



# E-Commerce Evolution

BMC's overhauled website gives customers a user-friendly, locally tailored online experience

Thomas Edison once said, "To have a great idea, have a lot of them." It appears the thought leaders at BMC have taken the inventor's advice to heart. Last year, the No. 3 firm on the ProSales 100 list took home the Excellence Award for technology with its innovative Ready-Frame system. Now BMC has impressed judges again with the launch of its new website, BuildWithBMC.com, which hosts what is arguably among the industry's most robust e-commerce sites to date.

The site, which went live in December 2015, lists more than 40,000 products available for purchase, along with detailed descriptions, inventory, pricing, videos, safety

information, and more—as well as numerous additional features, including order and delivery tracking, invoicing, account management, customer service, and reading materials.

"Being innovators in the market and finding ways that allow customers to do business faster and easier makes a customer want to do business with [us], but in addition it helps them become better business people," says Lisa Hamblet, vice president of e-business. "Continuing to provide technology, tools, and capabilities like the e-commerce system really allows our customers to do business when they want to do business and how they want to do business, which is essential today."

So far, the initiative is playing off. Since

the launch, the company has gained new customers as a direct result of the e-commerce platform, Hamblet says. And by making business easier for its customers, she believes the firm is achieving its ultimate mission.

But getting to this point didn't come without effort. In fact, to call it a massive undertaking would be an understatement, says senior director of eCommerce Denise Taylor. BMC's e-business platform has been evolving over the last five years and began with the launch of its proprietary Logistics Solutions system, which was developed in 2011 to track purchases and notify customers of delivery or pick-up by way of email, text message, and photo.

PHOTO: BRYAN REGAN

**From left:** Giana Noonan, director, Digital Strategy and Market Research; Mike Burns, manager, IT Business Analysis and Project Management; Lisa Hamblet, executive VP, eBusiness; Daryl Emig, VP, Information Technology; Larry Wadsworth, general manager, South Carolina; and Denise Taylor, senior director, eCommerce, all played a part in BMC's web upgrade.

The initial planning, strategizing, and designing stages of the e-commerce site alone took 18 months until the team would move forward with the building and testing of its functionality. Ultimately, Logistics Solutions would become an essential part of the tool and was rolled into the e-commerce platform. That later would be integrated into the existing backend system with little disruption to the operation flow, she says.

Of course, all of this required new staff and teams to oversee the process as well as handle the site post-launch. It also took due diligence. BMC obtained input and feedback from a number of reps in the field in a wide spectrum of roles. The team also conducted market research and surveys pre- and post-launch to ensure the site would meet its customers' needs and provide a service allowing them to conduct business on their own schedules. In doing so, the firm has validated that the current features and functionality are what its customers are looking for.

"Upfront planning and input from key constituents was really critical to make sure we had a solution that was easy to use," Hamblet said.

Today, BuildWithBMC.com is accessible to anyone, but so far the e-commerce capabilities are turned on in 13 of BMC's 30-plus markets. The Los Angeles market will be available next, with a soft launch in early November and the full suite available in early 2017. Other regions will follow, with Texas and Colorado on the radar.

The decision to not make the e-commerce site available nationally was a strategic move, Taylor explains. With each new market, the team goes through a deliberate process to ensure that all of the parties involved, particularly those at the local market level, are ready and prepared for a rollout.

The site is also market specific, which requires that each product have its own SKU number, specs, price, photo, and other perti-

nent details. This was likely the greatest challenge, Hamblet and Taylor concur.

Prior to the creation of the platform, there wasn't much pre-existing information available about the 40,000 products listed for sale on the site. But it would be a necessity for success. To make it happen, BMC partnered with vendors and manufacturers to obtain product descriptions and then rewrite them in-house for their audience. BMC also had to set up photo shoots for a large majority of the products, as well as create additional content such as videos and other noteworthy specs. This is an ongoing process with plans to continue to add additional products.

Because BMC was seeking to enhance the local experience and avoid a cookie-cutter website that was the same nationwide, the site has been developed in a unique way to provide relevant product information, branding, and marketing specific to each locale, regardless of whether or not it is a transactional one.

"When our customers in Salt Lake City

goes to the website they see product specifically sold in Salt Lake City and it really creates a local experience," Taylor explains. "We are really honoring the variability and independence that each of our markets has."

Understanding the needs of its customers, BMC designed its site to be responsive, a direct reflection of today's clients' expectations regarding online purchasing. Although a number of users still access the website from a laptop, data shows a number of accounts are used on handheld devices, further justifying the need to have a tool available that allows customers to make purchasing decisions from a jobsite with ease.

"Even since launch we're seeing more customers on mobile, and accessing info in the field is essential," Hamblet notes.

BMC also is using the data to benchmark itself by tracking deliveries and other data specific to each market and making adjustments as needed to improve internal operations, Hamblet adds.

"It's not often that you get an opportunity to revolutionize the industry, and what we're trying to do is bring about a tremendous change in the industry in the way that we're doing business," says Taylor.—Erin Ansley

