

Growth through Flexibility

Notations expands, diversifies and sustains long-term growth with BlueCherry® partnership



Founded in 1979, Notations set out on an uncompromising mission to offer stylish clothing at incredible value. The company began focusing on ladies sportswear and has since diversified into more distinct categories. Notations' three contemporary and luxury collections are now the foremost resource for prominent U.S. retailers in the moderate priced ladies clothing market.

When Notations first launched in 1979, the apparel industry landscape was extremely different from what it is today. Fast fashion was only an idea in the minds of some brands, and it would take decades before reaching American shores. However, the one change in the 60's that set the tone for the upcoming decades was the decline of high-end fashion and the rise of trendy clothing that was accessible to the masses.

Disruptive changes in the last 20 years, such as rapidly changing technology, eCommerce, and fast-fashion, have revolutionized the apparel industry. As a result, Notations had to remain nimble, smart and flexible to stay competitive and dedicated to their mission.



Key Challenge: Upgrade existing system to increase sales efficiency and build an infrastructure that supports scale allowing staff to focus on marketplace trends and the pace of fast fashion.

CGS Solutions: BlueCherry Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), BlueCherry Electronic Data Interchange (EDI), BlueCherry B2B eCommerce, BlueCherry Product Lifecycle Management (PLM), BlueCherry Advanced Warehousing, Microsoft Dynamics SL.

Results:

- More effective sales operations with streamlined order processing
- Increased order accuracy and tracking
- Enhanced ability to bring large volumes of product to market faster than competitors
- Cost-savings through long-term technology partnership that has scaled with Notations and the fashion market

Business Challenges

In 1994, Ric Lazarus joined Notations as COO and General Counsel. When Lazarus first started, Notations were in the middle of reviewing ERP systems to modernize some processes. The selected system served Notations well for ten years, however, in 2004 the time had come for an upgrade that would allow the company to expand and meet the changing demands of the marketplace. Unfortunately, the existing platform could not accommodate their shifting requirements. Drastic changes were needed to respond to disruptive changes. Many businesses that were slow to respond at this time would find themselves left behind.



With this in mind, Notations declared its mission statement that would guide the company over the next 35+ years: "To help women look and feel their best by offering them a wide range of stylish clothing from which to choose, at an incredible value. We operate on the premise that high-quality, well-designed clothing should be accessible to every woman."



Lazarus knew that to keep up with the pace of change, Notations had to make their processes more efficient and transparent. One critical pain-point was the way in which sales orders were handled.

At the time, sales staff hand wrote orders on carbon copy forms, and then they cut out physical swatches of the requested fabric, which was then attached to the form. Physically attaching the swatch was the only way to ensure that the correct product was produced. These forms passed through several required departments, and Lazarus calculated that a single order was processed seven times before it was complete.

The CGS Solution

Lazarus knew that streamlined order processing was one of the first ways the company could become more efficient, reduce errors and, as a result, save time and money. He envisioned a system in which sales teams could enter their own orders, and all the necessary data would flow through reports and workflows with less effort. Because the magnitude of this system change would have a significant impact on every area of the company, the CEO was skeptical about the ability to find an ERP system that would match their needs, and that employees would happily embrace.



Lazarus performed extensive due diligence at tradeshows, through recommendations, and market reports before selecting CGS's BlueCherry ERP to help Notations streamline and scale. Lazarus chose BlueCherry because of the dual benefits of having a strong platform of existing features, and the ability to tailor the product to fit Notations' unique business requirements.

Within two years of implementing BlueCherry, Lazarus was proud to announce that Notations achieved the goal of streamlining their order processing and never looked back. Today, orders are entered into BlueCherry once and move through the system with greater accuracy, speed and ease. As for the skepticism around whether the staff would be happy with the changes? Lazarus was also pleased to announce that the changes had nearly a 100% approval rating across the company. It took a few months to onboard the technology and for staff to become fully comfortable with the new procedures, however today they laugh as they look back at the extreme inefficiency of the old system, and they would never go back.

Measurable Results

In addition to the noticeable increase in efficiency, the partnership with CGS has resulted in significant cost savings that Lazarus didn't immediately anticipate. The fact that Notations does not have to think about replacing BlueCherry with an entirely new platform even after ten years translates into significant cost savings since transitioning to a new provider requires significant upfront investment, time and effort.

He stated that normally, after about decade with a software platform or service, companies have to transition to newer technology to keep up with industry changes and the competition. Lazarus says part of the problem is that often service providers are more focused on gaining new customers for sales growth, and they neglect the needs of their long-term clients, who may have outgrown their service.



If you want to see what makes a provider stand out, you just have to ask: how happy are their oldest customers? This is the true measure of a software service provider's staying power. We've been with CGS for 12+ years, and not needing a new provider at this time, has definitely resulted in cost savings.



What's Next for Notations and their CGS partnership?

Lazarus says the next opportunity for Notations' growth is with drop ship as it will open up a new sales channel and a new way to engage customers in eCommerce.

To accommodate this new channel opportunity, you must adapt to the systems/information challenges that come along with it. Lazarus explained that when Notations started an initiative to drop ship within the last 2 years, they defined the changes that would be required in their procedures, and discussed the possibilities with CGS. They were happy to learn that BlueCherry ERP supports drop ship natively and they didn't need any modifications or to purchase new modules.

Notations is currently shipping to two customer websites using drop ship, and within a year they plan to expand to ten. The following year, the goal is set on expansion to twenty. Lazarus is excited about BlueCherry's capabilities to handle drop ship because he predicts this is a high growth area for Notations, whether they sell through their customers' websites, or on direct marketplaces like Amazon or Jet.