CASE STUDIES: APPLE BOOKS

Founded in 1988, Apple Books is a nationwide book distribution company headquartered in Pittsburgh, PA. Stocking a majority of children and youth non-fiction texts, Apple Book mainly services public libraries and schools. Apple Books takes pride in their exemplary customer service, and strive to apply a personal touch to an otherwise large, impersonal industry.

In 2008, Apple Books' top clients began to require transactions to be processed using Electronic Data Interchange (EDI). Apple Books was not EDI-enabled, and needed to make a decision; either lose their top clients, or become EDI compliant. Marketing and IT manager Heidi Holzapfel noted that after taking one look at hardware and software prices for EDI, she thought "No, this is not the way to go!" Because Apple Books is largely dependent on public and government funding, Heidi commented that it was not a viable solution to "...throw money into a questionable solution."

After discovering the immense cost and expertise required to keep EDI in-house, Apple Books turned to outsourcing for their EDI needs. They needed to look no further than fellow Pittsburgh based company, Innovate E-Commerce. Heidi stated that she wanted to find "a local business that would understand and provide the service we needed." With no EDI experience whatsoever, Apple Books needed to form a partnership that would not only provide the right service at the right price, but also take the time to fully explicate an unfamiliar process that their company had never dealt with previously. After explaining their specific needs and restrictions to Innovate E-Commerce, Heidi was pleased with the results: "They really listened - and heard - what we had to say about our thoughts and concerns. They were able to offer viable and affordable solutions to our problems, and most importantly, thoroughly explained the process to us, so we would truly understand the technology and how it fit into our business process."

Apple Books did not have the technical capabilities to function with EDI, but Innovate E-Commerce was able to build a customized system for their use, including servers, an ERP system, custom maps and layouts for their Invoices and Purchase Orders, and customized client emails, notifications, and exception reports. Additionally, Innovate E-Commerce ensured that Apple Books was compliant with the variety of systems that their clients were utilizing, including iii, SirisDynix and OSA.

Due to Innovate E-Commerce's 24/7 monitoring and service, Apple Books is able to focus on the core elements of their business, while also reaping the benefits of EDI technology. Heidi commented that "It's perfect! We're freed up from worrying about EDI - we can send out our contact information to buyers, and then forget about it - it's taken care of. We are benefiting from high level technology with a low price, while also receiving a great level of efficiency from Innovate's customer service and project management."

Working with Apple Books has also provided Innovate E-Commerce the opportunity to break into the world of library software, an area previously unexplored by the company. Client Services Manager for Innovate, Amy Fisher, commented that "Learning about how the libraries function and their different software solutions is fun and interesting. It's different from anything we've ever done before, and has opened us up to new technologies and client bases."

The successful partnership between Innovate E-Commerce and Apple Books has proved to be beneficial and effective for both Pittsburgh-based companies as they continue to build upon their mutually advantageous business relationship.