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VFW's Online Store Was Outdated

The VFW had been running its online store, VFWStore.org, on the same website technology for 11 years. The store sells patriotic items—such as hats, shirts, and flags—to VFW members across the nation.

The original store was designed in 2003 using ASP.NET 1.1, which was bleeding edge technology at the time. However, the website no longer matched the more current VFW.org, and the outdated navigation experience was frustrating for buyers.

“We had extremely outdated, 11-year-old software that was no longer being supported,” said Jason Hailey, the Manager of Information Management at the VFW.

“We also had lots of highly customizable products, such as name badges, that were difficult to personalize. The whole design and back end were very old.”



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—JEFF JULIAN, MANAGING PARTNER, AJI SOFTWARE

AJi Software Designs New Website from Scratch

With only 5 people on his team, and responsibility for handling all new projects for 1.5 million members, Hailey hired AJi Software to assist with the design and development process.

“AJi managed the entire project, starting from scratch with the initial concept,” Hailey said. The AJi Software team created the following:

- Website design
- Project plan
- Business rules
- Page layout
- Programming
- Integration into CRM
- eCommerce system and payment flow
- Navigation flow and structure

“We implemented the entire store from the ground up using Sitecore and Insite Commerce,” said Jeff Julian, Managing Partner at AJi Software. “We designed all aspects of the project, from the user interface designs all the way to the back end integration with Aptify.”

New Website Features Sitecore

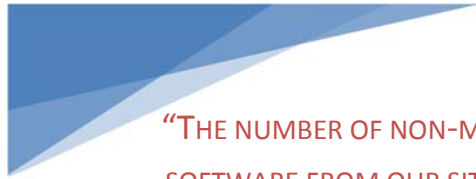
Sitecore was AJi’s software of choice for the VFW conversion. The new store was designed using:

- **ASP.NET 4.5**—web design
- **Sitecore**—content management system
- **InsiteCommerce**—shopping cart
- **Aptify**—ERP system

“Sitecore offered a much larger selection of integrated solutions for third party services,” Julian said. “Their eCommerce solution partner, Insite Commerce, offered a product that is ready for the enterprise, with an easy path for integration into the current order and inventory system.”

Challenges with Conversion

“The VFW has a very complex product customization structure,” Julian said. “Our focus was to make customization easier for the user, and give them more feedback on product availability.”



“THE NUMBER OF NON-MEMBERS BUYING SOFTWARE FROM OUR SITE NATIONALLY IS INCREASING. THAT’S WHO WE’RE TRYING TO TARGET.”

—JASON HAILEY, MANAGER—
INFORMATION MANAGEMENT, VFW

In fact, many products sold at VFWStore.org—for example, hats and shirts—are customizable with up to 30 different options, including size, color, unique patches, branch of service, and embroidered custom text. This creates a complex combination of products.

“We have some highly customized requirements for our products,” Hailey said. “There’s not a lot of companies that do what we do.”

AJi solved the issue by working individually with each product vendor to ensure that their products would be captured correctly in the sales flow. Then they significantly customized and integrated three systems—Sitecore, Aptify, and Insite—to support the complex ordering process.

Cool New Features

The new website, launched in February 2014, offers a single sign-on process designed by AJi, so members can quickly and easily renew their memberships and receive discounts on products—instead of calling in their membership number.

The marketing team can now offer specific discounts for members of the VFW, Ladies Auxiliary, and Men’s Auxiliary, depending on whether they are Annual, Life, or Legacy Members. In addition, the membership department can now offer better incentives for recruiting new members. Other new features:

- Better search capability for users
- Multiple product suggestions
- Modern user experience (UX)
- Streamlined look-and-feel with VFW.org
- Better integration with inventory management
- Ability to group common products into 1 single product with selectable options

Increased Sales

Users are already enjoying the enhanced navigation, better user experience, and simpler shopping cart. Hailey gives credit to the enhanced user experience for higher sales.

“Our orders are up approximately 10%-12% over the old website,” he said, adding that it used to take 3-4 clicks to get to the right product. Today, the sale happens almost immediately.

“I like the upsell best,” Hailey said. “Now we can show multiple products on one page—for example, a matching hat, or a similar shirt in a different color or style. The new online store will help us increase sales.”