

IT Investment Helps Maintain Competitive Advantage

Business Drivers

- Business Growth
- Changing Market Environment

A-America, Inc. was founded in 1974 as a small importing operation. After initially focusing on distributing dining room furniture, A-America expanded to include wood bedroom and home office furniture, as well as more formal wood furnishings and collections. Serving a variety of retail customers, A-America achieved fantastic growth over the decade, with a cumulative growth rate of over 400 percent since the early 1990s.

A-America has always imported its goods from Asia, including China, Thailand, Malaysia, and Vietnam. The lower costs enabled the company to capitalize on price advantages in the market for several years. However, over time, competitors shifted to overseas production—reducing A-America’s price advantage. To remain competitive and sustain growth rates, A-America needed new systems and tools that would provide tighter integration and improved efficiencies across their operations and deliver real-time access to information so they could better manage business.

Integrated Solution Provides Dynamic Results

A-America sought a single solution which would integrate information across all of their operations. They needed to be able to track customer and product performance as well as profitability at a variety of levels. Information needed to be dynamically available to enable real-time insight into results and trends and to empower management to take timely action on business issues.

Heavy importing operations required that A-America’s solution have robust planning tools for demand forecasting and purchasing to aid in aligning inventory availability with customer needs. Advanced capabilities were needed to track and manage containers and shipments arriving from overseas. In addition, A-America sought up-to-date, flexible technology that would change with their business as it continues to grow, without requiring significant and costly customization.

Pat Gillis, senior vice president for A-America, Inc., engaged a third party consulting firm to aid her team in conducting a thorough evaluation process. Ten vendors were identified, and three were selected for in-depth review—including Prelude and NxTrend. “The Apprise solution is much more comprehensive than the other solutions we evaluated,” said Gillis. “The application is more fully and seamlessly integrated, and utilizes more current and flexible technologies.”

Robust importing capabilities, including container and shipment tracking, as well as inventory forecasting, planning and management, set Apprise® apart. The enterprise-wide solution with seamless integration across applications, provides the real-time information access and visibility A-America needs to better track and manage business performance. Utilization of the latest technologies, such as wireless automated data collection in the warehouse, delivers the efficiency gains A-America requires to sustain its competitive advantage.



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Senior Vice President
A-America, Inc.

Profile in Brief

- Wood furniture distribution for residential and commercial retailers
- Products imported from Asia
- Headquartered in Seattle, WA, with showrooms in North Carolina and Las Vegas, Nevada



Business Impact

- Integrated Data Boosts Business Efficiency
- Access to Real-Time Information
- Better Visibility
- Low Total Cost of Ownership

Planning & Management Tools Improve Accuracy

A-America chose a phased approach for their Apprise implementation, beginning first with general ledger and financial applications. Shortly after, they migrated their remaining ERP data into the Apprise system. Last, they automated their warehouse through Apprise integrated wireless warehouse capabilities.

“At each phase, Apprise proved to be one of the easiest conversions I have experienced,” says Gillis. “The conversion was fast, easy, and produced clean and reliable data.”

According to Kurtis Beach, information systems manager, “the implementation process was well structured and unique in approach. The Apprise team mapped out, documented, and managed the project schedule and provided excellent support during all phases of the process.”

A-America has seen immediate improvements to their operations as a result of the new system implementation. Demand forecasting accuracy and inventory tracking and management have all been improved through the use of extensive planning and management tools.

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- Shawn Ross
Warehouse Operations Mgr
A-America, Inc.

“Warehouse picking is 67 percent more efficient as a result of the implementation of the Apprise wireless warehouse capabilities. The efficiency gains have exceeded our expectations,” says Shawn Ross, warehouse operations manager. The system’s rule-based environment has automated many tasks and enabled real-time alerts—reducing errors and identifying and surfacing trends more quickly.”

“The Apprise solution is fast and efficient,” says Gillis. “People from across our organization can access information in real-time—doing in three minutes, activities that used to take three days to complete.”

Integration across the application, as well as robust and flexible information management tools, have delivered reduced reporting intervals and improved cross-functional visibility into customer and product performance. Terry Liggett, director of finance, says, “I’ve worked with many systems and applications before, and I’ve found Apprise to be the most straight forward and easy to use. The extensive drill-down capabilities make the system very efficient.” As a result, the entire organization has been able to make faster, more informed decisions.



Ongoing Improvements

A-America plans to continue their history of revenue and profitability growth well into the future, despite an increasingly competitive market environment. To do so will require an ongoing commitment to meeting the changing needs of their customers and focus on customer satisfaction. In addition, A-America will need to continue to price competitively to sustain their market advantage. As competitors shift production overseas, A-America’s cost advantage will continue to narrow—making cost management and operational efficiency key to their ongoing success.

A-America recently upgraded to the latest release of Apprise to take advantage of new capabilities, including enhanced bill of lading (BOL) and picking demand functionality, as well as automated warehouse picking alerts. A-America also plans to implement incremental wireless warehouse capabilities, such as cycle counting, to improve inventory counting efficiencies and accuracy. Finally, they plan to leverage bill of material (BOM) capabilities to improve real-time visibility into inventory availability and to increase inventory accuracy.

A-America views Apprise Software as a long-term business partner with the tools and capabilities they need to evolve and succeed.



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