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Marketview Liquor

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— Tom VanGorder | Director of Online Operations, Marketview Liquor

Building a custom e-commerce website from scratch doesn’t always yield the results a growing company needs.

Marketview Liquor switched to the Miva platform for a powerful site backed by the expertise and strength of Miva’s world-class e-commerce team.

Problem

- » Buggy custom-built website
- » Limited back-end functionality
- » Lack of confidence in the development team

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If you enjoy wine and live in upstate New York, odds are good you’ve heard of Marketview Liquor. Located in Rochester, the store draws fans from miles around who cite Marketview’s huge selection, competitive prices, and helpful employees as reasons why they’ll travel out of their way to patronize the business.

Though originally launched in nearby Penfield as “Vintage Liquors,” Marketview took its current name when owner Mike Palmeri moved his enterprise to a storefront within view of the local grocery store in Rochester. Today, after more than forty years of business, Marketview occupies a 27,000 square-foot location with dedicated retail space, warehousing, and a special climate-controlled wine cellar that preserves an impressive collection of fine wines. They launched their website in 2007 (www.marketviewliquor.com) and now ship wine and spirits to 37 states.

“We Have to Get Online!”

Tom VanGorder, Director of Online Operations for Marketview Liquor, has been with the company for over ten years. He describes the original reason for the website launch. “In 2006,” he says, “the owner of the company, Mr. Palmeri, was driving back from Florida

with his wife. She was looking through the Wine Spectator magazine and saw that another wine company was doing \$5 million in sales through their website.”

This opened Palmeri’s eyes to the possibilities of the online marketplace for wine and spirit sellers. He arrived back in New York from the trip and exclaimed, “We have to get online!” As can often be the case with brick-and-mortar businesses, the expansion into the online market made perfect sense for Marketview since it would broaden their reach without requiring additional physical locations.

Building a Home-Grown Solution

When Marketview set out to launch their initial website, they opted for a completely custom-built site. They hired a local developer who employed an offshore team and who could therefore offer Marketview cheaper rates on the work. “We were the largest site they had built to-date,” VanGorder remembers, “and it was clear from early on that there were going to be issues.”

Marketview initially launched their website in May of 2007, and they went through four different versions of the

Solution

- » Rock-solid modern e-commerce website
- » Powerful customer service tools for the business
- » Excellent support and confidence in the platform for the future

site over the course of seven years with the developer. "Frankly, it was a mess," says VanGorder. "There were always problems." He highlights three key examples of the difficulties they faced.

Rampant Bugs

- » "We were constantly dealing with bugs," VanGorder says. "Anytime we wanted to add a new feature, it would take months before everything worked correctly." Since getting new features implemented was so problematic, Marketview wasn't able to fully develop the shopping experience they wanted to provide for their online customers.

Limited Reporting

- » "Reporting functionality on the platform was always very limited," says VanGorder. This directly impacted their ability to aid customers who called in with order problems, since it was difficult to quickly access the relevant data while a customer was on the phone.

Careless Updating

- » "The last major change we made to the site," explains VanGorder, "was a new version that had an updated look and feel." But instead of moving the business forward, Marketview saw traffic drop. "It turns out that the developer had messed up and changed all of our URLs," VanGorder says. "This caused us to lose all of our Google rankings, and we had to completely restart our search engine optimization (SEO) efforts."

For Marketview Liquor, the SEO disaster threw their issues with the

developer into sharp relief. "We realized that it just wasn't sustainable," VanGorder explains. "The developer's engineers were in Belarus, so we did get good rates from them, but everything just took so long to get done."

Living with the Pain

Despite the issues with their custom-built website, Marketview Liquor stayed with the local developer for a total of almost seven years. The update that ruined their SEO rankings happened in 2010, and even after that incident it was another three years before they decided to make a change.

VanGorder points to Marketview's online sales growth during that time as a main reason why they opted to live with the pain they were experiencing. "In spite of all the issues," he says, "we were seeing 60% sales growth every month. When you're growing that fast, you don't feel like you have time to do a major website overhaul. You realize it's a hassle, but at the same time it's also working. We didn't necessarily want to mess with it!"

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The Marketview Liquor team looked into other options over those seven years. "We went through the process of potentially switching two or three times," VanGorder says. "But a lot of the platforms we saw were really limited." He adds that there was a trust factor involved as well. "Who do you trust with your new site?" he asks. "We knew how bad things were with our current developer, so how were we supposed to know we weren't getting ourselves into a worse situation with someone new?"

