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OTABO GETS IN STEP WITH CUSTOMERS AND VENDORS WITH CENTRIC PLM™



FOOTWEAR COMPANY USES TECHNOLOGY TO INCREASE AGILITY

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“When you get to a certain size, the way you manage a business needs to change. You start to outgrow Word and PowerPoint and spreadsheets with the level of rigor required to track every detail.”

Chris (Rocky) Finlay, Chief Growth Officer of Otabo, explains the company's growing pains before implementing Centric PLM. Otabo needed to manage their growth, communications, product ideation, development iterations and client partnerships more efficiently.

Today, Otabo has established more efficient product development workflows, improved transparency to both their customers and vendors, a way to bring all their product data together and a stronger infrastructure. Just how did they arrive in this place?

A FAMILY AFFAIR

Sabrina Finlay, CEO of Otabo, learned the ins and outs of the industry from her family's business in China, an OEM footwear manufacturer for brands such as adidas, Nike and Timberland. Sabrina launched her own business, Otabo in 2016. The company fills a need for full-service manufacturing that allows smaller startups to compete with big brands, and big brands to become more agile and efficient. Her husband Rocky, also holds a leadership role. Today, Otabo has a network of 50+ factories at its disposal. It is relationship forward, transparent and quality focused.

INTRICATE BALANCE

Otabo embraces the idea that supply chains can be works of art. They'd always had strong Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) in place, but the company was growing rapidly and serving their customers the best way they could required many moving parts. The need for digital transformation became more apparent. Sabrina says about searching for a PLM, “Some people in the company started going to Rocky with complaints about what they needed and what we weren't giving them in terms of technology. That was really the start of it.”

Says Rocky, “When you get to a certain size, the way you manage a business needs to change. You have to scale your management strategies, the way you teach, the way you distribute decisions, the way you move information, the way you protect information. All of these things need to be scaled.”

He continues, “I could see how powerful the habits of work are and how adding a PLM would amplify that work; reduce the time wasted, enable more transparency, more agility. We discussed that as a team, went through the demos. We understood that it would be worth the effort to make the switch... it's an amplifying and accelerating infrastructure addition.”

WHY CENTRIC?

Otabo based their search for a PLM solution on features, price and, in a departure from the usual, Glassdoor reviews. “There were so many employees who said they loved working at Centric,” says Rocky. “The choice came down to the alignment between our companies. Our values match, the sense of adaptability, agility, the dedication to quality. The commitment to the success of our business sealed the deal.” He continues, “And being able to pivot and be agile, that's been transformative for us and for the team. The teams really bonded well through that collaboration and that trust and transparency.”



“CENTRIC IS SO HEAVILY INTEGRATED INTO EVERYTHING. WE'VE ACTUALLY DISCOVERED A LOT OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR MORE ORGANIZATION, MORE SOPS, MORE AND GREATER EFFICIENCIES—THAT'S BEEN THE MOST EXCITING PART OF ALL OF THIS.”

CHALLENGES

- + Continued industry disruptions
- + Lack of transparency
- + Overlapping roles
- + Hard to track development with email, spreadsheets and PowerPoint

MORE THAN THEY BARGAINED FOR

After a completely remote implementation in 2020, during a difficult year to begin with, Sabrina says, “One of the things that was really surprising to us and was not something we expected—Centric PLM has significantly changed the way we’re approaching the work and how our team works together. It really made us rethink what some of the roles in our business should be.”

With the single source of the truth provided by Centric PLM, Otabo reorganized their workflows. “Centric is so heavily integrated into everything. We actually discovered a lot more opportunities for organization, more SOPs, more and greater efficiencies—that’s been the most exciting part of all of this,” Sabrina says.

WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM YOUR FRIENDS

The pandemic forced the hand of companies all over the world. Strain on the supply chain and wildly varying consumer demand made for uncertain conditions. The lessons learned from Otabo are extremely valuable for any circumstance.

Sabrina explains that the pandemic didn’t necessarily bring anything new in terms of disruption, it was just more extreme. “The problems have always been the same; there’s an issue with the supply chain falling apart someplace or timelines or launch plans. Like deliveries not being able to make it on time because of shipping issues, a typhoon wiping out our materials inventory, one season. We’ve lost our power grid multiple times and had to shut down factories, relocate to other production lines, and so when I think about problems like that we just expect them to always be there.”

Sabrina says, “We’ve always put in a lot of contingency planning, and with 2020, the first thing we did was look at where we needed more transparency, and that was across the supply chain, but also on the client side. Understanding where everyone was in terms of their challenges. Really taking a step back and looking at the reality of our problems. We re-evaluated what to do with the supply chain and how to work with clients.”

