Classic Alaska Trading Company

Pitney Bowes SendSuite® Live Global Logistics Management Solution is a powerful, web-based shipping management solution that consolidates, integrates and automates shipping processes in multiple locations, while providing a highest degree of visibility and control over the entire mail operation.

Classic Alaska Trading Company implemented SendSuite Live across three stores, a corporate sales center and various departments to help streamline shipping operations, save time and reduce costs, from the mailroom to the shipping dock.

SUMMARY

Classic Alaska Trading Company has been providing customers with quality outerwear to handle the harsh Alaskan winters since 1947. What started as a small surplus store selling Army/Navy gear in Anchorage has become Alaska’s premiere outfitter with five locations, 100 employees and 40,000 product SKUs. Throughout the years, the company has grown substantially but stayed true to its original mission — to meet the needs of Alaskan workers as they confront the challenges of the last frontier. Recently, that meant upgrading their online and shipping operations.

The Challenge
In 2011, the biggest challenge facing Classic Alaska was how to expand their web-based business so they could reach more customers with their complete selection of products. One obstacle was their outdated shipping operation. For years, they had run shipping separately — and manually — out of their five stores. While all the stores carried core outerwear products, each store also offered unique products popular in that area of the state. For instance, full hunting and fishing gear selection could be found in their Kodiak store, while the other stores are more concentrated on work wear.

“As part of our online business expansion, we needed to consolidate all five shipping operations into a single automated system,” explains Brian Birklid, the company’s Outside Retail Manager. “This would allow us to offer our full inventory to all Alaskans, and ship them with fewer mailing errors and greater savings.”

Enter SendSuite® Live
Pitney Bowes had a brand new logistics management solution SendSuite® Live that seemed made to order for Classic Alaska, and by November 2011, the trading company became one of the early adapters. SendSuite Live helped unify their multiple shipping locations into a single operation. Fully automated and integrated with the major carriers (FedEx, UPS and USPS), the solution handles all their primarily mailroom shipping needs, from checking residential zip code status to preparing labels, tracking packages and rate shop mail carriers. Being web-based, it also allows Classic Alaska to harness the power of online efficiencies and help manage costs.

Challenge
Classic Alaska Trading Company wanted to expand their web-based business, but first needed to consolidate multiple shipping locations into a single, comprehensive mailing operation. For the first time, this would allow them to offer their entire product selection to all customers online.

Solution
Pitney Bowes SendSuite® Live Global Logistics Management Solution helped the trading company unify their mail operation among five stores and the corporate sales office, save time and manpower with more efficient shipping capabilities, and automate many manual processes to improve mailing accuracy and customer service.
Incredible time saver
Birklid says SendSuite Live’s ability to do “price shop shipping” has been a real time and money saver. Whether shipping a product from store to store, or from a store to a customer, they use SendSuite Live to quickly determine the speed of delivery — ground, overnight or second day — and find the least expensive carrier “with just a click,” he says.

In the old manual system, shipping managers had to access the major carriers separately, enter addresses by hand, get the shipping price, and then move on to next carrier — a very time consuming process. Today SendSuite Live does the price shop shipping in seconds. “What used to take 6-7 minutes for one order now takes maybe 10 seconds,” Birklid says. “When you consider we’re shipping 1200-1500 packages a month during our busy season, that’s an incredible savings in time and labor.”

Automation improves service, accuracy
SendSuite Live’s automated reporting was another key benefit, Birklid says. In the past, they wrote labels by hand and used a scale, meter strip and price chart to determine postage rates — again, time consuming. Now everything is automated. Mail operators scan an order form into SendSuite Live, which then creates accurate labels and saves all the information into a central database, including shipping/delivery dates, weight, tracking number, and cost to ship. “If a customer doesn’t receive a package on time, we now can easily track it. Before, with five stores doing things manually, we had no centralized record of shipments.”

More accurate labeling has also greatly improved customer service. During the busy four-month winter season, mislabeling packages — such as using billing addresses instead of mailing addresses — had been a nagging problem, but no longer. “No more handwriting or simple human errors,” Birklid says. “We’ve had zero mistakes with SendSuite Live, it’s great.”

RESULT

200 hours saved in COD forms alone
In the Alaskan bush communities, it’s a cash economy, not credit. To pay with cash or check, the proper Collect on Delivery (COD) form much be attached. Previously, Classic Alaska created the forms manually. With SendSuite Live, Pitney Bowes customized the software so that any printer could print a COD form when the package is delivered. With this option, Birklid expects to save up to 200 hours in manually processing COD forms this year alone.

The trading company’s consolidated shipping environment also extends to the corporate sales office, which outfits many large customers, mainly North Slope oil drillers and construction firms, with gear to withstand Alaska’s winters. “Across our entire business, SendSuite Live is helping us to improve customer service with better tracking, while reducing costs. That combination of greater savings and better service has made us a stronger company,” he says.

“Our initial goal was to expand our web business and to fix an outdated shipping operation. With SendSuite Live, we ended up saving money, driving online sales, discovering new efficiencies and improving customer service. You can’t do much better than that.”

Brian Birklid, Outside Retail Manager, Classic Alaska

The Pitney Bowes advantage
Classic Alaska was able to streamline their shipping and mailing operation across multiple locations with a highly scalable solution that can expand as needs grow in the future.