



Columbia Launches Mobile Commerce Strategy to Support Store-Based eCommerce at Retail Locations



Industry segment

Outdoor apparel

URL

www.columbia.com

From the front yard to the forest, Columbia Sportswear Co. has earned a legendary reputation for high-performance, functional, and stylish apparel, footwear, and related accessories and equipment that keep outdoor enthusiasts comfortable and protected, no matter where their excursions take them. For more than 70 years, this “family-business-gone-global” has carefully and steadily built a lifestyle brand that is synonymous with the great outdoors. In addition to its flagship Columbia Sportswear® brand, the company also designs, develops, markets, and distributes products under the Mountain Hardwear®, Sorel®, Montrail®, and Pacific Trail® brands. In its most recent fiscal year, the company posted more than \$1.2 billion in annual sales.

A STRATEGY TO FACILITATE ON-SITE RETAIL SALES

One of the keys to Columbia’s strong mindshare among consumers has been the company’s carefully cultivated loyalty to and from its retail partners. According to Paul Zaengle, vice president of ecommerce for Columbia, those partnerships were top-of-mind as Columbia devised its ecommerce strategy. “Retailers are our lifeblood,” he said, “and we had to be 100-percent sure that our ecommerce initiative wouldn’t step on their toes and compete with them. We were in no rush to jump in and upset these partners – which is one of the reasons we didn’t launch any type of ecommerce until 2009.

“For us, ecommerce is primarily about supporting our retailer partners’ selling efforts, and only secondarily about direct-to-consumer sales. One of our marketing-research partners reported that, last year, for the first time ever, consumers in our market ranked manufacturers’ websites as the number one source for information about the products they buy – more than friends, publications, or advertising. What’s more, more than half of all buyers research their prospective purchases online before they buy.

“Our mobile commerce site also emphasizes the importance of user reviews. People trust these ratings and we think that’s crucial to driving sales – so we’re taking that ‘wisdom of the crowd’ and effectively putting it in our retailers’ stores.”

–Paul Zaengle

*Vice President of eCommerce
Columbia Sportswear*

“As we continued to study and evaluate ecommerce and looked at the trends taking place, we saw that mobile ecommerce was particularly interesting and attractive to Columbia. Now, since buyers aren’t carrying laptops into the store, the smartphone and other mobile devices become critical. As they stand in the aisles and look at the product alternatives, they want to look at videos, user reviews, prices, and more – right from their mobile devices. And that was create a big win for us and our retailers. It’s about providing just-in-time information to the consumer when they are most likely to buy based on what they learn.”

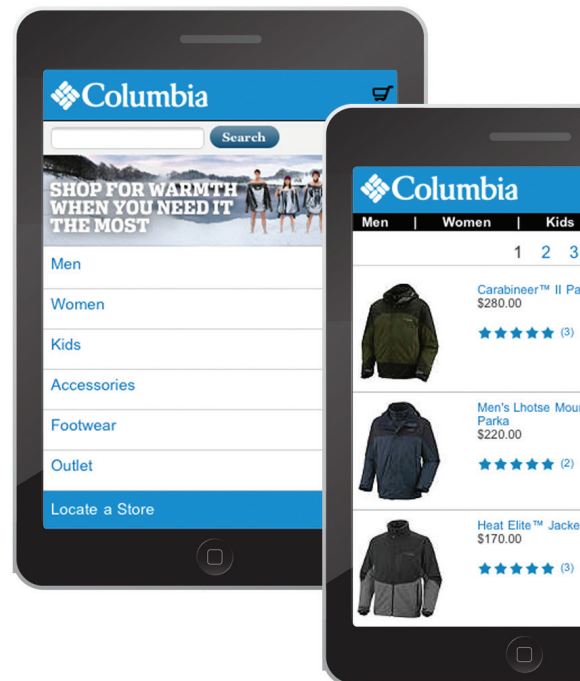
THE STOREFRONT STILL MATTERS

Zaengle quickly points out that Columbia hasn’t forgone the necessary work of launching a top-notch Web storefront. The company’s classic ecommerce site was a priority for several reasons. “First and foremost, this site is a source of revenue and profit,” he said. “There are going to be some situations where a consumer will want to purchase online. For example, he might not live near one of our retail partners. And, of course, most of our retailers only carry five to ten percent of our entire line, and their size and color selection might not be that large – especially late in the season.

“Most importantly, the desktop storefront is a representation of our brand online. We’re still the number one source of research and information, If you’re buying outerwear or footwear, we represent the brand and products better than anyone else. And by selling some merchandise directly, we can fund a much better digital presence. We invest in the creation of images and videos for our own site, but also provide those to our retail partners to improve their ability to sell our products online as well.”

