



Apparel's
2009 **TOP**
INNOVATORS

As its recent caps and apparel confirm, New Era Cap is transitioning to a fashion-conscious, trendy and stylish mainstream

What makes an apparel company truly an innovator?

Many of the answers lie in the pages that follow, which honor our **Apparel** Innovators.

While the strategies of our recipients are diverse, the vision, the determination and the leadership each demonstrates are not.

To all of our honorees, **Apparel** Magazine tips its hat to you for your resourcefulness, your creativity and most importantly, your innovation.

The Shoe Company

HEADQUARTERS: Toronto, Ontario, Canada |

www.theshoecompany.com

NOMINATED BY: Opterus | www.opterus.com



The Shoe Company has implemented a store-operations solution from Opterus to accommodate the high volume of communication taking place between its head office and its 70 retail stores

The Shoe Company was facing challenges similar to most retailers: limited resources, competing demands on management time, limited management skills and autonomous management with minimal direct supervision. The company needed a solution to accommodate the high volume of communication taking place between the head office and its 70 retail stores.

The Shoe Company partnered with Opterus Inc. to implement its Store Ops-Center solution, which allows the company to access real-time information regarding how its 1,200 employees are executing, all on a store-by-store basis.

The Shoe Company contributed ideas for features and functionality of the solution. One specific example is that of “Gate Keeper” in the Store Ops-Center. It was important to the company to have multiple content creators at the head office, but it did not want to make messages and tasks available to the stores instantly without some kind of check in place.

“With current solutions, like e-mail, you can flood a store manager with e-mails that would take longer than a day to read through, let alone act on,” says Lewis Feinstein, vice president of operations. The Gate Keeper is an approval process that ensures what is viewable by the stores is clear and consistent. Content creators may require Gate Keeper approval, while some others may have permission to have their messages and tasks viewable by the stores without that approval step.

All reports are now available real time, on demand. “The ones we look at most often are the exception reports around overdue tasks and unread messages,” says Feinstein. “We can now manage compliance to corporate strategies and execution very easily.”

The Shoe Company recognized that for some retailers, there is a disconnect between the technologies that it provides its employees and how employees actually want to use the technology. “We found that most of our employees are used to some kind of social networking tool and welcomed the new technology,” says Feinstein. “It gave them a way to receive information and log issues that was familiar, more efficient and was a welcome change to old paper/mail/fax methods.”

Since implementing Store Ops-Center, the company has significantly cut costs and increased operational efficiency throughout its entire enterprise. Expenses were reduced through productivity improvements, and sales increased due to improved store compliance and head office support. Productivity improvements experienced throughout the organization averaged 20 percent.

Store personnel are provided with clear, concise and timely direction, along with the proper tools to best do their jobs to support corporate initiatives.

The application was designed using best practices of Web 2.0 architecture and software development. By using technologies such as Ajax and JavaScript, Store Ops-Center can be run over low bandwidth network connections as well as broadband. The solution gives The Shoe Company an innovative and alternative way to communicate head office strategies, ensuring that communications are being read by the right people, store-level tasks are being executed as they should be, and that stores are compliant with corporate objectives.

Looking forward, The Shoe Company plans to continue to invest in cutting-edge solutions to make its operations more successful, and is currently implementing a new survey solution and a customer loyalty program.

“We are focusing on customer loyalty and retention and have gone to an electronic loyalty program and data base,” says Feinstein. “We are also conducting online surveys to help us understand what our customers like or dislike about their shopping experiences. In responding to this information, we believe that loyalty and retention will increase along with our average basket size at the check out.”