

Accelerating Growth Through Partnership



Quick Look

Company: Thule

CEO: Magnus Welanders

Website: thule.com

Headquarters: Malmö, Sweden

Founded: 1942

Industry: Auto Accessory Manufacturer



Partnerships transform classic business models

Among outdoor enthusiasts, auto accessory manufacturer Thule is a household name—though many people mispronounce it. Pronounced “Too-Lay,” Thule was founded in 1942 and started producing automobile accessories in 1955. Still based in Malmö, Sweden, Thule has become a market leader selling its products through a network of over 2,500 dealers as well as direct to customers online. As Thule modernized its ecommerce site and overall customer experience, it identified its manufacturing and distribution channels as lagging behind as they relied primarily on person-to-person contact to take dealer orders and make product recommendations.



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Director of Customer Service
North America

Why Microsoft?

Microsoft partners offer deep market, product, and customer expertise that help companies transform their business to better meet changing market and competitive needs.

Microsoft partners tackle complex business challenges

As Microsoft Certified Partner Sitecore was running Thule’s consumer site, Thule expressed a desire to transform their dealer experience by moving the distribution channel online. Manufacturing and distribution have historically been slower to embrace the cloud compared to retail businesses, which are driven by customer demands and internal marketing, design, and branding teams.

Sitecore informed their Microsoft Certified B2B Partner and ISV Insite Software Solutions about Thule’s need for a cloud-based solution. Based on the Microsoft .NET framework, InsiteCommerce is a preferred ecommerce platform for use with Sitecore and a natural fit for many of Thule’s existing back-end systems.

Once the Sitecore and Insite solutions were integrated with Thule’s other business systems, an online catalog of over 10,000 items were available to Thule’s dealers. The new system brought together pricing, payment terms, and personalized product offerings, while accounting for multiple warehouse locations, countries, and currencies. The system also integrated Thule’s existing ERP system. This implementation is an example of multiple partners working together, focusing on their core strengths to deliver high value to their clients.



Annie Scopel, Director of Customer Service for North America at Thule, underscored the importance of planning, especially when undertaking this disruptive transformation to streamline online ordering. "It is critical to perform a thorough pre-study of business rules with scenarios and have meetings to ensure every partner understands the requirements and milestones. It is also critical to have a dedicated tester to ensure that requirements are behaving according to scenarios," she said. Managing a project with partners located in different time zones, and spanning cultural and language barriers, presented additional challenges. By working with Microsoft Partners—each of whom focused on their broad set of complimentary core competencies—Thule saw their vision realized.

Transformation as a disruptor of manufacturing and distribution

Delivering on the project requirements gave Thule a distinct advantage over its competitors, some of whom were still taking wholesale orders by phone and on paper. By bringing the wholesale channel online, Insite extended Thule's sales department, transforming the way Thule had been interacting with its dealers for the past 50 years.

"We received incredible feedback from our customers about the new site," said Scopel. "Many feel that [the solution] is one of the best B2B sites they have used. And our salespeople tell us that the new site has changed their lives."

Measured benefits and continued growth

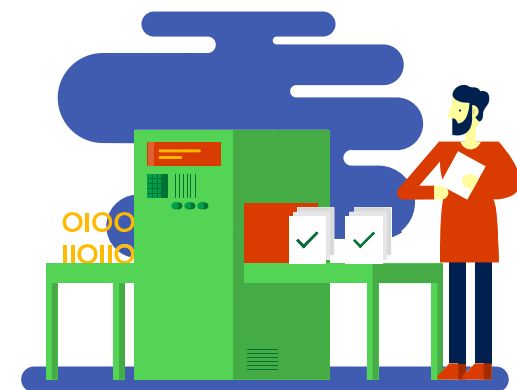
Since launch, Thule won 2013 Best Customer Service and 2014 Best B2B Experience distinctions in their dealer surveys. "We tripled adoption six months post launch. We were able to improve call response time by 350% without headcount expansion, [and improve] morale within the support team," Scopel added.

"We're finding that one of the key reasons that companies are buying and selling goods [from a particular vendor] is how easy they are to do business with. One of the reasons that Thule believes that they've grown faster than their competitors is that they are so much easier to do business with."

*– Brian Strojny,
Cofounder and EVP of Insite*

The experience has encouraged Thule to adopt additional technologies, like chat functionality, to help dealers increase communication, improve customer service, and differentiate Thule from its competition. More sales-oriented functionality is on the horizon with tools to help sales reps build pre-book orders based on dealer history and product category.

Consumers know more about the products that are available to them today than ever before, and this has created a much more competitive landscape for retailers and manufacturers alike. Created and implemented by a team of Microsoft Partners, Thule's dealer network solution created competitive advantage by allowing dealers to place pre-season orders, order displays, and even take advantage of recommendations on what to buy. This frees up Thule and dealer sales reps to drive deeper engagement and better customer service.



Partners Help Drive Success

1 An outdoor industry leader forms

Thule begins business in 1942 and creates its first auto accessories in 1955. Ski racks, roof racks, and other products soon follow

2 Thule's consumer website launches

Sitecore CMS is deployed to communicate product information to a consumer audience. Thule expresses a need to also bring their dealer channel online.

3 Opportunities in the dealer network

Sitecore works with Microsoft Partner Insite to utilize their InsiteCommerce solution to address Thule's dealer channel need. The cloud-based solution is a preferred ecommerce platform to implement with Sitecore. The solution is also integrated with multiple Thule back-office systems.

4 A new dealer commerce site is released

Thule rolls out the system to their 2,500+ dealers worldwide, transforming the way they work with their dealer network.

5 Measurable results are positive

Positive feedback and increased dealer attention continues to differentiate Thule from their competitors. Increased efficiency allows Thule's sales teams to improve call response time by 350% and improve morale within the support team—without increasing headcount.



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