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SUMMARY

Vera Bradley

Customer
Vera Bradley

Industry
Retail

Challenge
Vera Bradley needed to optimize their inventory management and distribution center activities, as well as improve support for task and workforce management operations.

Solution
Communications and Task Management
• Reflexis Task Manager
• Q-Comm
• Q-Check

Workforce Management
• Reflexis Workforce Scheduler
• Reflexis Appointments
• Advanced Analytics and Reporting

Inventory Management
• Zebra MC9190 and MC9200 mobile computers
• VH10 vehicle mounted computers
• DS3678 scanners

Warehouse Management
• Zebra SmartCount™ self-scan hardware/ software solution

Results
Vera Bradley leverages Zebra's store operations and inventory management platforms to improve workforce scheduling and task management, as well as inventory distribution management. Ultimately, the time and effort Vera Bradley saves in simplified execution, optimized scheduling, modernized appointments, and streamlined inventory management enables on-site managers and front-line associates to better support the customer experience.

Vera Bradley Leverages Retail Workforce, Task, and Inventory Solutions for Success

Based in Fort Wayne, Indiana, Vera Bradley is a leading designer of women's handbags, luggage (and other travel items), fashion and home accessories, and unique gifts. Founded in 1982, the brand is globally famous for its innovative designs, iconic patterns, and brilliant colors. The company operates 144-plus Full Line and retail Factory Store locations throughout the United States.

Communications and Task Execution Problems

The company's rapid growth began to strain their communications capacity, with corporate interacting with stores via outdated phone and email-based processes and legacy systems. Conference calls and emails came at different times of the day, and pulled managers and associates away from the store floors. Additionally, using email to communicate corporate initiatives was confusing Store Managers, who spent 1-2 hours a day reviewing their emails—and this was potentially damaging to the customer experience.

Under the old system, communications about store displays, promotions, price changes and more were sometimes unclear, and various corporate departments emailed stores without a strict gatekeeping function in place. Sometimes updates remained unsent, while at other times, stores received irrelevant or redundant communication from corporate. Finally, corporate lacked visibility into the stores' project completion levels.

Improved Task Management, Communications and Auditing

To address these challenges, in 2014, Vera Bradley began rolling out new retail operations platforms, including Reflexis Task Manager™. The application offers a single place for tasks, communications, surveys, forms, and calendar functions, as well as a mechanism to collect feedback. The system streamlined the process for corporate-to-store communications and improved peer-to-peer messaging. Corporate gatekeepers review the tasks and real-time communications within Reflexis for clarity and to provide final approval before releasing to stores.

After the most recent upgrade, managers use Task Manager to save several hours a week communicating with stores. The system also prevents overwhelming message floods: there was a 95 percent reduction in email volume and the company eliminated an average of 10 email inboxes per store. Corporate sees the status of tasks across stores and can manage by exception, addressing issues at those locations that have an execution challenge. The rate of on-time completion of corporate-generated tasks also rose to 95 percent, up from 40 percent.

District Managers can manage chats to communicate directly with stores, as needed. Store teams use Task Manager daily to help them execute their projects efficiently and with greater accountability. Store Managers can now:

• See prioritized activities on a dashboard that is regularly refreshed with new information

• Quickly locate what is pertinent on a color-coded user interface (UI)

• Plan out their week in advance with centralized calendars

• See all messages in a single system, without the need to toggle between various applications to find their communications

• Quickly search for relevant messages without scanning through months' worth of email

Workforce Budgeting and Scheduling Gaps

Vera Bradley also saw an opportunity to put an automated scheduling system in place. This would free up Store Managers and give front-line associates more control over their schedules. Under the old system, each week, Store Managers relied on eight different spreadsheets to handle scheduling, payroll and related operations. They spent between 5 and 15 hours per week performing manual tasks, including looking up Excel-based schedules and approving associate time swaps.

In some of the larger Factory Stores, the General Managers spent hours each week creating schedules for 30-40 store associates, they tried to account for employee skillsets, availability, customer traffic, labor overtime, and much more.

