

The Answer Company Transforms Timebomb Trading Processes with Development on the Acumatica Platform



OVERVIEW

To increase the competitiveness of its Acumatica ERP practice, The Answer Company created a development team to help customers solve unique challenges. The company invested in Acumatica's xRP development platform because it is flexible, built on Microsoft technologies, constantly improving, and provides extraordinary support and training through its Acumatica University and collegial developer community. Read on to learn how The Answer Company developed customizations that helped Timebomb Trading automatically generate tens of thousands of SKUs, seamlessly connect to its B2B platform Elastic, and prioritize its inventory. And why The Answer Company loves the xRP platform.

KEY RESULTS

- Created a customization package to integrate Elastic, which has a proprietary data format, with Acumatica via a "plug-in" architecture
- Created an efficient way to pull orders from 11 Shopify stores into Acumatica
- Maintained inventory levels in 11 Shopify stores from Acumatica
- Eliminated manual entry of some 10,000 to 20,000 new SKUs each quarter, creating an automated product matrix
- Developed a way to prioritize inventory and bulk allocate stock based on customer information
- Created a way to reserve stock for eCommerce stores in a virtual warehouse to ensure items wouldn't be accidentally picked from the main warehouse

CHALLENGES

Companies often have unique processes or ways of doing business that don't align with even a robust, full-function ERP. Although Acumatica Cloud ERP is highly configurable and offers various industry-specific modules, no product can address "every" need of a customer. Understanding that The Answer Company executives decided to add a development team to better address the specific needs of customers, including Timebomb Trading.

Exclusive fashion and apparel distributor [Timebomb Trading](#) helps trendy and adventurous apparel products reach Canadians, acting as the brands' back-office operations. Although technically a distribution company, Timebomb Trading does much, much more.

It distributes products to more than 500 Canadian retailers. It created and ran 11 Canadian online stores selling branded apparel to Canadian consumers. Timebomb also offers expertise in sales, brick-and-mortar retail, e-Commerce, marketing, event planning, third-party logistics, customer service, and manufacturing in Canada.

Those additional services are why global niche apparel brands such as Stance, Roark, Rumble, and Topo Designs have signed exclusive deals with Timebomb.

When Timebomb's on-premises, legacy ERP reached the end of life and began crashing, executives took the opportunity to change some of its manual processes, streamline operations, and move to the cloud with the goal of becoming a modern, more agile corporation, one that reacts quickly in the fast-moving fashion industry.

They required a flexible, open ERP, one that could connect to its multiple Shopify sites, one that could also connect to its B2B platform Elastic, and [EasyPost](#), its shipping software. They also hoped they could automate the generation of thousands of SKUs at a time. Filling those requirements with an out-of-the-box ERP proved challenging.

Company

The Answer Company
www.theanswerco.com

Industry

Software Developer and ERP Integrator

Number of Employees

Approx. 140 full time employees

Headquarters

New Westminster, BC, Canada

Specialty Areas

Acumatica Developer and ISV

The Answer Company Developers Key to Success

But Timebomb Trading had a strong partnership with its long-time trusted IT partner, The Answer Company. A few years ago, The Answer Company decided to add Acumatica implementations to its lines of business, and later it created a development team to help companies like Timebomb solve their biggest challenges while also improving its own competitiveness.

The Answer Company, which has offices throughout Canada and in Portland, OR liked that Acumatica offered an open, flexible xRP platform with must-have functionality including financial management, a CRM, and inventory management while also offering industry-specific editions for distributors, manufacturers, construction, and e-Commerce.

Acumatica sells its platform through partnerships with value-added SaaS resellers who provide customization and support services, and with developers who license the Acumatica platform for fully customized implementations for those companies needing to address unique requirements.

The Answer Company liked Acumatica's agile, modern, and flexible xRP platform, which integrates with multiple services and third-party solutions. It was designed to seamlessly connect and integrate with other applications, allowing partners to create custom processes, procedures, and even applications that can meet clients' unique business requirements.

