

**THOS. BAKER**

Services: Integrated Fulfillment, Webforms
Industry: High-end outdoor furniture and decor

Trading Partners: Direct to consumer

Integrated Fulfillment Positions Thos. Baker for Robust Growth

Those who know the Thos. Baker name know the brand is synonymous with one thing: luxury.

Improving Thos. Baker's
Trading Partner Relationships

Whether it's a craftsman teak outdoor dining set or a professional-grade poker table for the family game room, all of its products have a classy, upscale touch. Since starting in 2004, the Washington-based retailer has become a trusted brand in timeless home furnishings — ones that will add elegance to all kinds of spaces throughout the home.

**SUPPLIERS**

But opulence isn't its only specialty. Thos. Baker prides itself on providing exemplary service. When customers place an order online with thosbaker.com, they can expect to be informed every step of the way, from the moment the product leaves the distribution center to the time it arrives at their doorstep. And if there is a change along the way, customers need not worry: Thos. Baker has someone dedicated to calling and informing customers of changes in shipping or with the product itself.

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— Alan Blackford, COO, Thos. Baker

Yet it wasn't always this way at Thos. Baker. A few years ago, the company struggled with customer communication as an outdated EDI system didn't offer the capabilities it needed to integrate with its vendors and automate fulfillment. Employees were required to hand key in all the data for tracking and order information from the various drop-ship vendors—even from Thos. Baker's own warehouse.

"During the peak season, I had someone full time sitting there doing nothing but keying in this information," said Alan Blackford, COO for Thos. Baker. "I had come from a retail technology background and was very familiar with the various EDI communications and processes and knew there must be something better."

Not only was the process manual, there was often a significant lag between the time shipments were processed and the time the company actually communicated that to the customer. Sometimes it could be two or three days before it notified them that a shipment had occurred.

"What was noticeable was that we had several shipments that would arrive at the customer's location before we sent them the shipment notification," Blackford said. "We would send them the notification after they had already received their package, unwrapped it and enjoyed it. We just weren't matching the excellence that our brand had worked so hard to achieve."

These challenges prompted Thos. Baker to seek out a new EDI solution that would automate fulfillment, offer the vast scale it needed and — most important — would integrate with its ERP system, NetSuite. Blackford ended up attending SuiteWorld, a NetSuite conference, where he made the invaluable connection to SPS Commerce.

“SPS was just a natural fit,” Blackford said. “With one integration to its retail network, we could connect with all of our EDI vendors, which makes it much easier to gain scale. The problem with other systems was that they required us to have a unique connection with every single vendor, and the maintenance and ability to keep that in order was impossible.”

And as a SuiteCloud Developer Partner since 2007, the Integrated Fulfillment for NetSuite solution from SPS Commerce is “Built For NetSuite” verified and supports more than 500 NetSuite customers integrated to the SPS Retail Network. SPS also provided the expertise Thos. Baker needed, Blackford said. Whether it was vendor relations, mapping or data configuration, there was always an expert on hand to help.

“That was a huge game changer for us and made our onboarding experience so much better. It’s really important to have the personnel structure to support EDI. We have a partner to do this now,” Blackford said.

Now that Thos. Baker has worked with SPS for a couple of years, fulfillment is going smoothly for the company. For starters, Thos. Baker was able to redeploy the staff that once did data entry, and was able to create a new full-time position to focus on the customer satisfaction piece of the business.

“We are super proactive with our customer about every shipment we send, whereas before, we might send an email or hope that a problem would just go away,” Blackford said.

Working with SPS has also prompted other trading partners to change the way they do fulfillment. Many of Thos. Baker’s suppliers weren’t on EDI and were using email to communicate the status of shipments. But adopting a new system provided an opportunity for the company to explain the advantages of using an automated fulfillment solution, and today, a couple of Thos. Baker’s large vendors are now integrated to the SPS Retail Network themselves. Those vendors that aren’t ready for automated fulfillment but wanted to do EDI are now utilizing WebForms from SPS Commerce, which helps cut down on delays and errors because order information is provided to Thos. Baker so they can update their customers in a timely manner.

And Blackford sees a lot of opportunity for SPS to support its growth strategies. For instance, one of the biggest challenges Thos. Baker faces is gaining visibility into drop-ship inventory so that it knows what’s in stock at its vendor warehouse at any point in time. Thos. Baker sees the opportunity for SPS to help its vendors provide drop-ship inventory details directly to the retailer so that it knows the status of all of its orders, and is working with SPS to get that effort underway.

“SPS is a critical part of our growth strategy,” Blackford said. “One of the reasons I like SPS is that its strategic priorities align very nicely with mine. We could not have scaled the way we have without having a partner like SPS.”