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Easier To Buy From

With A Web Channel Managed by a Single Partner

Blount International needed to become ETDBW (easier to do business with).

The problem: They couldn't manage a new web channel in-house. **READ MORE ->**

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ABOUT BLOUNT INTERNATIONAL

Blount International, Inc. is a global manufacturer and marketer of replacement parts, equipment, and accessories for the forestry, lawn, and garden; farm, ranch, and agriculture; and concrete cutting and finishing markets.

Blount sells its products in more than 115 countries around the world.

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Background

This story is centered around one man. It's the best way to convey the drama and challenges of these kinds of projects. And it's a reflection of our genuine respect and admiration of Barry Brunetto, the now-retired executive who championed this initiative that helped transform Blount International.

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I N DECEMBER 2008, BARRY BRUNETTO, THEN THE VP OF IT AT Blount International, took a call that would change the course of Blount International forever.

Adrienne Wilson, Corevist VP of Sales & Marketing at the time, asked Barry if he wanted to offer his distribution channel a managed B2B eCommerce solution. "It'll leverage all your investments in SAP," she said. "Plus it will have minimal impact on your resources--whether IT, human, or financial."

Four months later, an advisory group of Blount's US-based distributors would be piloting that new SAP-integrated B2B customer self-service portal.

By the end of 2009, Blount's B2B eCommerce website was managing 30 orders per day, for 1000 employees and customers, in 8 different countries.

Fast forward five years to year end 2014 and Blount's B2B eCommerce website processed over $100M worth of orders for 7000 registered website users from 50 countries. These website users logged in over 700 times per day to manage all of their normal commercial interactions with Blount, without any human interaction, 24 hours per day 7 days per week.

A portrait of a leader in action.

Over the course of the last five years of Corevist working with Barry Brunetto and the Blount organization, I have had the privilege of observing and supporting a true leader in action.

What follows is the story of Blount's B2B eCommerce journey framed by what I believe to be Barry's top 10 contributions to his organization's success:

1. Create a Vision

2. Focus on Architecture

3. Let Your Customers lead

4. Assemble the Right Team

5. Think big. Start small. Move fast.

6. Be Engaged and Reasonable.

7. Threaten to Put it Into Production (accelerate failure)

8. Be Persistent

9. Perfection is the Enemy of the Good

10. Don't Forget to Celebrate

by **SAM BAYER**
Chief Executive Officer
Corevist

Create a Vision

As an avid personal user of eCommerce websites, Barry knew that his ultimate goal was to eventually have Blount interact directly with the actual consumers of Blount's products by opening up a Business to Consumer (B2C) channel. **READ MORE ->**

BARRY BRUNETTO

Former VP of Information Systems
Blount International, Inc.

BARRY BRUNETTO'S MANDATE WAS CLEAR TO HIM FROM day one when he joined Blount in 1998. As a business oriented IT Executive, his primary mission was to **become "Easy to do Business With" (ETDBW)--all without increasing the burden on his IT staff.**

Talk about a tall order.

Initially his focus was going to be on his internal constituents: those in Manufacturing, Supply Chain, Logistics, Finance and Human Resources. From there, the plan was to focus on Blount's distribution channel, their Distributors and Dealers all over the world. This would be their Business to Business (B2B) channel. But that couldn't be the end game.

As an avid personal user of eCommerce websites, Barry knew that his ultimate goal was to eventually have Blount interact directly with the actual consumers of Blount's products by opening up a Business to Consumer (B2C) channel.

But, considering the impact that a B2C strategy could have on Blount's existing distribution channel, it would have to be approached with great forethought.

Based on the IT state of affairs at Blount in 1998, he knew that he was going to have to tackle his ultimate vision in two phases.

Phase One of his tenure focused on getting Blount's internal IT house in order which would lay the groundwork for Phase Two. Phase Two was simple: become "Easier To Do Business With" ETDBW.

The only problem was that internal IT capacity. Blount was going to need a special kind of solution--one that didn't increase the workload on their IT team.

Phase Two was simple: become "Easier To Do Business With" ETDBW.

