



Tango Increases Gift Sales with Mobile Ordering System



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– Vicky Muerterties
Owner
Tango



The market for gifts and home decorative accents is substantial, totalling more than \$65 billion in sales each year. Most of the industry is dominated by small to medium sized manufacturers, who typically lack a national sales team and depend on sales agencies to take their products to market. With a decline in consumer spending, soaring fuel prices, and competition from large chain stores reducing the number of small retailers, sales agencies that specialize in the gift and home decor markets face real challenges that affect their bottom line.

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— Lynn Aylsworth
President
writeORDER

Tango, an independent, multi-line sales agency based in Atlanta, wanted to offset these challenges in the marketplace by improving its operational efficiencies. As a result, the agency has deployed a state-of-the-art handheld system that enables its sales force to efficiently record orders at tradeshows and on the road. By eliminating paper forms, the mobile system has enabled Tango to boost productivity and increase revenue at a time when many of its peers are experiencing a drop in sales.

INEFFICIENCIES OF PAPER

While a few sales agencies have been adopting technology to improve productivity and reduce costs, most tend to use little or no technology in many core busi-

ness processes. Like most agencies, Tango had been using paper forms, which sales reps tediously wrote by hand at tradeshows or customer sites. Later at a hotel room or home office, sales reps checked the orders for errors before faxing them to the main office, where a clerk typed the data into the accounting system.

The entire process was slow and prone to errors. For sales reps, it was easy to transpose digits while copying SKU or product numbers, and the time required to fill out and review forms could be better spent serving customers, selling products or preparing for the next day's calls. Time efficiency was especially important during tradeshows, where sales agencies have a lot of pressure to bring in most of the year's sales in the span of a few days. For office clerks, inaccurate sales orders caused by hard-to-read faxes and typing mistakes led to customer dissatisfaction as well as the need to regularly spend time cleaning up errors.

THE NEW MOBILE SYSTEM

As a result, Tango has deployed a mobile ordering system that consists of a Socket SoMo® 650 handheld computer equipped with a Socket CompactFlash Scan Card™ Series 5, a small bar code scanner that plugs into the top of the device. Running on the SoMo 650 is a standalone order entry application from writeORDER, a provider of custom sales force automation solutions for manufacturers and sales agencies. The SoMo 650 is writeORDER's preferred device for entering orders in the showroom and in the field, and easily handles the various ordering requirements of the 29 manufacturers represented by Tango. The Socket hardware was supplied by 24/7 Network Stability, Inc., the preferred IT vendor of AmericasMart Atlanta, where Tango has a permanent showroom.

Now, when sales reps take an order, all it takes is the quick push of a button to scan a UPC or SKU number bar code on a product or in a catalog. The information is instantly and accurately captured in the writeORDER software on the SoMo 650. Sales reps can also use the system to look up account information on the fly.

After the order information is complete, it can be immediately uploaded to the Internet and sent to manufacturers for fulfillment. If web access is not available, the order can be saved for a batch transmission at the end of the day. To confirm the order, sales reps use a wireless printer to provide customers a hard copy on the spot. An electronic copy is also sent to the customer's inbox once the order is uploaded.

The whole process is fast and easy. Because information is electronic from the start, the company no longer needs a clerk to transcribe information. Faster access to data in the field gives the business owners better visibility of business operations with real-time online reporting and analysis. In addition, orders are electronically imported into Tango's accounting application, eliminating a time-consuming and error-prone manual process. Orders can also be sent to manufacturers as electronic files formatted specifically for automatic importing into their accounting application, further reducing cost and errors.

For sales reps, having accurate data means they no longer need to check orders for errors, giving them more time to prepare for the next day's sales calls. "It's been a great productivity enhancer for the individual salesperson on the road as well as in the showroom," said Lynn Aylsworth, President of writeORDER. Tango is in the process of deploying 14 SoMo 650 handheld computers to its sales force.

Having a web-based application was important, because, as a small company, Tango lacked the IT resources to deal with software installations or upgrades. Using web-based software also enabled Tango to set up a buyer's portal for customers to re-order products or check on shipments anytime.

PROBLEMS WITH CONSUMER DEVICES

When Tango first deployed the writeOrder application, the company used a consumer-grade PDA from a leading manufacturer. The PDA, however, was not designed for business use, with a short battery life and an unstable platform that often crashed. "It was very frustrating for our sales reps. During a tradeshow, they would frequently hand me a PDA because of technical problems. I became the technical person, not wanting to be the technical person," explained Vicky Muetterties, one of the owners of Tango. As a small business, Tango lacked dedicated IT staff, and Muetterties ended up troubleshooting the problems herself.

Even customers began to distrust the technology and asked sales reps not to use it. "With the consumer-grade PDA, bar code scanning just was not reliable.