The system had gaps and lacked automation, and managers worried the schedules were noncompliant with the myriad of labor laws. Also, the schedules weren't always aligned to sales peaks and other types of customer demand drivers.

Reducing Time and Effort with Automated Scheduling

Vera Bradley needed a system that would save time and effort spent in scheduling, while complying with labor laws and business rules. So, in 2014, the company rolled out Reflexis Workforce Scheduler™ for labor budgeting, forecasting, and scheduling. The system is also integrated with Task Manager to ensure stores have enough labor resources for the timely completion of all corporate-generated activities.

With a couple of clicks, on-site managers can quickly get a store snapshot and make changes to schedules. "From a personal perspective, our Store Managers are a thousand times happier than they had been," says Lauri Bray, District Manager at Vera Bradley. "They're not working on schedules until 8 p.m. at night." For managers in high-volume stores, it has reduced schedule creation time to 30 minutes and put 3-4 hours a week back on the floor for selling.

The employees enjoy fair and equitable schedules with timely postings. Among the various ROI metrics were a 25 to 50 percent improvement in scheduling effectiveness (through allocation of labor to customer demand). Each store now saves 15 hours per week—time which can be used by associates to be on the floor, selling—while the system also provides a 6 percent payroll savings annually.

"With Reflexis solutions, stores feel so much more organized and can focus on the customer," says Vice President of Stores Kelly Brown. "And store managers love Reflexis Workforce Scheduler because it is so fast, intuitive, and efficient. With Reflexis Advanced Analytics and Reporting™, Store Managers can review overs and shorts and corporate can identify opportunities to further optimize schedules."

COVID-19 Drives Changes in Shopping Behavior

The arrival of COVID-19 changed shopping habits, with customers wanting to be safe and at ease while shopping in store. So, in fall 2020, Vera Bradley also rolled out Reflexis Appointments™ to allow customers to book in-store meetings.

Customer-Driven Appointments Adds Value

Previously, a customer had to call up a store and make an appointment. Now the customer books an engagement through the Reflexis Appointments application on Vera Bradley's website—which then alerts on-site managers of the upcoming meeting. The solution is also integrated with Reflexis Workforce Manager and Task Manager to ensure the right associate is available at the right time. If the store is particularly busy, the manager can block off time, making more appointments available when there is greater associate bandwidth.

Since the rollout, 98 stores take appointments weekly, and this has contributed to higher sales. "Someone coming in purposefully shopping means an average higher dollar sale," says Amy Schenkel, Senior Full Line Channel Specialist at Vera Bradley. Reflexis-generated appointments have shown a 25 to 50 percent lift in the average transaction value, as compared to walk-ins.

Explosive Growth in Supply Chain

Vera Bradley's continuous rapid growth and expanding channels required the rollout of retail inventory solutions in their warehouse and to support their stores' fulfillment processes. The company services multiple distribution channels (including those involving partnerships with major retailers, while supporting their own Vera Bradley retail and outlet stores) as well as the ecommerce business.

Driving Visibility, Accountability in Inventory Processes

To boost uptime and productivity in the company warehouse, in 2014, Vera Bradley deployed Zebra's MC9190 and MC9200 mobile computers, VH10 vehicle-mounted computers and DS3678 scanners. Additionally, to ensure stores have the right products at the right time, Vera Bradley also leverages the Zebra SmartCount™ self-scan hardware and software solution. Zebra SmartCount offers real-time inventory visibility to optimize shrink and boost sales. Also, corporate can view multiple stores' inventories from a single dashboard. Zebra SmartCount assists in fulfilling customer orders, and has made audits more accurate and easier to conduct. The units can be scanned hourly and the solution refreshes data in real time.

Leveraging the easy-to-adopt Zebra platform, associates quickly print tags for the products so they can be stored and shipped to rapidly fill customer orders. This means that a customer can purchase items in the store of their choice—and associates can rapidly scan, locate, and retrieve (or order) the desired merchandise without having to route the customer to another location. Overall, each year, Vera Bradley uses the Zebra SmartCount solution to conduct more than 1,100 inventories. Since 2018, the solution has supported a 5 percent productivity gain, even as the number of units scanned increased.

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