Focus on Architecture

SAP was going to be the lynchpin to Blount's ETDBW strategy. **READ MORE –›**

BARRY'S PHASE ONE AGENDA INCLUDED THE IT infrastructure as well as the applications. He upgraded or installed the telecommunication basics of local area networks, wide area networks, and phone systems. From there he focused his attention to the more daunting worldwide implementation of SAP.

SAP was going to be the lynchpin to Blount's ETDBW strategy.

The company had been growing its manufacturing and distribution capabilities as well as its geographic footprint through acquisitions.

Consolidating the growing organization's IT services was the only cost effective way to manage the business. With the leveraged buyout of Blount by Lehman Brothers in 1999, fiscal conservatism was the watchword. Standardizing the various business units on a common SAP platform would help Blount realize economies of scale.

By 2003, Blount had consolidated all of their business units, and their 13 worldwide locations, onto a single instance of SAP. The next several years saw further adoption and rollout of SAP, including the opening of new distribution centers and the implementation of SAP's APO (Advanced Planning and Optimization) solution, a major upgrade to SAP ECC 5.0 and rationalized data center and disaster recovery operations.

By 2007, with the foundation in place, Barry was not only ready to embark on Phase Two of his vision; Blount's customers were starting to demand it.

Let Your Customers Lead

When customers complain, successful companies respond. **READ MORE ->**

THE CONSENSUS OF BLOUNT'S 2008 ANNUAL GATHERING of the US Customer Advisory Board was that Blount was significantly lagging their peers when it came to leveraging the internet for Customer Services. **Simply put, Blount was "Hard to do Business With."**

Now that Blount had concluded its Phase One infrastructure transformation, this was exactly the fuel that Barry was looking for to help launch his Phase Two initiatives.

Developing B2B eCommerce capabilities and becoming ETDBW was no longer an agenda that Barry had to push onto the organization. Customers were demanding it.

The scope of the first eCommerce project at Blount was to enable US distributors to conduct business with Blount via self-service. Within 3 months of kicking the project off, US distributors were able to login to Blount's secure B2B eCommerce website 24x7 and access all of the information about their account, orders and product availability that was in SAP in real time.

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Assemble the Right Team

That's when the Cloud that cleared his vision appeared. **READ MORE ->**

THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT DELIVERING A WORLD CLASS B2B eCommerce offering to your customers is a complicated endeavor. Next to implementing SAP itself, it is probably one of the more complicated, and probably most visible projects an organization will ever undertake.

B2B eCommerce initiatives cross all organizational boundaries from sales and marketing, to distribution and logistics, to finance and human resources. Obviously, they have a significant reliance on IT.

According to the Gartner Group's November 21, 2014 report entitled "Predicts 2015: Adaptable, Innovative Digital Commerce Approaches Drive Opportunities":

"Currently, organizations commonly incorporate **10 to 15 different vendors** in support of their digital customer experience across experience management, analytics and operational integration."

The combination of SAP mastery, web application development and operations combined with complicated integration requirements typically send the mid-market industrial manufacturer into overload.

What's more, IT organizations at industrial manufacturers **typically aren't staffed** to take on a project with this level of complexity and visibility all by themselves.

In light of this reality, Barry came to the conclusion that pursuing the project on his own was out of the question. But, a survey of the market for products and suppliers who could help him build his SAP Integrated B2B eCommerce website brought him nothing but sticker shock and disappointment.

That's when the Cloud that cleared his vision appeared.

Adrienne Wilson, Corevists VP of Sales and Marketing at the time, called Barry and offered a managed web channel solution that would require zero hardware, software or human resource investments on his part. She explained that the Corevist solution was deployed in the Cloud and included prebuilt, configurable SAP integration. His new, managed web channel could be up and running in 90 days.

Barry found his solution at last.

With a well-written contract, including the requirement that the software be put into escrow, the partnership between Blount and Corevist was born in March, 2009.

Think Big. Start Small. Act Fast.

Managing expectations would be key to Barry's success. Thinking big, starting small and acting fast was his strategy.

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BLOUNT'S BRANDS

Blount International supports 13 worldwide locations and 8 brands through one instance of SAP.

MANAGING EXPECTATIONS ON PROJECTS IS OFTEN MAKE or break.

