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Product Content Partnerships

How Walmart & Dr Pepper Snapple Group met the new demands of digital shoppers

Presented by



SALSIFY

If you're reading this case study, statistics say you have a smartphone. In fact, 72% of adults in the United States own one.¹ That's a mind-blowing rate of adoption — with less than ten years in the market, (the first iPhone release was June 2007), almost three-quarters of the United States adult population has a computer in their pocket.

This transformation — access to information whenever and wherever we happen to be — has disrupted the way many markets have operated — commerce being one of the top.

As consumers, we want to make the best purchase decision for every product we buy. It's about being informed — and we seek that information on our phones, computers, and tablets. In fact, 82% of us that own a smartphone use it while we're in-store to help us make a purchase decision.² This has real revenue implications. **Forrester Research expects 42% of US in-store sales to be influenced by the Internet by 2020.**³

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Jordan Ste. Marie
Sr. Manager, Ecommerce Marketing
Dr Pepper Snapple Group

Focusing on the new shopping experience — one where the digitally empowered consumer is at the center — means ensuring your products can be found no matter how he or she decides to shop. The new focus is building bonds between brand and retailer. It is transforming commerce and changing the role of product content from an operational burden to the driver of commerce currency.

As consumers “click and collect” their way across the web, any brand or retailer that doesn't have the relevant product content in place is invisible to a digital shopper and risks losing a place in the purchase decision.

Dr Pepper Snapple Group confronted the reality of this new age of shopping with a hard look at their strategies. The company saw that serving a changing consumer would require not only new people, processes, and technologies — but also a new level of partnership and coordination between retailers and brands. At the center of these strategies, they had to figure out how to manage, optimize, and syndicate product content from brand

to retailer to the consumer in the most efficient, consistent, and meaningful way possible.

“We've seen a wave of technology starting to influence buyers in new ways. We set out to tackle that,” says Jordan Ste. Marie, Senior Manager of Ecommerce Marketing at Dr Pepper Snapple Group. “Grocery is about to change as we know it, and it's going to become this omnichannel experience where your brands can't afford not to participate.”

For brands like Dr Pepper Snapple Group, the key challenge was how to meet this new level of demand for product content. Beyond the packaging and promotional campaigns, consumers and shoppers want consistent product descriptions and images everywhere they are — search, mobile, retail sites, and social media. The group needed an agile content creation strategy across its large portfolio of flavored brands and the ability to manage and share that content across all relevant locations. The brand was up against third-party content and images and retailer content already linked to its products.

Retailers, including Walmart, were also looking to expand their product catalog and the product content that goes with it to keep pace with shopper demand. Knowing the most accurate source of content is the brands that make the products, Walmart sought to source and coordinate product content from its suppliers to build a deep and meaningful customer experience on its shopping platforms.

“The retail industry as a whole is trending towards a new customer expectation — the seamlessness of shopping, whether you are in-store or offline or online,” says Ram Rampalli, Global Head of Content Acquisition at Walmart. “In this new world, consumers expect to be able to search and choose whatever thing they'd like from an endless aisle.”

How it Began

Walmart's Quest to Build an Endless Aisle

With consumers in charge, Walmart needed a way to bring more convenience to its shopping experience to stay ahead of the competition. The company could no longer rely on shoppers deciding to buy based solely on what was in the store's aisle. Armed with mobile phones, shoppers have competitive offers and alternative retail experiences at their fingertips anytime, anywhere.

Ram joined @WalmartLabs, the technology arm that supports ecommerce growth and innovation for Walmart, in 2011 to help address this problem. He took a hard look at its web presence and saw the opportunity to grow product assortment online to serve customers. Getting product content online for every product, no matter where the point of sale, became a companywide initiative.

¹Pew Research Center, Feb 2016

²Consumers in the Micro-Moment, Google/Ipsos, U.S., March 2015

³Forrester Research Web-Influenced Retail Sales Forecast, 2015 to 2020

“We all shop anywhere and everywhere. Customers want to get the right product at the right price and through the right experience. Our goal is to build a good digital product catalog — so customers can discover the real range of products we sell,” says Ram.

