

CUSTOMER SUCCESS



AHERN Communications Relies on Sage Pro for Accounting Innovation

AHERN Communications is a small, privately held company that distributes telecommunications equipment and related electronics products to commercial and retail customers. Like many small companies, AHERN launched a Web site several years ago to broaden its marketing channels; however, unlike many of its peers, AHERN's site is a great success.

The reasons for AHERN's success in a crowded market include the company's ability to tightly manage inventory, to streamline order processing, and to offer same-day shipping. How has AHERN been able to achieve differentiation in these key areas? The company integrates its Yahoo! Web store with its back office accounting and inventory management solution—Sage Pro ERP.

Success Through Satisfied Customers

Based in Quincy, Massachusetts, AHERN Communications was launched 15 years ago as a direct sales company, offering telecommunications products such as headsets and peripherals to large corporations. "In the early days," recalls Alison Smith, AHERN's vice president, "it was easier to sell 500 headsets to one company than to 500 individual consumers. But that environment began to change about five years ago with the proliferation of the Web, so we launched our Yahoo! store to ride that wave. And it's a good thing we did, because we're now doing about 400 sales each week over the Internet to both consumers and commercial customers."

AHERN credits its sales growth to a singular focus on customer service. "We have received a 95 percent rating in the Yahoo! Customer Rating Program, allowing us to be designated a Top Service shopping site, which is a sign of superlative quality. In addition, we consistently score over 95 percent satisfaction levels by BizRate.com, where more than 2,500 customers have evaluated our service since 2000," says Smith.

CUSTOMER

AHERN Communications

Industry

Telecommunications Equipment

Location

Quincy, Massachusetts

System

Sage Pro ERP

CHALLENGE

AHERN Communications needed to streamline order processing, especially for orders placed on its Web site in order to provide same-day shipping and decrease processing costs.

SOLUTION

With Sage Pro accounting software and a customized interface developed by AHERN's integrator, Wac Consulting Inc., Web orders are automatically captured and entered into Sage Pro.

RESULTS

AHERN relies on Sage Pro to help maintain tight inventory control, fast order processing, and same-day shipping. The added custom interface enables a fully automated online sales order process.

15 Years of Success With Sage Software

To earn and maintain such enviable ratings, AHERN relies on Sage Pro to help maintain tight inventory control, fast order processing, and same-day shipping. "We started using Sage Software products about 15 years ago and have implemented every upgrade since then," Smith says. "It seems that Sage Software always knows what we're going to need before we actually need it.

For example, we had been looking for a way to streamline the manual process for entering orders on the Web site. Along came Sage Pro, and we had our answer. Since Sage Pro includes access to source code, our integrator, WAC Consulting Inc., could easily develop a customized interface that automatically captured Web orders and entered them into Sage Pro."

By automating its Web store process, AHERN not only reduced the time required to process orders, but also cut costs significantly—all while dramatically improving customer service. "We used to spend as many as three hours at the end of each business day manually downloading and processing Web orders," Smith says, "When all costs associated with manual handling are tallied, we've saved about \$50,000 annually with our new Sage Pro solution. While this is certainly significant, even more important is the fact that we can now ship orders to customers the same day they are made."

Automated Order Processing

Orders are placed at the Web store or through one of AHERN's six call center agents and are automatically logged into the Sage Pro Order Entry module. After credit cards are authorized and purchase orders are routed to the Accounts Receivable module, packing lists and invoices are created by Sage Pro. The packing lists are routed to AHERN's warehouse, where the Inventory Control module automatically reflects the reduction in inventory required to fill the order. Invoices are sent to another department for mailing to customers.

Shipping labels are automatically printed by the UPS® WorldShip® System, which interfaces with Sage Pro. When an order is entered into the Sage Pro Order Entry module, that information is immediately exported to the UPS application, which returns a shipping label and tracking number that is automatically added to the invoice.

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—Alison Smith
Vice President
AHERN Communications

AHERN has even automated the process by which prospects are converted to customers. "We use Goldmine for outbound telemarketing and have implemented a software link developed by Strong Software between the telemarketing application and Sage Pro," Smith explains. "As a result, when a prospect we contact through Goldmine decides to place an order, all information about that customer is automatically transferred to the Sage Pro customer file, eliminating the need to manually enter this information."

The Past as Prelude to the Future

Building upon its e-business success, AHERN added a Web site that enables corporate customers to view their accounts in real time.

"For me, running a small business, the best thing about Sage Pro is that it's easy to make the software do what we need whenever we change our business practices," Smith states. "I can always access information in any form I want, and I can even make that information securely available to our customers—as we will be doing on our new Web site. It is this easy customization, coupled with the software's ease of use, which has made me a loyal Sage Software customer since 1987. In all that time, I've never even looked at another software provider because I know that if I need something done I can either get the Sage Pro application to do it for me or find a third-party product that seamlessly integrates with the Sage Pro platform."



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