cleaner and healthier work environment. www.hillnmarkes.com

About Unilog

Unilog is a global technology and services company that specializes in eCommerce solutions and enriched product catalogs for the B2B marketplace. Unilog's flagship product, CIMM2, is a fully integrated eCommerce platform designed to fit the unique requirements of the wholesale distribution industry. www.unilogcorp.com



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