To a developer like Kulvir Kaila, Acumatica was a breath of fresh air. For years, Kaila had worked with legacy ERP systems that were rigid, difficult to install, inflexible, and provided limited documentation.

Customization was problematic with closed systems built on so-called industry standards that dictated a way of doing business since they were intended to be deployed "as is", making it difficult and expensive to create workarounds to meet a customer's particular way of doing business, Kaila says. These closed system owners opposed outside development and customization.

"You could never get anywhere in understanding the framework because they were closed-box solutions," says Kaila, now Director of Application Development at The Answer Company. Many of the systems, such as Oracle NetSuite, Epicor, and SAP were built 20 years ago in older code.

"There was no community to get answers to things you struggled with, you either knew a system or didn't, and there weren't any resources online to learn how to get solutions for the more complicated scenarios we had," he says.

Acumatica is different, he says.

Built with Familiar Microsoft Technologies

"Acumatica is built with Microsoft technologies from the ground up, and you can get right into the platform and make changes," he says. "I found that mind-blowing compared to what I was used to doing."

Acumatica's development platform (xRP) completely leverages Microsoft's .NET platform and the Visual Studio IDE to fully customize Acumatica using its xRP Framework. When developers install a developer instance of Acumatica, the complete xRP Framework is loaded into Visual Studio for developers to use and build powerful customizations—including fully functional modules on par with Acumatica's financials.

Using software built with common, universal technologies and exposing a powerful framework and toolset empowers developers. For Kaila, Acumatica's open framework and use of common development tools meant that developers could customize Acumatica as needed using Microsoft Visual Studio with C#. That flexibility and being a C# developer "excited me," he says.

"It's very difficult to leverage Visual Studio with legacy systems," he explains. "The beauty of Acumatica is that it's tied right into Visual Studio and you spend all day working in it. There are no funny ways you need to learn to troubleshoot or test."



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The Answer Company

Kaila was also impressed that Acumatica's strategy is to constantly improve its framework. "That and their movement to the .Net core excites any developer: knowing you're able to take advantage of the latest technology."

Open Customizable Platform

A flexible, modern platform that makes it easy for 3rd-parties to customize was exactly what Timebomb needed, and that's why the company chose Acumatica Cloud ERP.

Timebomb needed to connect its disparate systems, figure out a way to eliminate the tedious manual task of entering thousands of SKUs, and determine an efficient way to categorize and manage its three different order types:

- B2B pre-booked orders from retailers coming through the B2B platform Elastic, which didn't connect to its previous legacy system and required its proprietary data format
- Shopify orders to Canadian Consumers via its Canadian brand sites
- Orders through its own limited online store.

Connecting Shopify and EasyPost was easily accomplished simply by implementing Acumatica, whose open platform was designed to seamlessly connect many third-party applications, says Kevin Gartly, senior implementation consultant at The Answer Company who managed Timebomb's Acumatica deployment. Instantly, using Acumatica's REST API, the need for Timebomb staff members to upload tracking numbers from EasyPost into Shopify was eliminated.

Solving Timebomb's other main challenges took some software development by The Answer Company. Those technical challenges included:

- Getting EmeraldX's solution called Elastic to work with Acumatica
- Figuring out how to pull in orders from 11 Shopify stores into Acumatica
- Creating a way to maintain inventory levels in various Shopify stores from Acumatica

The Development Team at TAC created a customization package that allowed EmeraldX to integrate its Elastic solution into Acumatica via a "plug-in" architecture. In more detail the developers tapped Acumatica code implementation for Elastic Support Extensions. They also implemented data definition and business logic for:

- Attribute Types
- Parent Brand – Brand mapping
- Brand – Sub brands, Customers, Salespersons
- Inventory Catalogs

Automatically Generated Product Matrix

Every season, Timebomb Trading handles some 10,000 to 20,000 new products from its brands previously they had to enter every item manually. When Acumatica was deployed, The Answer Company's developers were able to build upon Acumatica's functionality that allowed retailers to generate variations—sizes and colors—for one SKU automatically.

