



CLIENT:
Hose of South Texas



LOCATION:
Corpus Christi, Texas



INDUSTRY:
Industrial Hose Distribution



PROJECT:
Digital Commerce Growth and Content Subscription

Problem

Hose of South Texas - a mainstay in the industrial hose industry since 1978 - considers themselves more than just a company that sells hose; they're a partner in finding solutions. Over the years, the distributor has expanded their products and services to offer custom solutions, hydraulic and pneumatic equipment repairs, hose testing, and an online storefront. One of the early adopters of eCommerce in their industry, Hose of South Texas implemented their website in 2016 to create a user experience that would encourage customers to make repeat purchases and drive retention.

Katina Yoakum, Director of Online Business & Marketing for Hose of South Texas, helped with their eCommerce efforts. "Our goal was, and still is, to create customer stickiness with our digital branch," said Yoakum. "We feel the more we can offer on our site, the more our customers will keep coming back."

For their initial site, Yoakum personally sourced all their product data, emailing every vendor for information, writing the content, and putting it into multiple spreadsheets. Without a product information management (PIM) tool, curating content for 12,000 items was not only time-consuming but the manual process also made it difficult to maintain data consistency across manufacturers.

Adding to their challenges, the distributor's site had limited backend functionality. Yoakum said she couldn't make simple changes, such as changing a banner, without creating a case ticket with the eCommerce provider. On the front end, their site lacked two key elements - robust content and supporting documents and the ability to show product availability online - which resulted in little organic sales, no existing customer sales, and poor internal site adoption by the sales team.

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Solution

After four years of little traction and mounting frustration, Yoakum began researching other platforms on the market to better fit their needs. She watched multiple webinars by Unilog and was impressed at how relatively easy it looked to use their eCommerce solution. With Unilog’s platform, she saw how much control she could have on the backend and was excited to see they had a PIM where she could manage all her data in one place. “The whole platform was really attractive but, truthfully, the first thing that grabbed my attention was that I could actually change my own banner,” admitted Yoakum.

Hose of South Texas signed with Unilog and their new eCommerce site went live in 2021. The distributor’s implementation included a more flexible and feature-rich website and a content subscription to Unilog’s CX1 PIM solution, which gives them access to millions of enriched SKUs curated directly from manufacturers. Through their PIM content subscription, the distributor now has 22,000 items online.

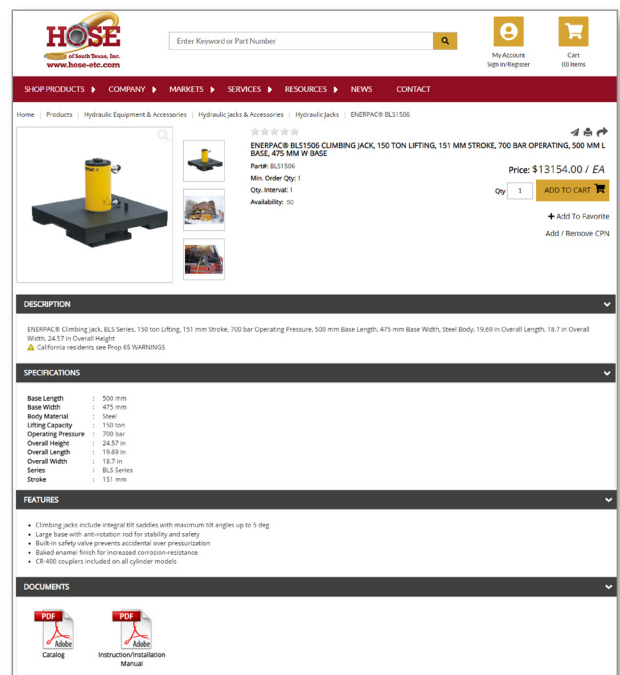
» CONNECTED PRODUCT CONTENT AND COMMERCE

Unilog’s connected suite of solutions enables the distributor to interact with their customers 24/7, 365 days a year, reaching more markets and industries than they had before. “We’re shipping orders to Alaska, Maine, and even overseas,” remarked Yoakum. “That’s what I like about this site - we can be there for our customers, wherever they are.”

