

Towne AllPoints Communications

Delivering Multichannel Sales and Solutions

Towne AllPoints Communications, headquartered in Santa Ana, California with facilities in St. Petersburg, Florida and Plainfield, Indiana, offers a multi-faceted range of services to fully deploy the multiple communications channels that businesses and consumers use today. Towne offers direct mail processing and production including offset and digital print-on-demand, database management and marketing, response management, inbound and outbound telemarketing, web chat, and e-mail broadcasting—all to create a highly effective, efficient, and interactive communications network between Towne's clients and their customers. Mike Shepard, senior corporate vice president at Towne, described his firm's complex business operations more simply as "third-party logistics."

"Ten years ago, my personal business mix consisted of 70 percent literature fulfillment and 30 percent direct mail. Today it's 30 percent technology, 50 percent fulfillment, and 20 percent direct mail. What we do now didn't exist ten years ago," Shepard said. "It's a deployable information management system. We work with all industries, but I specialize in the travel and hospitality industry, with client companies like Hilton Hotels and Resorts International, Starwood Hotels and Resorts Worldwide, Norwegian Cruise Line, and many others. We make it possible for their clients—travel agents and consumers—to go online and order materials from what we call 'glass warehouses.'"

Towne is responsible for managing the marketing brochures, schedules, invitations, and a variety of other materials, it inventories them for the client, and sends them out at the request of authorized travel agents and consumers. Different levels of authorization with appropriate, varying access are the key to deploying a web-based system as you must make both available to all, while being able to manage quantity maximums on a by client/by individual basis.

“Previously, the agents couldn’t see what they were ordering,” Shepard noted. “They had to call in or fax their orders. And the clients only received static inventory reports—usually faxed to them—which were obsolete the moment they were printed. That was what the world offered ten years ago. Now, we’ve moved from an environment where the customer had no visibility into our system to where they have the same access to the same information we do. They can see if their order was shipped, where it was shipped, and how much inventory is on hand—a true description of a glass warehouse.”

Today, Shepard said, “An individual client might have hundreds of pallets of literature—and millions of individual pieces of literature supporting hundreds of thousands of inquiries per year.” And Towne serves hundreds of clients.

Underpinnings

Despite the wide range of products and services Towne offers, one task it did not want to take on was software development. To serve its client needs, Towne actively sought out Boston-based interlinkONE Inc., a leading developer of solutions for digital on-demand and web-to-print services, as well as for integrated campaign management that includes lead generation, collateral fulfillment, order, inventory, fulfillment, and warehouse management.

“interlinkONE’s software, ilinkONE v8.5, offers front-end capabilities that are at the core of everything we do,” Shepard noted. “We wouldn’t be able to fulfill our customers’ requirements without it.” Shepard cited reliability as a primary factor for working with interlinkONE along with the software’s scalability. “We’ve never had to refuse a customer request because it was too big or involved too many destination addresses.”

interlinkONE’s willingness to work with Towne in developing customized applications has been another plus in the companies’ relationship. “Our company is a leader in differentiating between consumer-direct and channel leads, the channel leads being those from travel agents and planners,” Shepard explained. “We might get 10,000 inquiries for one of our cruise line clients, with 9,999 of these from individual consumers, and the 10,000th from an agent or incentive travel planner looking to book a whole ship.

We enhanced the software to allow for measurement of channel and direct sales. We did the customization and worked with interlinkONE to include this capability in its native product.”

In other cases, interlinkONE has developed an automated “matrix” solution to customize the response to each inquiry. For example, a request for information on a particular cruise might trigger shipment of a standard brochure on the cruise, as well as updated related information (a change of itinerary, for instance), along with a personalized sales letter to the inquirer, and cruise pricing and itinerary information. “All done seamlessly,” Shepard added.

Shepard stated that Towne also has integrated with numerous client systems to include Salesforce.com, which has “extreme” penetration in the marketplace. “interlinkONE’s ability to integrate with Salesforce.com allows us to work with customers who have Salesforce.com deployed,” he said. “This makes it possible to add personalization to letters and other communications sent to inquiries using data taken from a telemarketing center which uses Salesforce.com as their contact management system.”

Creative culture

Although much of the logistics behind sales is automated, Shepard emphasized the significant—even indispensable—role of live interaction with salespeople. He noted “Customers often aren’t aware of exactly what is causing a problem, or with a change in operations, what direct or indirect challenges may result. It’s the job of the sales force to determine these ‘pain points’ and then to devise a solution.”

“Very often, we see similar business problems with different clients, but in various disguises. interlinkONE’s company culture allows us to be creative in finding and developing solutions,” Shepard said. “interlinkONE has experience with these various challenges and can create elegant solutions that are seamless, easy-to-use, and dependable.”

Both Towne and interlinkONE are committed to developing solutions to automate the mechanical tasks that can be done more accurately and efficiently with little to no human intervention. This allows more time for the indispensable face-to-face communications with clients that build relationships and result in both improved sales volume and customer loyalty.

About interlinkONE

interlinkONE provides software that delivers end-to-end personalized marketing, fulfillment and variable print solutions. Companies in the print, fulfillment and mail industry use interlinkONE to better manage, execute, and measure their customers' marketing initiatives and boost revenue. Solutions include Software as a Service (SAAS) or ASP web hosted marketing tools that make it possible to create highly targeted one-to-one mailers, web-to-print solutions, personalized URL campaigns and e-mail marketing in addition to fully integrated campaign management, lead acquisition programs, collateral fulfillment, order, inventory, fulfillment, and warehouse management. With interlinkONE's suite of solutions print, fulfillment and mail service providers can improve marketing results and increase revenue opportunities while reducing costs.