“For example, provinces in China were quarantined. We definitely prioritize safety. If people couldn’t work in a safe environment or they couldn’t travel safely, we eliminated that as an option. We looked at, if our normal resources aren’t there where else do we go?” In a bold business move, Otabo reached out to competitors. Sabrina says, “We sought out factories hurting because their orders were cancelled by large brands. These are factories that were up and running with workers ready to go but no orders coming in. We ended up sharing workforces, partnering with competitors to make sure all of our businesses survive.”

On the supplier front, Otabo asked multiple vendors to develop the same material, letting them know that only one business would get the order. But the initial request still contributed to the overhead of starting the project, doing the development work, keeping people working.

This remarkable stance required open thinking and solid relationships. It was challenging because it extended to their clients, too. Sabrina says, “We had to go to the brands and tell them that we’re in a really hard place where we might not be able to deliver on this one thing but we can deliver a version of it. But it’s going to cost you more or it’s going to require you to deliver five shoe designs instead of one, so that we can alter it as needed.”

The lessons learned from all this are to develop strong, deep relationships with your vendors and clients, be flexible and agile, and always have a contingency plan.

SCALING RIGHT

Some of the same lessons can be applied to scaling. Before even thinking about scaling, Sabrina suggests you establish:

- Deep and trusting supplier relationships
- Good communication between client teams, vendors and internal teams
- Transparency about challenges, plans and risks
- Processes that are aligned to improve effectiveness

Taking a collection from 10,000 to 300,000 pairs of shoes can involve everything from changing manufacturing facilities to new suppliers to changing logistics and other details—it’s important that brands build the foundation to scale ahead of time.

PLM AND TRANSPARENCY

Transparency, a key part of Otabo’s successful navigation of disruptions, is further enabled by Centric PLM. Sabrina says, “Having that one source of truth, and being able to dissect all of the information in terms of materials, vendor costing, and then tying all that together for design, gives the brands an understanding of the impact of their designs. You have transparency into the decisions and the compromises that the brands are making in terms of costing and timeline. This is what PLM is enabling us to do. It’s changing a lot of things in regards to how fast we are, but also how we think about our business.”

RESULTS

- + Continued and more efficient contingency planning for disruptions
- + Improved efficiency and communication across functions
- + Roles more clearly defined
- + Information available in a central repository



OTABO (www.otabo.com)

Otabo, founded in 2016, is an international footwear, apparel and accessories manufacturing company. After over a decade in the footwear manufacturing business, CEO Sabrina Finlay realized that great ideas from startups were not getting the support they needed and had more potential than people realized. One question changed everything: "Why are you turning down small accounts when they're actually the most meaningful?"

Finlay started exploring opportunities to partner with passionate creators to bridge that gap. She has forged her own path within the rigid manufacturing industry to cultivate a company that is relationship forward, transparent and quality focused. Otabo's unique approach allows small startups to compete with big brands and big brands to become more agile and efficient. Now, Otabo works with over 50 factories and hundreds of materials and components vendors to help great ideas find their feet.

ABOUT CENTRIC SOFTWARE (www.centricsoftware.com)

From its headquarters in Silicon Valley, Centric Software® provides a Product Concept to Consumer Digital Transformation Platform for fashion, retail, footwear, luxury, outdoor and consumer goods including cosmetics and personal care and food and beverage. Centric's flagship Product Lifecycle Management (PLM) platform, Centric PLM™, delivers enterprise-class merchandise planning, product development, sourcing, quality and product portfolio optimization innovations specifically for fast-moving consumer industries. Centric SMB focuses on core tools and industry best practices for emerging brands. Centric Visual Innovation Platform (CVIP) offers highly visual digital board experiences for collaboration and decision-making. Centric Software pioneered mobility, introducing the first mobile apps for PLM, and is widely known for connectivity to dozens of other enterprise systems including ERP, DAM, PIM, e-com, planning and more as well as creative tools such as Adobe® Illustrator and a host of 3D CAD connectors. Centric's innovations are 100% market-driven with the highest user adoption rate and fastest time to value in the industry. All Centric innovations shorten time to market, boost product innovation and reduce costs.

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Centric Software has received multiple industry awards and recognition, including being named by Red Herring to its Top 100 Global list in 2013, 2015 and 2016. Centric also received various excellence awards from Frost & Sullivan in 2012, 2016, 2018 and 2021.



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