The site’s intuitive user interface offers sophisticated search and navigation features to help customers find the products they want quickly and efficiently. Yoakum said it’s a great feeling when they see out-of-state customers organically enter a part number on Google, see Hose of South Texas’ site come up, and place their order on their site. She added, “There’s probably a local distributor in their neighborhood, but they chose to purchase from us and that trust factor is really big for us.”

Adding to the distributor’s enhanced user experience is a wealth of better product content - including inventory availability - which has become a great resource for customers and sales teams alike. Yoakum encourages her sales team to reference their website when talking with customers so they can tell them what a product’s stock availability is, access product details, and pull up spec sheets and manuals to answer any questions the customer may have.

Instead of emailing every vendor to build their product content, Yoakum said she now relies on the completeness and accuracy of Unilog’s enriched content. “I no longer have to worry about one vendor sending me one set of information and somebody else another set of information that I have to try to clean up and normalize. Unilog’s content is consistent across the board.”



Results

Since their eCommerce implementation, Yoakum said the biggest benefits for their organization have been the enhanced customer buying insights they've collected and the increased accessibility and convenience for their customers.

» SITE ADOPTION

Site adoption has had a trickle effect: as their sales team has started using and advocating it, their customers have begun adopting it as well. They currently have about 10% of their customers using the site and are seeing a lot of organic site visits and sales.

Initially, their sales staff was a bit hesitant about the website. Yoakum explained that the site was not there to replace them but, rather, to assist them and their customers. She considers their site a valuable tool for them to use and talk about with their customers. "Our sales staff likes being in front of their customer, but I remind them that our buyers are getting younger, and this (online buying) is what they're used to," explained Yoakum. "I encourage them to ask their customers what they prefer but, ultimately, we need to provide a happy medium of both self-service and full-service offerings."

To help with site adoption, Hose of South Texas employed a strategy Yoakum learned about while attending one of Unilog's user conferences. After gaining buy-in from her management team, she set up online accounts for all their customers and uploaded some of their most purchased products into a My Favorites list, a convenient dropdown list customers can access from the top menu of the website. By setting up their online accounts and having their frequently purchased items readily accessible for quick reorder, Hose of South Texas provided convenience and a customized experience for their customers right out the gate. This strategy also gave their sales team leverage when walking into a client meeting. "When they tell our customers that their account is already set up and show them how easy it is to log in and click on their My Favorites list to find their products, it takes a lot of pressure off of the customer," said Yoakum.

» QUANTIFIABLE SUCCESS

With site adoption growing, the hose distributor is achieving their goal of creating customer stickiness. Using Unilog's Site Analytics Pro module to track and evaluate their digital branch's performance, Hose of South Texas has seen their site traffic grow by more than 43% in the past year, and average order value (AOV) increase by nearly 73%.

The enriched product content from Unilog is attracting search engines that, in turn, are ranking their pages higher in search results and bringing in five times more sales through search engine traffic than direct entry. "Our website has had a positive impact on revenue and customer reach, and our brand recognition has been vital for our overall business growth and sustainability," added Yoakum.