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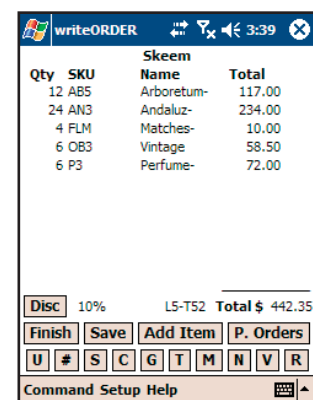
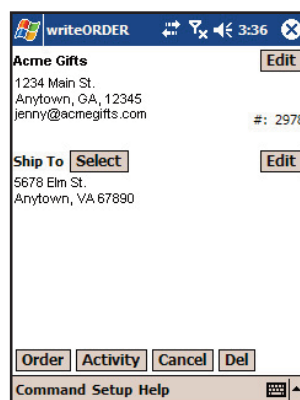
— Vicky Muetterties
Owner
Tango

Halfway through an order, the PDA would crash. Customers got negative towards scanning and would ask for their orders to be handwritten," Aylsworth remarked.

Another problem with the consumer device was the poor quality of its Wi-Fi, which made it difficult for sales reps to connect to a wireless printer. With dozens of wireless access points in an exhibit hall, the PDAs kept connecting to the wrong network. As a result, Tango often had to mail copies of orders to the customer after the tradeshow.

UPGRADING TO THE SOMO 650

After Tango switched to the SoMo 650, the hardware problems disappeared. "Anyone using the SoMo 650 stays connected, and I never have to reboot it to get things back on track, whereas I had to reboot quite



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– Vicky Muetterties
Tango

CUSTOMER AT A GLANCE

- Organization: Tango
- Founded: 1991
- Headquarters: Atlanta, Georgia, USA
- URL: www.tangoreps.com
- Primary business: Independent multi-line sales agency specializing in the gift industry

PARTNER AT A GLANCE

- Organization: writeORDER
- Founded: 2002
- Headquarters: Richmond, Virginia, USA
- URL: www.writeorder.com
- Primary business: Provider of custom sales force automation solutions for manufacturers and sales agencies

PARTNER AT A GLANCE

- Organization: 24/7 Network Stability
- Founded: 2001
- Headquarters: Atlanta, Georgia, USA
- URL: www.247nsi.com
- Primary business: IT service provider

often with the previous device,” Muetterties described. “Also, it takes several days for the battery in the SoMo 650 to die, which is great, because it gives sales reps plenty of time to get orders off their device and up into the Internet.”

“Wireless connections are faster and more reliable with the SoMo 650, because it has 802.11g Wi-Fi technology, whereas most PDAs, like the ones Tango previously used, only have 802.11b technology,” said Ken Segal, President of 24/7 Network Stability.

When Tango initially tested the SoMo 650 at a local tradeshow, the company experienced fantastic results. “We were using the SoMo 650 for the first time, and it worked flawlessly. In a week, we did over 1,500 orders with really no hardware issues at all,” Aylsworth explained.

With a better device, sales reps are also more willing to adopt the technology. “I sent the reps on the road with the SoMo 650, and they are just thanking me profusely, because in order to write orders on the road, they need to have a good piece of equipment,” Muetterties said. “The consumer-grade PDAs we previously gave them were just sitting in their office, not being used.”

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

With the handheld technology, Tango has been able to improve productivity, cut costs,

and increase sales at a time when many of its peers are seeing a decline in revenue.

“With the technology, we write much larger orders at a tradeshow, because sales reps spend more time talking to customers and less time writing down numbers,” Muetterties described. “Also, we don’t need to have as many people writing orders as we used to. We used to have a lot more temporary workers in the showroom, and it’s a big benefit to have less people writing orders.” Besides showroom staff, Muetterties has been able to cut down on clerical staff, with the need for transcription eliminated.

“The gift and home decor markets are very sensitive to the state of the economy, with many sales agencies experiencing declining sales at recent tradeshows. The fact that Tango could be more efficient and write larger orders is a contributor to the company’s growth in revenues compared to a decline for many other sales agencies at the show,” Aylsworth said.

Overall, the technology has had a dramatic effect on Tango, fundamentally changing the way it does business. “Deploying this technology has been the best decision I’ve ever made,” Muetterties said. “I’ll never go back to order writing through paper.”

CHALLENGE

Eliminate paper sales forms

SOLUTION

- Socket SoMo 650 handheld computer
- Socket CompactFlash Scan Card Series 5
- Custom sales order software from writeORDER

RESULTS

- Larger orders at tradeshows contribute to overall growth in sales
- Eliminated expense of temporary workers at tradeshows and transcription clerk at main office
- More accurate data improves customer satisfaction and eliminates need for error-checking, giving sales reps more time to focus on sales
- Greater adoption of technology among sales force with reliable, business-class system that captured 1,500 orders in one week with no hardware problems
- Faster processing and transmission of sales orders
- Access to up-to-date account information anytime, anywhere for sales reps
- Better visibility of remote data for business owners
- Web-based software is easy to install and eliminates IT issues of PC based solutions



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