



A NEW BREED OF ERP

Robust, flexible, industry-specific solutions help apparel and footwear brands move their businesses forward.

For far too long, apparel and footwear brands and retailers have struggled with cumbersome legacy ERP systems that are outdated and inefficient. Often built using the old “green-screen” technology and modified from a general ERP solution in an attempt to fit the needs of their businesses, these dinosaurs have lost their luster.

In today’s apparel and footwear market, where companies need to meet the demands of multi-channel customers who expect a wide array of merchandise available anywhere and anytime, modern IT solutions are a must.

Quite simply, the legacy ERPs no longer cut it.

Apparel firms today do not want to muddle through daily operations with these outdated mainframe applications. Instead, they need dynamic, flexible and scalable systems that help them gain control of business operations and information, nimbly

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respond to new market and channel opportunities, and realize significant process improvements. In addition, companies want employees using the ERP to have an easy-to-use, intuitive system with a modern look and feel.

The ERP Evolution

Traditional ERP systems were comprehensive and powerful, but difficult to navigate and required tedious and time-consuming re-keying to move data from one place to another. Advancements came in the form of applications based on Microsoft’s graphical user interface (GUI), but while these systems emphasized “ease of use,” they often resulted in fewer features and benefits than associated with the more robust, older-generation ERP applications.

Today, we’ve finally reached an era where ERP systems combine both the robustness of the original workhorses with the user-friendly interface of the second-generation solutions. Apparel and footwear businesses today can “have their cake and eat it too” by opting for ERP solutions that provide all the necessary features and functionality; are based on business logic specific to apparel and footwear manufacturing, sales, and distribution; have flexible deployment options; and offer a modern user interface.

What’s powering this latest evolution of ERP that promises integrated, scalable, easy to-use-solutions and a full scope of features and functionality?

Forward-thinking technology providers are embracing the idea of cloud-based technology solutions delivered via a software-as-a-service (SaaS) model. These virtualized platforms host a comprehensive and robust application suite that can perform on any operating system or database. This approach eliminates the need to be platform/server-, operating system- and database-specific and removes constant concerns about system updates and upgrades.

And because cloud-based solutions are deployed over the web and offer access through an on-demand, pay-as-you-go model, they hold the promise of great value and flexibility for users. Choosing an ERP application delivered via the cloud instead of via costly internal IT infrastructure gives companies the ability to minimize capital expense on servers, networks and IT staff.

The SaaS platform deliverable also means companies don’t have to maintain and support IT infrastructure and be concerned with software versioning and updates. As a result, users say

goodbye to the large capital investment and ongoing technical resources that typically stress a company's operational budget during an ERP implementation.

In addition, SaaS/cloud solutions can be accessed anywhere in the world — a key factor for today's apparel and footwear companies which often have complex global supply chains with partners, vendors and offices spread across the globe. Users can log on anytime and anywhere with just a laptop or a smart phone. And that anytime-anywhere access also frees companies from being tied to a specific technology backbone. Whether a business' corporate systems are run by IBM, Dell, HP, or any other vendor is indifferent when it comes to using a cloud-based ERP.

Flexible, Scalable, Integrated

One of the greatest benefits of this new generation of ERP solutions is that they provide today's apparel and footwear companies with flexible, scalable, integrated access to all the data needed to run their businesses effectively.

While ERP used to mainly address financials and core business data, today's solutions also help businesses with all aspects of the concept-to-cash cycle. With plug-and-play modules to handle product lifecycle management; EDI interfaces with manufacturers and other vendors; customer relationship management; and even warehouse and supply chain functionality, today's solutions offer robust capability — all at the click of a mouse.

The best of these modern ERP solutions are also flexible in terms of configuration and customization. Rather than forcing apparel and footwear brands to fit into the software, the software can be adapted to fit the needs of the companies purchasing the software. Indeed, ERP systems that are flexible and configurable have found a more receptive market than solutions that are rigid and difficult to navigate.

And because these solutions are dynamic, cloud-based and easy to configure, they scale well with companies that are experiencing growth or that need to flex up and down with demand fluctuations. This has not historically been the case with legacy systems, which require a large investment and ongoing costs for maintenance and upkeep. In those cases, companies seeking scalability are often left unsatisfied.

These modern solutions have been a home run for apparel and footwear brands such as Row One Brands Inc. of Needham,

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Mass. The startup company, which produces customized footwear for the collegiate market, recently selected Xperia Solutions’ next-generation ERP system, Comprehensiv. The solution was a perfect fit for the young firm, according to Row One’s Chief Operating Officer Joe Smith, Jr.

“The fact that Xperia specializes in the footwear and apparel industries, uses the IBM platform, and offers a system that is scalable and easy to use was ideal for us. Allowing our company to run the Comprehensiv system as a SaaS solution was just what we were looking for in our ERP platform,” Smith explains.

Row One will use Comprehensiv’s full suite of products including warehouse and inventory management, procurement and production, CRM, financials, and more. The solution will enable Row One to track goods from inception (production) through the sales process as well as shipment and final payment.

About Xperia’s Comprehensiv ERP

By updating its Comprehensiv ERP system to a Microsoft .NET framework, Xperia is able to offer its customers a modern solution modeled on familiar applications such as Microsoft Outlook. As a result, users are familiar with the environment and thus can adapt quickly with minimal training.

In addition, the new interface makes it easier for users to automate common tasks. Instead of the need to rekey information from one of the old ERP green screens into an Excel spreadsheet, data can now be exported automatically within the system. The same applies for running customized reports and tracking shipments as well.

The new look and feel also makes it easier to access information and view data from an operational information perspective. Data such as order status, inventory levels, warehouse management information and financial details are available at the click of a mouse.

The new interface also means implementations can execute in weeks instead of months. Flexibility is also a key element: users can implement Comprehensiv in a traditional “enterprise” model or as a SaaS model. Also featured is a robust set of security permissions options and there is flexible security around the authority specific users have within the system as well. ■