EMBRACING MOBILE DEVICES

Using an in-house team and about two months of resource time for design, project management, and development, Columbia launched its support for popular mobile devices in just six weeks. The company opted to support about half of the major handsets in the market – which generated approximately 90 percent of the traffic. This new storefront – Columbia.com/mobile, gives outdoor enthusiasts unprecedented access from their mobile devices to learn more about Columbia and its product line, and shop on the fully e-commerce-enabled site. Some of the storefront features include:



“Mobile commerce isn’t, and shouldn’t be, about transactions. It’s about surprising and delighting consumers who can research products and make decisions right there in the store.”

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- **Search** Since mobile users are often in a hurry, Columbia conveniently presents search at the top of the home page for quick product lookups.
- **Product Catalog and Categories** The full Columbia catalog is available from the mobile storefront, with key product categories, such as Men, Women, Kids, Accessories, Footwear and Outlets placed on the center of the home page.
- **Product Subcategories** Consumers can easily navigate to product subcategories such as jackets, fleece, and shirts from product categories on the home page.
- **Product Details Page** Product details are presented with images optimized for mobile screens, along with color availability, color, size and quantity selection, pricing, style, product description and features, and other information.
- **Ratings and Reviews** Full product ratings, reviews, and product-details pages are all available from subcategory pages, bringing the full online shopping experience directly into the hands of the mobile consumer.
- **Store Locator** A store locator lets users find nearby stores that sell Columbia products using the smartphone GPS. Links on the store name opens Google Maps pages, while links to the phone number dial the store telephone number.
- **Cross-Channel Branding** The Columbia brand is seamlessly integrated across all pages on the mobile storefront and provides a rich cross-channel branding experience for customers, whether they’re shopping at one of Columbia’s retail partners’ stores, at its company-owned stores, at home or on the go.
- **Seamless Checkout** The checkout process is as simple and seamless as the main Columbia site. It’s easy to add products to the cart, use a persistent shopping cart on all pages, and get order confirmations that include shipping options, tax, and total cost.
- **Privacy, Customer Service, and More** Persistent links to privacy, terms of the site, the Columbia Greater Rewards Program, customer service hotline, and “Visit the Full Site” are on all pages.

Columbia simultaneously manages the day-to-day operations of both its e-commerce website and mobile storefront through a single, unified environment. This greatly reduces the amount of site maintenance as well as duplicate changes and updates. In addition, with Demandware’s integrated development environment (IDE), Columbia can customize, extend, and enrich the capabilities of its mobile storefront.

“One of our biggest challenges and time commitments was determining which devices to support,” Zaengle said. “The market is so fragmented with different platforms, different screen sizes and resolutions and features. While we see the brand-enhancing value of other types of mobile apps, we have deliberately avoided the idea of developing a mobile shopping application. That doesn’t align with our strategy. We think the right shopping experience is achieved with a mobile browser and storefront.

“Too many people are viewing the mobile handset as just another window into the storefront. We think the reality is that consumers view mobile commerce as an entirely new way to shop. Today, it’s all about on-demand information at the point of sale and we have to deliver that in a store-centric manner that lets the retailer capture the transaction.

“That’s why our mobile commerce site also emphasizes the importance of user reviews. People trust these ratings and we think that’s crucial to driving sales – so we’re taking that ‘wisdom of the crowd’ and effectively putting it in our retailers’ stores. We also use a lot of video. When you’re standing in the store, you don’t want to read a lot. You want to see the product and how it’s used. A video demo goes a long way.”

EXPANDING TO NEW BRANDS

Building on its success, Columbia expanded its mobile commerce strategy to its Mountain Hardwear brand, launching its desktop and mobile storefronts simultaneously. The company’s Sorel brand is next on the list and international expansion is slated for the coming year. The company anticipates launching both the mobile and traditional storefront sites simultaneously. A new mobile search engine marketing strategy is also in the works.

“We believe that merging the online and offline world is the right strategy for our business,” said Zaengle. “While our conversions are low – that’s actually what we want: lots of traffic that then gets pushed to the retailer for execution. Mobile commerce isn’t, and shouldn’t be, about transactions. It’s about surprising and delighting consumers who can research products and make decisions right there in the store. Demandware made that a fast and affordable option for us – and it’s strengthening our brand and our relationships with consumers and retailers.”

ABOUT DEMANDWARE

Demandware, a leader in digital commerce, enables the world’s premier retailers to move faster and grow faster in the changing face of retail. Demandware’s enterprise cloud platform minimizes the costs and complexities of running global, omni-channel commerce operations, and empowers retailers to respond with speed and agility to new market opportunities and continually evolving consumer expectations.

For more information about Demandware, visit demandware.com, call 888-553-9216 or email info@demandware.com.