

# MUSCLEMASTER.COM

## Solution Overview

### Industry

MuscleMaster.com is a leading online health and fitness superstore. As a profitable and growing company, MuscleMaster found that their old business solution no longer could handle their high volume transactions and reporting.

### Scenario

MuscleMaster.com needed a solution which would integrate their existing e-commerce and fulfillment systems and support their growing online business.

### Company Profile

MuscleMaster.com has remained profitable for over a year and has continued to grow rapidly in the online health and fitness arena. By utilizing state-of-the-art technology, MuscleMaster offers extensive information, products and services for people interested in exercise, weight loss and nutrition.

### Benefits

By creating a system that focuses on what is most important, MuscleMaster has been able to free up their sales representatives to focus on customers and sales rather than processing of data.

### Software Used

Microsoft Business Solutions Dynamics  
 Financial Series  
 Distribution Series  
 Integration Manager  
 Microsoft Visual Basic  
 Microsoft SQL Server  
 Aristo Parcel Shipping Systems from  
 Kewill E-Commerce

## *Integrated Software helps "E-tailer" MuscleMaster.com handle six million dollars in sales with five service reps.*

The implementation of a business software solution that integrates with existing e-commerce and fulfillment systems has enabled on-line fitness site MuscleMaster.com to handle \$6 million in sales with just 5 customer service representatives.

"We would need at least twice the number of reps to handle our current sales volume using our previous business software," according to Nick Chunias, Chief Executive Officer of MuscleMaster.com, based in Southborough, Massachusetts. "The savings will only increase as our volume grows. Our three-year plan involves sales of \$25 to \$30 million and we estimate that we can handle that with just 13 to 15 reps." Substantial time savings come from seamlessly moving orders from the company's e-commerce site into the business software and on to the fulfillment system without requiring data entry. Freeing the service reps from data entry helps avoid processing errors and allows the reps to focus more fully on addressing customer needs. In addition, the faster throughput provided by the integrated system results in improved customer satisfaction by allowing MuscleMaster.com to push forward the cutoff time for orders to be shipped by an additional two hours daily.

Founded in 1996 and headquartered in Southborough, Massachusetts, MuscleMaster.com is a leading online health and fitness superstore. The MuscleMaster.com Web site utilizes state-of-the-art technology to offer extensive information, products and services for people interested in exercise, weight loss and nutrition. In addition, MuscleMaster.com has built an outstanding reputation within the health and fitness community by offering free educational email newsletters, extensive fitness and nutrition content on its Web site and industry-leading customer service. The MuscleMaster.com Web site provides one-stop shopping for vitamins, nutritional supplements, fitness equipment, and services geared towards individuals interested in an active and healthy lifestyle. The company is further able to expand its influence in the industry through a unique strategic partnership program which allows other sites to leverage MuscleMaster.com's extensive product, image and article databases and offer a complete line of health and fitness products to the consumer. MuscleMaster.com uses its innovative technology to handle all of the back end processing and customer service for its strategic partners. The results have been impressive. While other e-tailers have fallen by the wayside, MuscleMaster has been profitable for over a year and has continued to grow rapidly.

## Need for a Change

When MuscleMaster first went live, the company used a low-end Windows based accounting solution. As sales volume started to rise, problems appeared. One such problem was that the volume of transactions slowed processing on the old software to a crawl. Another operational hurdle was that the need to re-enter every order into both the accounting software and the company's fulfillment system took up the majority of the service reps' time.

Chunias began looking at midrange software solutions; after a thorough review, Chunias selected Microsoft Great Plains Dynamics. Examination of the software and conversations

*"When I originally put the system into place, I figured we would save about 500 hours per month in order processing time in customer service department and these savings would pay for the complete cost of the software and implementation in about six months. The software paid for itself in even less time."*

Nick Chunias  
Chief Executive Officer  
MuscleMaster.com

with users convinced the CEO that Microsoft Great Plains Dynamics would provide the robust solution that MuscleMaster.com would need to have in place to help achieve its aggressive growth plans. Another important factor was the key tools provided with Dynamics for integrating with other crucial applications. In particular, Integration Manager is a powerful tool that utilizes the same business logic used in the Microsoft Great Plains Business Solutions products (Dynamics, eEnterprise and Siebel) to safely and easily integrate data at a low cost.

Chunias enlisted the help of DataSys Corporation, Waltham, Massachusetts, a Microsoft Business Solutions Partner with 100 customers in Massachusetts, to provide installation and training and, most importantly, to develop the integration between Dynamics and its other systems. DataSys employs a full-time, certified team of consultants for installation, training, project management, and development, as well as dedicated sales, customer relations, and marketing support staff.

