CASE STUDY

FLOW

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Heirloom delivers its 'top customer service' promise

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NZ'S MUCH LOVED BATHROOM PRODUCT SUPPLIER HAS TAKEN THE LEAD IN CUSTOMER COMMUNICATION, SETTING A NEW STANDARD WITH FLOW SOFTWARE...

Heirloom International has long been held as a leading manufacturer and distributor of bathroom products in New Zealand. The business has earned a genuine place in Kiwis' hearts, and is widely recognised for its high quality products and design flair synonymous with "bathrooms with style".

For over 40 years Heirloom has delivered to its brand promises; "to be a reliable and responsible business partner that supports its products with easily accessible product information and top customer service". Now, through Flow Software, Heirloom has the platform to deliver leading service – raising the stakes in integrated customer communication.

Graham Rea, CEO of Heirloom says, "We immediately recognised the benefits of investing in Flow. For us it was about two key dimensions; the first was a way to automate processes and build a platform for future technology-based ordering and distribution. The second was the capability to improve on our existing service offering. Paramount for us was to have that flexibility in a cost-efficient way".

Cost-efficiency, ease of implementation and flexibility is the very essence of Flow's middleware solution. As CEO David Masters explains, "what makes Flow an ideal solution for the importer/distributors is its pre-configuration capability, which means much more rapid and cost-effective implementation."

He continues, "We think of the importer/distributor business model as a hub and spokes. The hub is a large company, often with upwards of 200 suppliers and each of those suppliers forms a spoke. Once we've implemented Flow with a hub, we now understand the EDI requirement and capability for that hub and all the spokes. It means that we're continuously building on a wealth of pre-configurations and that's what makes it so quick and cost-effective to roll out".

Flow can provide real-time access to product searching, stock on hand, online ordering, invoicing, statement reviews and more. Furthermore it offers component functionality so that clients need only implement the modules that will give them the greatest return on investment.
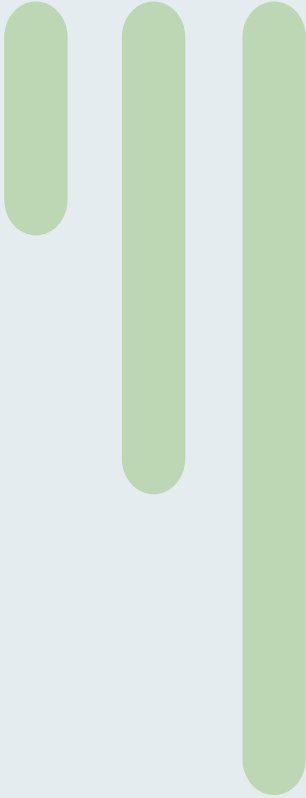
As Rea says, "These days customers want to minimise their inventory, they want prompt delivery and they want to know where the product is. Yes, Flow complies with our customers' different administrative and ordering systems but more importantly it's about adding value. A key attraction for us was the ability to build in enhancements such as order tracking so our customers can get the information they want instantly".

Says Masters, "We think Heirloom is a model importer/distributor and there are lessons inside Heirloom that we think others would be interested in hearing. In our experience, most importer/distributors have one to three major customers and are largely operating within a single industry. Our work with Heirloom incorporated seven major customers across the home improvement/building, plumbing and electrical sectors".

"It's important to understand that each sector has its own specifications and quirks", David Masters continues. "Selling wood for example requires information such as the types of treatment, size, origin and more... Compare that to say, towel warmers, where we're exchanging data about regulatory approval, operating specifications and the like. It's fair to say that we're talking about wildly different types of information that has to flow back and forth. Heirloom has proven the model; that we can handle all the quirkiness to standardise the process across organisations and sectors. Flow has proven its scalability."

Rea says, "What we have now is the ability for much better execution and standards reporting. Of course product and brand are important but the ability to add value in delivery and billing, and reducing administration for the transaction is now as important as the product itself".

Both Flow and Heirloom agree that the process was collaborative and smooth from start to finish. Says Flow's engineer, Anthony Mulles who headed the implementation, "Heirloom were fantastic to work with. They gave us access to the business knowledge we needed and their technical people with whom we could talk through any issues to find an ideal solution".

Rea says, "That it went live almost without me being aware of it, indicates how smoothly it went; obviously, with a lot of work and focus by everyone involved. One of the reasons we chose Flow was because of their proven record, dedicated approach and reputation for being a safe pair of hands".

His final word, "Flow did what they said they would do and it all went to plan. As I've said, we're conscious that service is paramount. We're a good medium-sized company and we understand our customers' businesses. We've always been able to hold up our products and commitment to superior service and now we can also hold up an integrated, customer-focused EDI solution we're proud of."

**For more information about
Flow Integration & EDI Solutions**

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