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Out-of-the-Box Warehousing

How to affordably improve the online fulfillment process

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Edited by: Ken Beaulieu in: Getting New Customers

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FuelNet presents a case study on how one growing business improved its fulfillment process through a customized online service.

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PROBLEM: Shane Ellison's new Internet enterprise was making money, but he had no room to grow the business. Soon after he founded The People's Chemist to sell organic nutritional supplements, his Santa Fe, N.M.–based business took off — but Ellison's business development strategy had left him scrambling. "It got crazy on many levels," he says. "We were snatching orders off the Internet, packaging, labeling, and standing in line with a bunch of boxes." What's more, the fledgling company had no way of tracking orders, so employees were spending a lot of time trying to answer customer questions.

SOLUTION: Since most fulfillment services are geared toward bigger businesses, Ellison's search for a solution was frustrating until he saw an article about Shipwire. "Our services are designed for entrepreneurs, by entrepreneurs," explains Nate Gilmore, vice president of marketing and business development at Shipwire. From its home office in Sunnyvale, Calif., Shipwire offers a scalable model of inventory management in strategically located warehouses, along with shipping and tracking services that small businesses can customize online. "It's designed to be point and click, so small business owners can run a global operation from their couch," Gilmore says.

According to Gilmore, many new businesses stumble because, even though it's easy to set up a payment system through a service like PayPal, the challenge of shelving, tracking, and moving inventory is a difficult one. "They're soon saying, 'I need to focus on my customers — I don't have time to manage a warehouse,'" he notes. "So we designed a system where they gain the efficiencies of a Walmart, but pay only for services they use."

Ellison, whose business has doubled since he started his company three years ago, gives a lot of credit to Shipwire for his successful business development. "It was the missing link to the technology I needed to grow," he says. "I took their free month [of service], and we haven't looked back. I look at online entrepreneurs who are still packing their goods and taking them to the post office, and I can't understand it."

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