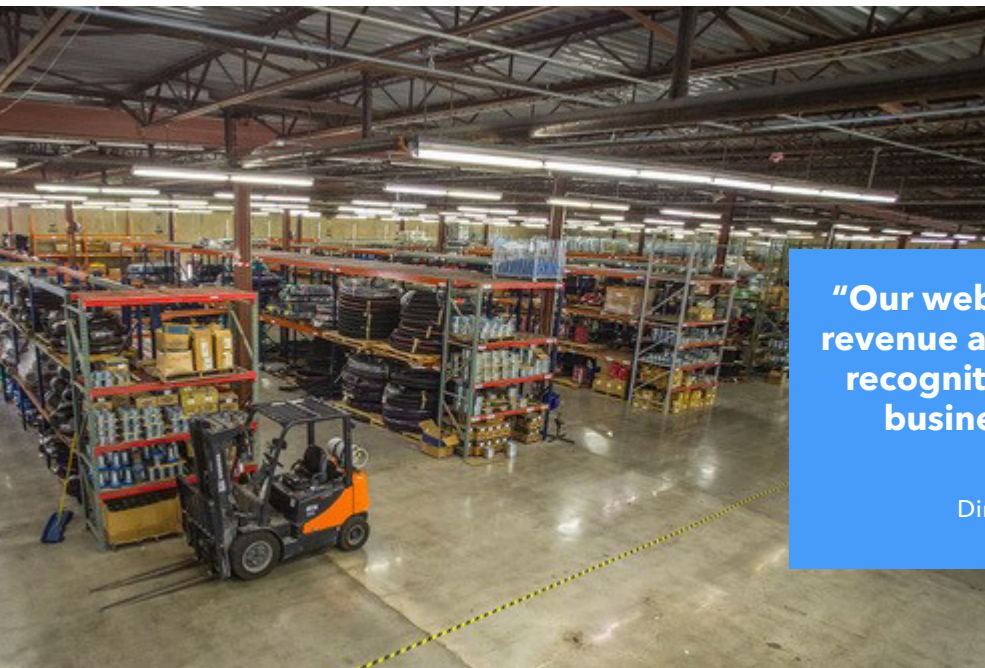
» IDCO-UNILOG PARTNERSHIP

Hose of South Texas is a member of the Industrial Distributor Cooperative (IDCO), a member-owned organization that helps hose distributors and suppliers drive success in the marketplace. A member of IDCO's Taxonomy Steering Committee, Yoakum was glad when IDCO and Unilog partnered to provide connected product content and commerce solutions for IDCO members. Through their partnership, other IDCO members can launch a successful digital branch and subscribe to Unilog's extensive product catalog, called the IDCO PIM, which contains hundreds of thousands of industry-specific items from more than 900 brands. Hose of South Texas is utilizing the same PIM to feed product content to their site and is sharing their success story with fellow IDCO members looking to build a better digital branch and boost their relevance.

Future Roadmap

The distributor continues to find ways to enhance the customer experience. Their future roadmap includes adding approximately 10,000 additional items to their online catalog and enabling customers to pay their invoices online. "The more that we can offer our customers, and the more they can do on our site, there's no reason for them to leave," explained Yoakum. "That's how we build that stickiness that we first tried to create back in 2016. It's all about what we can do to make their life easier."

As part of their ongoing commitment to providing top-tier service and an expansive product range, Hose of South Texas recently announced their new partnership with TIPCO Technologies. Yoakum explained this collaboration will leverage the strengths of both companies, enhancing their offerings without changing the user experience their customers have come to rely on. Their site will remain the same, providing a seamless transition for their users, but with the added benefit of a broader product selection and enhanced capabilities. "This partnership enables us to continue to not just meet but exceed our customers' expectations by continuously innovating and improving to meet their needs," she asserted.



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About Hose of South Texas

Since 1978, Hose of South Texas, Inc. has been supplying a complete line of hose and hose-related products to a variety of industries. Over those 40 years, the distributor has built strong, long-lasting relationships with clients throughout South Texas, across the United States, and beyond. They serve a diverse mix of end markets including petrochemical, oilfield, heavy equipment, agricultural, marine, steel mill, food and beverage, hydraulics, and trucking industries. To learn more, visit hose-etc.com

Unilog is the leader in connected product content and commerce, delivering the platform, content, and connectivity businesses need to succeed in the digital arena. Our connected suite of solutions helps wholesale distributors, manufacturers, and specialty retailers sell more, stay relevant, and reduce their cost to serve.

For more information, visit UnilogCorp.com