And finally, VanGorder admits that a fear of the unknown also played a role

in postponing their platform conversion. "I look back now," he says, "and I can see there was a lack of understanding regarding what a switchover would even entail."

Ultimately, it was the developer who forced Marketview into action. "He came to us," VanGorder says, "and put a huge figure down on the table." The developer was going out of business, and if Marketview wanted him to continue maintaining the site, he asked them to guarantee a certain level of budget each month. "He was basically asking us to fund his team," VanGorder remembers. "It was something like \$20,000 of spending he wanted from us every month when we hadn't spent more than \$5,000 during the entire previous year." Marketview knew it was time to make a change.

Choosing Miva

As Marketview Liquor set out to find a new e-commerce platform, they considered multiple vendors. "We looked at Magento and some of the other major players," says VanGorder, "but we ultimately chose Miva."

VanGorder says their initial referral came from an unlikely source. "You know, it's funny," he says, "our UPS delivery guy was raving about the Miva team and about how well Miva integrated with their WorldShip system. He put us in touch with a contact and we started to learn more about the platform."

VanGorder points to Miva's extensibility as a key factor that impacted their decision. "Miva works with a ton of third-party systems," he says, "and that told us the platform would be able to do what we needed it to do."

VanGorder says that conversations with Miva during the discovery process helped develop assurance that the group behind the platform was trustworthy. "At the end of the day," he says, "it came down to the fact that I really liked the people at Miva and they gave me confidence that Miva was the best platform for our future."

Marketview Liquor chose to have Miva do a complete redesign and build of their website, and they kicked off the

process near the end of 2013. "We went back and forth with the design team a few times," VanGorder says, "and we were up and running on the new site by May of 2014."

Moving Forward with a Modern Site

"After dealing with our old system for so long," says Tom VanGorder, "it was great to start with a clean slate on Miva." He describes some of the features of the new platform.

Customer Accounts

- » "The biggest improvement in the area of customer experience," VanGorder says, "is the customer account feature." The old site had limited customer account functionality, but on Miva, Marketview Liquor can craft the best experience possible for their online clientele. The new site allows customers to easily access their own history, re-order based on past orders, and check on the status of pending deliveries.

"Shop as Customer" and Improved Reporting

- » The "Shop as Customer" feature allows Marketview phone operators to log in and view the website exactly as a specific customer is seeing the site. "This is a huge improvement," says VanGorder. "Along with the improved reporting, this feature helps us troubleshoot problems over the phone so much more easily."

VanGorder describes how the new reporting has streamlined day-to-day operations as well. "It's a very common scenario for someone to call in with a question or change on their order," he says. "Before it was a big problem if they didn't know their order number, but now it's easy for us to find that order and help get the customer squared away."

Problem Resolution with Miva

- » "Compared to working with our old developer," VanGorder says, "problem resolution with Miva has been great." Whenever Marketview discovers a bug or wants to add

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features, VanGorder gets in touch with his Miva contact and the issue gets resolved. "We're not on the edge of our seats whenever fixes go in," he says. "We have confidence in the Miva platform and the Miva team."

"There were so many bugs on our old system," VanGorder says, "that we were just used to maneuvering around them. It's like night and day to be on a platform that works with us instead of against us."


Results with Miva

Marketview Liquor can point to impressive improvement in key metrics on their new Miva website. "The first thing we saw," VanGorder says, "was that our conversion rate jumped right out of the gate. We went from 1.75% to 2.14% immediately." For the first two complete months on the new site, site-wide transactions were up 37%, average order value was up 7%, and revenue was up 46% compared to the previous year on their old website.

VanGorder also talks about how Marketview's online customers are

reacting to the new site. "The customer experience has dramatically improved," he says, "and we've had positive feedback from just about everyone." He cites the improved look and feel and the upgraded functionality as the reasons for a sharp drop in negative comments. "Compared to the old site," he says, "there have been virtually zero complaints."

"Overall," VanGorder says, "working with Miva has been such a great experience." Marketview Liquor is now looking forward to their first holiday rush on the platform, and VanGorder is expecting to implement the new Miva 9 after the turn of the year.

Marketview continues to target 30% to 35% sales growth online, and with their new website they are confident this goal is within reach. "The website is such an important part of our company's growth," says VanGorder, "and with Miva we feel like we're positioned for success." 





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