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# technology

reported by elizabeth bennett

## flexoweb's online store fronts

Entering the increasingly important world of online business can be daunting, especially for small to mid-sized apparel companies. Technical Advancement, with its product Flexoweb, may have the solution for wholesalers who want to enter into this lucrative venue.

As its name suggests, Flexoweb is a web-based product that functions as a flexible sales tool for the retail industry. It is designed for the rapid construction and ongoing maintenance of online store fronts. Designed from the ground up to support both Business-to-Business (B2B) and Business-to-Consumer (B2C), the product is focused for wholesalers, but can also be used for the consumer market.



Lawrence J. Wiener

"One of the basic things that sets us apart is our flexibility and ease of use. As the product is browser based; no client soft-

ware is necessary, which is great for smaller companies. All functions are accessible through a web interface," said Technical Advancement president Lawrence J. Wiener, "Also by virtue of being a web application, customers always use the most up-to-date version of the system automatically."

Flexoweb is targeted for small to medium sized retail businesses. Technical Advancement has sixteen clients in the apparel industry in New York City and is looking to add more.

Currently, Flexoweb is being sold to businesses across the United States and Canada and is being sold to support the European market this year. Delivery of service is provided through the Application Service Provider (ASP) model. The Flexoweb system can also be delivered via a Network Appliance for larger customers with their own IT staff.

"One of the biggest highlights of the product is that you can segregate depart-

ments, such as distribution by brand or distribution by category, such as women's or men's," said Wiener. This is useful for companies that are multi-branded or carry separate categories and only want to sell one to a particular vendor.

In addition, "One can turn 'commerce mode' on or off. With commerce mode off the vendor can see the products but cannot order directly from the web. This feature is used mostly when retailing to large chain stores. With commerce mode on, orders can be placed directly on the website which is the typical mode for independent retailers. With built-in credit card processing, this frees the merchant from performing separate credit

Shopping.com, that drives traffic to the site so that products come up at the top of the list in search ratings.

Another advantage that Flexoweb can offer is statistical reporting that shows wholesalers specifics regarding who has looked at the site. Provided details include the date, time and number of item views per buyer, all orders placed and where the order is coming from.

Shipping is also an important feature of the product. Currently, Flexoweb uses integrated shipping via UPS but business owners can also request custom carriers, for an additional fee. According to Wiener, the company will soon begin using USPS and FedEx capabilities which will facilitate improved international shipping.

"Flexoweb's full screen image view provides exceptional customizable image detail," according to the company. "We also have super size and zoom viewing capabilities," Wiener explained.

In addition, Flexoweb can create email campaigns to be used to target associated vendors with new products and promotions. Built-in address books can provide multiple shipping addresses for buyer or customer.

A company that has multiple brands may choose to allow only certain vendors to see certain brands. A merchant has three brands of clothing: Indigo, Angel and BigDog, but only wants Vendor A to see the Angel line, Vendor B to see BigDog line and Vendor C to see the Indigo line. This is simple to setup within Flexoweb using the multi-department capabilities as each brand is put into a separate department. Subsequently vendors are given permission to see products only within the department that the merchant wants them to view. Alternatively if the merchant wants to show only footwear to Vendor A, jeans and tops to Vendor B and everything to Vendor C, then they would setup departments to represent the different categories.



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checks. Once the order has been placed, copies of the complete order are emailed to the vendor, the merchant and any additional sales reps within the merchant's company.

"The e-catalog feature is an excellent tool for trade shows because it allows the merchant to create a custom catalogue for any prospect interested in their products and then subsequently email it to them. The email contains a link to the custom catalog that can be optionally password protected and have an expiry date attached. Flexoweb tracks who has looked at the catalogs, how many hits the site has per day, as well as the number of orders and the times they were placed," he continued.

Flexoweb also has a built-in search engine optimization with Goggle, Amazon and