

SUCCESS STORY

## How an Industrial Distributor Took its Big Book to Big Time E-Commerce Stardom



When Charlie Bonomo joined MSC Industrial Supply as its new Chief Information Officer in 2009, he knew he wasn't stepping into a company at the forefront of e-commerce technology. At the time, MSC was a 66-year-old, mid-sized supplier to the maintenance, repair and operations (MRO) industry, still very much a catalog-driven market.

MRO sell the tools, parts, materials and other products that keep manufacturing plants running at full capacity. As one might expect from the manufacturing industry, the purchasing managers at the various plants that MSC supplied weren't particularly tech savvy. If one visited their offices, you were much more likely to see a well-thumbed MSC catalog with notes sticking out from all sides

than a PC on their desk. But Bonomo knew that needed to change for MSC to continue to compete and win in a fragmented industry that was consolidating and being increasingly run by technology.

"We said to ourselves, 'digital is clearly where the world is going.' We know that the catalog would take a back seat to the Internet," he recalled. "I'd say to people, 'If you had \$100 to bet, and on the table were a catalog on one side and a computer with a website on the other, where would you put your \$100?' And there was an obvious answer to that question. And so we said we want to leapfrog our competition and we want to become number one on the web to meet the changing needs of our customers," Bonomo said.

He didn't know it at the time, but the path MSC would take to success would be heavily influenced by Mindtree, an IT consulting company some 8,000 miles away. Collaboration between the two happened almost by chance, but over time it has blossomed into a vital and productive partnership.

### Laying Down a Blueprint

For a company that sells more than 1 million individual products, creating a robust e-commerce site was no small task. The existing website that Bonomo had to start with made things even more difficult.

"It was built on antiquated technology: RPG and CGI script running on mainframe," he recalls, adding that simple changes or upgrades could take months to accomplish. The site also wasn't stable and experienced frequent downtime.

"And it was ugly," says Bonomo. "The user interface was bad, two search technologies were cobbled together. When you searched for something, you'd get a list of items so large you probably wouldn't find what you're looking for."

On top of that, all their data was structured for what Bonomo calls "70 years of catalogs." In other words, the data was very analog, with no governance or consistency. For example, a one-inch tool part might be labeled so many different ways (1", one inch, 1 inch, 1 in.) that even a good search engine at the time would have trouble properly presenting the best results.

### E-Commerce Transformation with Mindtree

Bonomo assembled a dedicated e-commerce team within the company. Phase 1 was to clean up and standardize all the data, because he knew that even the best user interface and search engine would mean nothing if the data was still disorganized and ungoverned. Then he took a step that was uncommon for MSC – outsourcing IT services.

"We had outsourced RPG development to someone, but we were having huge issues with them and it was frustrating," Bonomo says. "We went to Mindtree and asked if they could help us with this problem. They had expertise in RPG and a very good process in place. Mindtree came in and did the RPG job without issue. Over time, the relationship has grown."

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– Charlie Bonomo  
SVP and CIO  
MSC Industrial Supply Co.

MSC then engaged Mindtree to work on development of their new e-commerce site. This was another situation where an existing vendor was not meeting expectations.

"Somewhere near the launch, things had gone bad with them," recalls Bonomo. "We were in a tough spot because we did not have the expertise on board, but we still had a lot of work to do, and we were close to launch. Mindtree asked if we needed help, saying they also had expertise in IBM WebSphere Commerce development. Well, there couldn't have been better news at that time. They came in and quickly dug into the code, learned about what was going on technically, and what the site was and what it needed to do. And they became our anchor, our key partner in terms of taking over responsibility for the lion's share of that development."

#### MSC/Mindtree Partnership Highlights:

- Developed e-commerce site that made MSC a recognized leader in their industry, and ranked #40 on Internet Retailer's annual Top 500 list
- Upgraded electronic data exchange infrastructure to streamline the sales process for large accounts, as well as integration with other systems.
- Supported MSC in successful integration of their largest acquisition
- Conducted Triz-based innovation exercise with key business and IT executives to define over 20 prioritized ideas to transform key business processes
- Stabilized and improved a business-critical Master Data Management platform.

Aside from using IBM WebSphere Commerce as the underlying platform, the engagement also involved the redesign of the entire Endeca backend to improve the search experience and customize user interfaces. It also entailed a massive revamp of the product display pages to significantly improve the user experience. All of this required a lot of development in Java, use of web services and MQ for messaging back to the host.

### Partnerships and Profits: The Cornerstones of Success

Fast-forward three years, and Bonomo's mission is accomplished: MSCdirect.com is now widely viewed as a leader in the industry.

"We've experienced phenomenal growth in searches and transactions, and we turn in excellent performance around the clock, even at peak times," he says. "One of the nice things about the site is we've built resiliency into the architecture, which scales both horizontally and vertically. So if the backend goes down or is degraded, we can still provide a good customer experience and take orders."

Bonomo says the new site has greatly enhanced their marketing efforts and has been instrumental in driving more than half of MSC's business through their eCommerce channels. In 2014, they were ranked #40 by Internet Retailer's annual Top 500 list.

As MSC's business grew, so did their relationship with Mindtree. Since those early collaborations, Mindtree has gone on to provide MSC a wide-ranging package of additional, ongoing services, including:

- Production support
- Business activity monitoring
- Rapid feature enrichment
- Performance benchmarking and management
- Test automation to enable regression tests, daily health checks and periodic performance checks.



### MSC Website Before/After Mindtree Partnership

#### Before

- RPG and CGI script running on the AS/400
- Antiquated search technologies cobbled together
- Fragmented and inconsistent data
- Frequent downtime, leading to customer complaints
- Marginally used for business transactions.

#### After

- Running on Websphere Commerce and Java
- Constantly evolving, best-practice search
- Unified, governed data store
- Resilient architecture with no downtime
- A key eCommerce vehicle for MSC - more than 50% of MSC's business is now done electronically.

"We view the Mindtree team as an extension of our team," says Bonomo. "They may not be wearing MSC badges, but they are all very important to us. We track turnover among Mindtree's MSC-focused team the same way we do among our associates. And I feel like I have excellent access at all levels of the company. When I point something out, it's never forgotten and it's always treated with importance."

Bonomo says he is consistently impressed by Mindtree's wide range of capabilities and processes, but is even more impressed by their integrity. "They work out problems, and they stand behind what they do," he says. "We had an issue on the website where some code didn't go through testing accidentally. They stood behind it and took off billable hours without question. They're human and make mistakes and stood behind it, putting the relationship first before anything else."

When asked what stands out the most about Mindtree as a partner, Bonomo points to their willingness to make a true investment: "So many companies come in and say, 'You're different, you're special, we're going to figure out how to make this work, we'll make the investment.' And then an army of people that know nothing about us or about those conversations or about the

relationship come in, and they're more conscious of how many billable hours they can get than anything else. And it ends up a mediocre experience most of the time. Whereas with Mindtree – in terms of consistency and standing behind what they say – they come in and do what they promised. It may be an upfront investment or a joint win-win that requires a little bit of give and take on both sides in the beginning. But they consistently prove that they will make the investment to make the relationship successful. They don't just talk the talk, they walk the walk."

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## About Mindtree

Mindtree [NSE: MINDTREE] delivers technology services and accelerates growth for Global 1000 companies by solving complex business challenges with breakthrough technical innovations. Mindtree specializes in e-commerce, mobility, cloud enablement, digital transformation, business intelligence, data analytics, testing, infrastructure, EAI and ERP solutions. We are among the fastest growing technology firms globally with more than 200 clients and offices in 14 countries.