Blount's project was big and complicated. They were clearly thinking big when they decided to add an eCommerce channel to their worldwide customer service and sales organizations.

In embracing 50 countries spanning 4 continents, they knew they would face a myriad of differences in language, culture, business processes and rules, all of which could slow the acceptance of the new web channel initiative.

Managing expectations would be key to Barry's success. His strategy was to think big, start small, and act fast.

With the world waiting, and Blount's Senior Leadership Team (SLT) watching, Barry announced that he would begin the aggressive deployment of their B2B eCommerce solution in phases. He was first going to address the needs of his US distributors who predominantly placed orders via EDI. Those distributors wanted an eCommerce website that would enable customers to self-serve functions like:

- lookup of product availability

- check on delivery status

- reprint order-related documents

Once that was in place, the plan would address Europe's needs,

followed by Latin America and the Far East.

Within 90 days of project kickoff, the US Distributors had their long-awaited web channel solution.

Customer Service Representatives were immediately freed up from handling the "mundane" calls from their customers, and customers were happy to log into a website and get instant access to the information they required to run their business.

Six months later, Belgium, Germany, Sweden, UK, France and Russia all had their localized B2B eCommerce websites in production. These websites had extended the basic functionality provided to the US Distributors with the ability to place orders into SAP in real time from the web.

Along the way, various enhancements were delivered, including:

- integration with a Product Selector Guide

- a European product catalog

- the ability to publish promotions for the European sales reps on the landing page.

In time, the ability to pay invoices online and to report shipping errors was also provided to Blount's customers. All the while, the online metrics were registering great success. Barry had thought big, acted small, moved quickly and succeeded by all measures.

Within 90 days of project kickoff, the US Distributors got the web channel they needed.

Be Engaged and Reasonable

Barry was the reasonable man in the room who always looked for the simplest approach that would deliver the most value with the least risk and at the lowest cost.

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FROM THE BEGINNING, BARRY'S ENGAGEMENT SENT A strong message about the importance of this initiative to the company.

He attended the entire 2-day US project kickoff, and each subsequent Focus Group thereafter. What proved most invaluable, however, was his active participation as the "reasonable man" in the room.

On numerous occasions, forces surfaced which could have expanded the project scope and delayed the GoLive date.

When new business processes were suggested that would require a significant departure from the established SAP blueprint, they were quickly ruled out. When "edge cases" that would only happen once in a blue moon were identified, Barry counseled the team to find a work-around for when the blue moon appeared.

Barry was the reasonable man in the room who always looked for the simplest approach that would deliver the most value with the least risk (and at the lowest cost).

Barry's direct, hands-on involvement sent a loud and clear message to everyone on the project team. Not only was this an important project, but getting it into production and deriving value quickly was critical.

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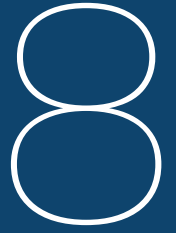
Threaten to Put it Into Production and Fail Early

Why can't you use this in production tomorrow? **READ MORE ->**

OREGON® products are sold through an eCommerce microsite connected to Blount's one instance of SAP. The OREGON eCommerce site is powered on Corevist's platform and is one of 14 microsites in the Blount family.

AT COREVIST, WE BELIEVE THAT PUTTING WORKING software in the hands of customers and asking them "why can't you use this in production tomorrow" is the most effective gauge of the software's readiness.

We also believe that **working software should be available from day one of the project.** That's why we use a series of Focus Groups with real users, to discover essential tweaks and customizations which will keep the client's unique business ticking. In essence, by threatening to put the software in production from day one, the project team learns to embrace and react to failure from the outset.

This is a foreign concept to most, especially those organizations that have endured an SAP implementation, but it immediately appealed to Barry when we kicked off our first project together in Portland, Oregon in March, 2009.

At the first Focus Group, with the full team assembled, we executed various use cases and uncovered upwards of 20 defects per hour. This process set the agenda for the next iteration of the project.

By agreeing to leverage as much of the out of the box functionality of the Corevist solution as possible, and to staying within the confines of Blount's corporate SAP Blueprint, our iterative process delivered a robust B2B eCommerce solution in a quarter of the time promised by other proposals which Barry had evaluated.