The Answer Company developers leveraged and expanded that technology so that Timebomb could take that product matrix and apply it to thousands of products, automatically generating thousands of SKUs in a click of a button, says Leonardo Justiniano, Sr. ERP Application Developer, Cloud Solutions.

"We figured out a more dynamic and easy way to create catalogs of products that was not time-consuming to handle thousands of products in just one go," he says.

Automating the matrix SKU generating process eliminated the need to add additional employees to manually enter that data. It also lengthened the selling season, says Timebomb Vice President Lester Yuen. "Retailers now have access to brand catalogs faster and we can offer the apparel for sale for a longer period."



““ For Timebomb, we created several customizations some that were previously thought impossible. ””

– Leonardo Justiniano,
Sr. ERP Application Developer,
The Answer Company

Prioritizing Inventory

Because they deal with nine brands and sell to hundreds of retailers as well as stock brands' online Canadian consumer sites, and its own inventory, Timebomb Trading needed a way to properly sort and distribute inventory items appropriately in Acumatica.

The Answer Company provided a custom Matrix Generator solution that allowed Timebomb to generate inventory from a spreadsheet of Item attribute values, thus creating all possible combinations of items.

The developers created a way for Timebomb Trading to prioritize its inventory, allowing them to bulk allocate stock based on customer priority so they can make sure their customers get their requested items. They also created a way to reserve stock for eCommerce stores in a virtual warehouse to ensure items wouldn't be picked from their main warehouse accidentally.

Timebomb Trading executives are happy that The Answer Company decided to invest heavily in Acumatica and that they decided to move into Acumatica development.

"The Answer Company pretty much saved Timebomb," Yuen says. "They were able to develop customizations and came up with solutions that will help us remain competitive well into the future."

Developing on Acumatica: A Competitive Edge

The Answer Company's decision to develop Acumatica's agile, modern, and flexible xRP platform allowed it to create custom processes, procedures, and applications that meet Timebomb Trading and other clients' unique business requirements. The Answer Company has also developed 33 Acumatica customizations for other customers and created two applications for the Acumatica marketplace.

The Acumatica platform is easy to learn, easy to troubleshoot, and help is easy to find. Just ask The Answer Company's Justiniano, who was a key developer on the Timebomb customization—even though he had just learned the platform.

"When I joined The Answer Company, all of my horizons expanded because of Acumatica and how powerful it is," he says.

"I like how fast you can get into the Acumatica platform and if a customer has an issue, right away you can figure out a solution because Acumatica's framework allows you to do that, whether it's a customization, or code, or configuration," Justiniano says. "In the end, it's the customer that benefits."

And when Justiniano or other developers run into challenging scenarios, Acumatica provides not only extensive information through its Acumatica University that's full of training materials and videos, but also has created a robust developer community where others share knowledge and willingly collaborate to solve problems.

In addition, Acumatica created a developer track as part of its annual Summit, where it shares its future product roadmap and holds a hackathon where developers team up with other business functions to create applications or products.

"As we continue to propel Timebomb's business forward, our development team looks forward to leveraging Acumatica's platform to bring new and exciting features to help Timebomb and our clientele continue to grow in the coming years," says Kulvir. "As the Acumatica platform continues to evolve towards .NET Core and the latest JavaScript framework Aurelia, the developer community will further embrace this platform to another level in the coming years."



Summary

Legacy ERPs have rigid, difficult-to-install, inflexible systems, and historically have provided limited documentation, which has made the legacy systems hard to learn and extremely difficult to customize. Acumatica has taken a different approach, creating a flexible and open xRP development platform that helps partners like The Answer Company better meet the specific needs of its customers.

Acumatica's development platform is built on Microsoft technologies, is constantly improving, and provides extraordinary support and training through its Acumatica University and collegial developer community.

Learn More

To learn more about The Answer Company, visit: www.theanswerco.com

To learn more about Acumatica's xRP Platform, visit: www.acumatica.com/developer