MuscleMaster's web development team created functionality within the company's Web site, based on Microsoft Active Server Page technology, to export orders into a SQL Server table. The next piece of the puzzle came when Donny Dunning, Development Manager for DataSys, used Integration Manager to create a routine that imports the tables and converts them into sales orders within Dynamics. The integration process was simplified by the fact that Integration Manager presents Dynamics data objects as fields with the same descriptive names as in the user interface; this provides a familiar reference with which to define the integration.

Dunning used drag and drop tools to map fields in the Dynamics business object onto fields in the data source. He also used the processing rules contained with Integration Manager to modify the data in several cases. He added a button to Dynamics that picks up the orders from the SQL Server table, converts them into Dynamics orders and puts them in a holding zone where they can be analytically reviewed by a specialist at MuscleMaster.com.

## **Integration Functionality**

Dunning also extended the capabilities of Dynamics using the Modifier with Visual Basic for Applications (VBA) by developing functionality that moves the orders from Dynamics to the company's Aristo Parcel Shipping System from Kewill E-Commerce. The Modifier with VBA provides users with the same exact VBA customization environment as found in the Microsoft Office family of products and allows users to extend, integrate and personalize the Microsoft Great Plains family of products by using industry-standard tools. The Dynamics extension, known as the Tracking System Integration, begins with a Dynamics customization that separates international orders from those within the United States, an important distinction which is required by the fulfillment system.

The Tracking System Integration also prints a pick ticket for each order that includes an identifying bar code. Users then simply push a custom button that moves the orders to a separate database accessible to the fulfillment system. After the warehouse personnel pick the order, they scan the bar code and the fulfillment system retrieves the sales order information from the database. The fulfillment system then populates the shipping information, prints a shipping label and returns the tracking number and shipment history to Dynamics through an ODBC interface that DataSys developed.

Through this Tracking System Integration, the customer service rep can also view the shipping history of every order to determine current and historical shipping status. With the push of a button, the customer service rep is instantly linked via a Web browser to the shipping status of the selected order on the United Parcel Service Web site.

More recently, DataSys has developed another custom integration called the Order Import Utility that imports orders from MuscleMaster.com's many strategic partners that sell through Yahoo!Shopping. Dunning initially researched the various ways of exporting orders from Yahoo!Shopping and selected XML. This custom application is written in Visual Basic and reads the XML order files and writes the orders to a SQL Server table.

The company's strategic partners simply provide MuscleMaster.com with administrative access to their Yahoo Store and a MuscleMaster specialist manages the order processing which includes exporting orders into an XML file. Each specialist is able to process orders from multiple stores each day. In the end, once the Order Import Utility has been run, the specialist uses the Integration Manager to import the data from the custom SQL Server table. This integration also includes a pricing and shipping translation table that makes it possible to offer different discounts to different stores based on their order volume.

### **Pays for Itself in Less Than 6 Months**

"When I originally put the system into place," Chunias said, "I figured that we would save about 500 hours per month in order processing time on the part of my customer service staff and these savings would pay for the complete cost of the software and implementation in about six months. The way it turned out, the software paid for itself in even less time. It just about eliminated the order processing job and has allowed my customer service staff to spend pretty much all of their time on their main job.

Rather than reducing headcount, we allocated the extra resources to servicing new strategic partners and we increased the amount of time spent working with customers; this is a major reason why our sales have grown from \$2.2 million last year to an expected \$6 million this year. Our reps are happier too because they are now focused on more analytical tasks and analysis as we have virtually eliminated tedious data entry. Best of all, our automated approach has positioned us to handle future sales growth with far less than proportional increases in staffing."

### **Award-winning Innovation**

The uniqueness of this application was recognized recently when MuscleMaster.com was honored with the Pinnacle Award for Innovation from Microsoft Business Solutions. The award ceremony took place at the Microsoft Business Solutions annual Convergence Conference in Orlando, Florida, an event attended by approximately 2,500 Customers, Partners, and staff. The Innovation category recognizes customers whose innovative use of technology within their business management system delivers measurable benefits to their organization.

Chunias concluded: "We needed a system that would integrate financial applications with just about anything else, including our own Web site, strategic partners, Yahoo Web sites, and shipping carriers. This was a major investment for us: we understood the importance of

choosing the right technology and the right implementation partner. Microsoft Business Solutions and DataSys came through with flying colors. The automated technology has allowed us to expand our distribution channels and grow our business. What's more, it has given us a decided edge over our competitors. The Pinnacle award is a great honor and validates our success."

For more information about Microsoft Great Plains Business Solutions, visit [www.greatplains.com](http://www.greatplains.com)

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