

Dauntless Solutions enables Bulk Natural Foods to increase their number of bulk orders by 200%

BulkNaturalFoods.com

- Bulk food co-op specializing in truck-load sales of locally grown, seasonal fruit
- Increasing volume put stress on their disjointed system threatening disaster
- Ineffective cataloging system resulted in a constant rewrite of product descriptions
- Taking and fulfilling orders was taking more time than they had to give
- Hired Dauntless Solutions to build a custom shopping experience to automate repetitive tasks
- Resulting in a system that does the heavy lifting for them
- Can now predict how long a given task will take
- Increased number of orders with less headache
- Ability to serve a dramatically larger geographic area



BACKGROUND

Bulk Natural Foods (BNF) is a co-op style bulk purchaser of locally grown produce. They specialize in buying semi-truck loads of seasonal produce directly from local farms; passing the discount on to their customers while ensuring optimal freshness and quality. They started in 2008 when Tim and Erin Otto decided to open their family/friends bulk buying to the community. The result is this unique buying collaboration which has expanded to include a dry goods catalog that the couple warehouses at their location. Their real drawing card remains the fact that their seasonal produce is super fresh. Folks know that what they order today for pickup next week is still ripening on the tree!

CHALLENGE

A Disjoint System

As volume began to increase the customer side of things quickly became a challenge. "I had just cobbled together what I could on the internet," said owner Tim Otto, "I was using an auto-responder and a cheap website so customers could order their stuff. We had to send out confirmations kind of

semi-manually. I'd cooked all this stuff together to make it workable. It was the best we could do really." Each new influx of customers made it more obvious that this piece-meal strategy wouldn't work long.

The addition of the dry goods warehouse meant more preparation for pickup day and more product descriptions. "We put a lot of work into writing product descriptions," said Tim. "Researching, pricing, getting pictures, the whole layout thing; we wanted to retain all of that and be able to just tweak the pricing and reuse it next year." Multiply that work times hundreds of products and Tim and Erin were busy. Unfortunately, without a good storage system they were constantly losing those descriptions and having to rewrite them.

Taking too Much Time

Collecting orders, keeping the warehouse stocked, notifying customers of the date/time of pickup, getting them the correct quantity and items on pickup day — all with a system that was patched together and manually processed. "There's only so far you can go with that," said Tim, "When you're

offering a service that people want and your list grows and doubles. Now you end up with a real problem and your time just winds up getting sucked out the window.”

With more customers BNF added a second and third pick up location. This increased customer benefit served to complicate their processes even more. “They’ll place an order,” said Tim. “And then they want to add something or change where they’re picking up. On our end we’re like –wow!–we don’t have any way to do that outside of manually going in there and changing it. We ended up on the phone all the time with a small group of people that were not enabled to help themselves.”

SOLUTION

“We had a unique thing we were trying to do,” said Tim, “So custom became an obvious thing I just knew we needed to do.” After waiting a year with nothing to show for it they gave up on their first programmer. Jeremiah Stover (Dauntless’ senior developer) came highly recommended so they hired him to build an automated system for them.

The focus is on the customer order experience via the shopping cart. One feature allows for a custom kind of “vendor” where individuals with extra space in their vehicle can make it available to others and “host” a local pickup at their home. These host families set up their pickup-location-profile on BNF’s website, specifying the time, location, amount of transportation space, transportation fees, etc. Then when a customer places an order they choose where they want to pick it up based on a dynamic map that allows them to choose the location nearest them. Later if they want to change something they simply login and make the adjustment.

On the back end the website tracks the

orders and logs how much BNF owes each host for transportation. The location based billing system tracks which state the order is being picked up in so that BNF can collect the appropriate sales tax. And the new cataloging system allows storage of product descriptions without losing them. All these systems and many more tie into the warehousing side of the operation where Tim has developed systems that make “pickup day” run smoothly.

RESULTS

Effective Systems

The outcome of having Jeremiah build systems that enable the customer to make their own changes has been dramatic. Instead of spending large portions of each day on the phone the BNF team now spends that time productively building their business.

The integration aspect is amazing. As systems fit together better there is less wasted time. Tim points out, “We’re building these systems to take care of the heavy lifting for us. It’s like having a fork truck compared to lifting boxes by hand.” What started out as a cobbled together set of disparate tools is developing into a more and more interconnected system.

Time Predictability

Tim recalled numerous instances where preparation for pickup day kept them up around the clock. “What’s really cool now,” said Tim, “Is when Jeremiah and I come up with these systems and they’re not just roughed in, they’re going really well and our staff can plug into them really easy. It’s predictable how long something is going to take. That’s what really makes a business a business rather than a headache. That’s the value behind the flow and predictability that building the systems, learning what you need, and building what you need creates. That’s

what makes it work for us. We’ve really gone down a bumpy road as a company and I just have to say, Jeremiah has been there, slugging it out with us. Together we’ve come up with some really good stuff!”

Ability to keep Growing

When BNF first brought the Dauntless team onboard they did six big order cycles per year. After just three years of working together they were able to handle 18 order cycles per year. That is a 200% increase and Tim told us that, “The sanity factor is much higher as far as business goes”. On top of that the geographic area they serve has increased dramatically. When they started building the new system they served one location in Tennessee, today they serve over fifty locations covering all of Tennessee, Northern Alabama and Mississippi, and Southern Kentucky. So while the number of order cycles has increased the size of those orders has also increased dramatically!

Tim and his team live in the future always pushing forward. “We still have more goals here to steady things out and keep growing” He told us. This last year they have been getting the infrastructure in place to start doing cycles that will sell more like an online store and be shipped UPS. The BNF team is excited as they prepare to launch this new program which they are integrating with their current order cycles.” It’s not so much why I chose Jeremiah and the Dauntless team but why I continue to choose them time after time.” Tim told us. “They produce results so I just know I am going to continue this project with them.”

If you are interested in learning how your company can start automating its business systems for greater growth and time efficiency, visit us at <http://Dauntless.Solutions> and schedule a consultation call.

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Tim Otto
Owner of BulkNaturalFoods.com

