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## Making It Personal

### Ace Hardware revamps its store-locator tool

By Samantha Murphy

Shoppers are demanding personalized shopping experiences similar to those found in local neighborhood stores—a practice that large chains often struggle with. Ace Hardware is overcoming this challenge through an online solution that brings its local stores to life by delivering local news, promotions and events to multichannel shoppers.

Oak Brook, Ill.-based Ace Hardware is comprised of more than 4,600 independently owned and operated stores. The chain is determined to use its multichannel strategy to uphold each store's local flare.

"It's essential for us to create an informative and inviting online presence to build a unique relationship between the Web-site user and their local store," according to Dana Kevish, Ace Hardware's e-commerce marketing manager. "We don't want consumers to think of us as just a corporate giant."

Its efforts date back to 2006 when it redesigned its site. Besides adding an interactive store-locator application from GSI Commerce Inc., a King of Prussia, Pa.-based provider of e-commerce and multichannel solutions, Ace Hardware also integrated geolocation technology to its store-locator tool.

The solution, from IP Intelligence provider Digital Element, Norcross, Ga., analyzes the numerical Internet Protocol address on the user's computer. After identifying the Web-user's city location, it targets them with local information, including the number of retail stores within a certain radius, store news, promotions featured in weekly circulars and events.

"We then provide shoppers with a Google map feature that identifies the closest Ace Hardware store in their area," Kevish said.

By clicking on one of the flagged store locations, visitors are directed to the individual store's homepage. Nearly 900 Ace Hardware stores are currently updating and customizing their page on the site with this localized information.

**Online shoppers can use Ace Hardware's interactive store-locator tool to learn about what's happening in their local store.**

Consumers can then filter through the results and save preferred store information.

"This not only ties the customer to their local Ace Hardware store, it also brings the location to life," Kevish said.

It is especially helpful to promote the company's "buy online and pick up later" service.

"Since more than 75% of our online orders are picked up in the store, we wanted to make finding a local store even easier for the consumer," Kevish said.

These features are also supporting impulse buys, as about 30% of Ace Hardware's shoppers that buy online and pick up later make additional purchases once they are in the store.

"We understand the importance of supporting multichannel initiatives by driving traffic and revenue online and off," Kevish said. "Geotargeting technology is successfully help-

ing us bridge the gap between the two."

Moving forward, Ace Hardware plans to take its geotargeting strategy to a deeper level. For example, the company plans to match online shoppers to various homepages depending on their location.

Consumers in Michigan, for example, might see a homepage that features snow blowers for sale during winter months, while those in warmer climates might see patio furniture on display. Similarly, Kevish said Ace Hardware aims to segment its customers based on geographic location through e-mail marketing.

"We have a successful and solid foundation in place, but we are also always looking for new ways to give the customer a personalized and localized feeling of a neighborhood store," Kevish said.

smurphy@chainstoreage.com



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