Working software should be available **from day one** of the project.

Over the next five years, we repeated this approach at Blount for every major release of website functionality and implementation in new business units.

Failing early and often ensured that these projects succeeded in the end.

Be Persistent

Just because you've built it, it doesn't mean that the organization or your customers will immediately use it. **READ MORE -›**

BARRY HAD BEEN LOBBYING HARD FOR ONE OF BLOUNT'S business units to adopt the B2B eCommerce website for their salespeople and customers. The cost to them would be minimal since the entire infrastructure was already in place, already managed by Corevist, and tailoring it to these new requirements was easy. As already demonstrated in the other business units, the value would be high.

After several attempts to convince the executive in charge, Barry couldn't get his approval. Fast forward 18 months and the executive in question left the business *"to pursue other interests."* The new regime eagerly sponsored the project. The B2B website went live in a matter of weeks, and as expected, **users absolutely loved the new web channel.**

The B2B website went live in a matter of weeks and as expected, **users absolutely loved the new web channel.**

Perfection is the Enemy of the Good

Frustrating? Yes! Perfect? No. **READ MORE ‑›**

Tisco – one of Blounts 8 brands -- launched its eCommerce initiative in 2014. It will be the 14th microsite within Blount International, all of which run on Corevist's cloud-based platform. It will also be the first to implement a rich content catalog for browsable shopping.

B2B ECOMMERCE IS A JOURNEY. WHILE YOU CAN ALWAYS strive for perfection, if you ever want to get a release out the door, you'll have to learn how to say, "It's good enough for now."

After the first version goes into production, there will always be more opportunities to pursue (and complaints to address). It takes wisdom and experience to manage this ever-growing backlog of requirements in light of all of the competing priorities and your company's finite resources.

That's why Corevist Commerce is a managed solution. Through continuous communication with you, we help you determine which change requests are the highest priority at any given time.

As an example, it was always clear to Barry that eventually, Blount's B2B eCommerce web channel would have to support credit cards and ACH payments--both for shopping cart checkouts, and for online invoice payment. However, since a large number of his customers paid by Purchase Orders only, Barry decided to launch the website with that payment method alone. He decided to deliver value to the many as soon as possible while deferring expanded payment methods for a later time.

Think of it like this. Should you hold business-critical functionality hostage to less common use cases?

Of course not! Barry's decision was smart and agile. It helped ensure that Blount's web channel delivered real, practical value for customers on Day 1, while deferring more advanced use cases for future interations of Blount's Corevist solution.

If you ever want to get a release out the door, you'll have to learn to say, "It's good enough for now."

Don't Forget to Celebrate

Don't wait until the very end to throw the party. **READ MORE ->**

Blount now processes 25% of all revenue through its SAP B2B eCommerce site.

Without one single IT hire.

FINALLY, WE COME TO THE LAST BIT OF PROJECT WISDOM: Don't forget to celebrate--don't wait until the very end to throw the party! :) All along the way, there will be things to celebrate, so take the time to celebrate them. A great Project Initiation Workshop, a great Focus Group, the successful design and implementation of a particularly complicated feature are all worth celebrating. It's a key part of managing everyone's expectations.

In December of 2014, Barry Brunetto retired from Blount after an amazing 17-year career. I was fortunate enough to have worked with him for the last 5 years of his tenure there, and I was honored to attend his retirement dinner. The tone and content of the speeches made during the evening gave me another very important insight into the qualities of a great leader. Not only did Barry transform the IT capabilities of Blount from the Industrial Age into the Digital Age, but **he did so while earning the deep respect and love of his team.** So much so, that one of his team members literally said that if he was asked to go into battle with Barry, he wouldn't hesitate to do so.

At Corevist, we celebrate our relationship with Blount. We're incredibly grateful for the opportunity to work with Barry Brunetto.

The journey towards perfection continues.

Want to learn more?

Find out how Corevist Commerce can help companies like yours.

GET A DEMO

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At Corevist, we help companies like yours every day. Through close relationships with partners like Magento and SAP, we help our B2B clients achieve the managed web channel solution they need today – and we help them prepare for the future.

Get in touch with us today to learn more.

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