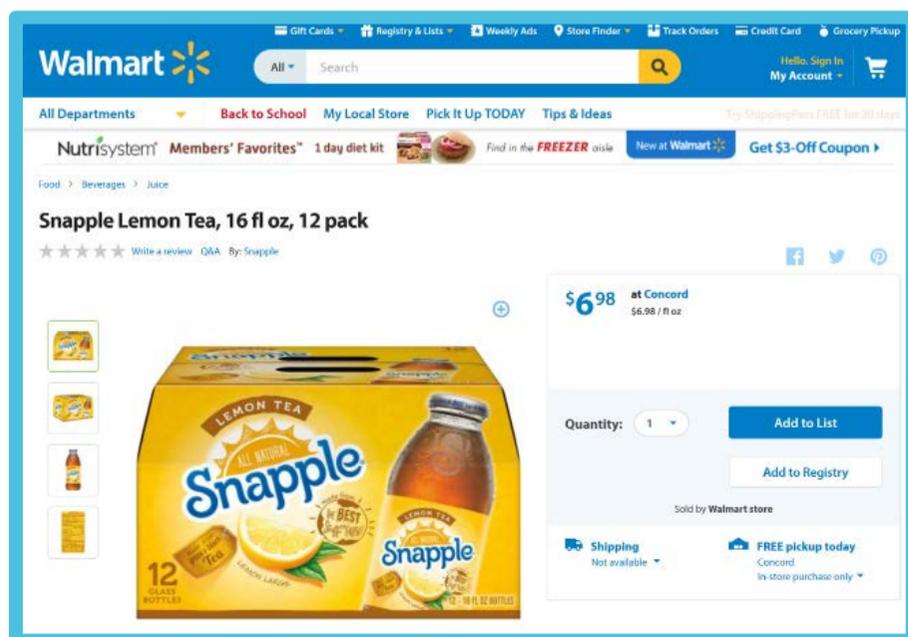
Getting product information for millions of SKUs and hosting it on Walmart.com is an enormous undertaking. For Rampalli and team, there were two initial challenges to solve. First, source quality product content for so many products across thousands of suppliers. Second, organize, standardize, and optimize all that data to go live rapidly on the site.

Initially, Walmart had been sourcing product data from wherever it could — brands themselves, third-party catalog vendors, content pools, and content service providers. It was a costly and time-consuming process.

This was not a scalable solution. Instead, Walmart partnered with Salsify to develop the systems it needed. “We developed a seamless API that connects us to the supplier. Then Salsify gets all the content, standardizes it, normalizes, it and then pushes it to us,” says Ram.

Together, Salsify’s product content management platform and Walmart’s API allows brands to get their product content live on Walmart.com in seconds instead of months. With the process and technical capabilities in place, Walmart rolled out a program for all of its product suppliers, asking for a specific set of digital product content for all store assortment only (SAO) inventory.

“The best source of that content is the brands we work with — they know the products better than anyone else,” says Steve Breen, Chief Merchandising Officer for Walmart.com. “With this initiative, we’re not only meeting the demands of today’s shopper; we’re empowering our suppliers to have a more direct role in merchandising their products to the end consumer. And the results we’ve seen to date are exactly what we had hoped.”



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Ram Rampalli,
Global Head of Content Acquisition,
Walmart

Digital Brand Power Up

Dr Pepper Extends Brand and Sales Potential

Around the same time, Dr Pepper Snapple Group was also looking to capitalize on the growth opportunities this new shopping environment presented for its brands. As a top CPG company, its company websites are used for brand messaging and awareness, and are not set up to be shopper environments. The products looked exactly as they would want them to. But on its partner retailer sites, the ecommerce team identified some inaccuracies and gaps with how its portfolio of brands was showing up. Retailers had been funneling data from multiple sources, third-party groups, and legacy sales systems. The result was the wrong brand experience — and often the wrong information — for the consumer.

“When shoppers walk into the store and see our brand, it’s exactly how our brand team, our packaging team, our marketing organization and our sales organization has worked to present it,” says Jordan. “That same experience is going to happen online, and if we didn’t control it with that same level of attention to detail, it was going to lead to a poor shopper experience. The more we dug into the online retailer landscape, it was clear bad data was a problem across every retailer — not just one.”

Dr Pepper Snapple Group has a large portfolio of flavored brands, each with long product lists that needed digital content for retail partners. Many products needed that content to be

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Steve Breen,
Chief Merchandising Officer,
Walmart.com

created from scratch; they were sold in store, but the digital shelf was neglected. In those cases, Jordan and his team also had to rally the key players across brand, legal, and regulatory as well as agency partners. Each had a stake in the way product information should appear online. With no capacity to scale such a massive undertaking, the Dr Pepper team prioritized key retailers, including Walmart.

“We had to make decisions based on limited to zero data; we had to be willing to fail fast. Initially, we focused on priority brands that we knew drive the most revenue for our business, and tried to keep up with where our products were showing up,” says Jordan.

In 2013, the Dr Pepper team knew their current manual process was not going to scale. Each retailer needed different spreadsheets of data with different instances of product content information across the Dr Pepper Snapple Group’s brands. The ecommerce team knew it needed technology to solve the problem. They talked about trying to build something in-house,

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*Jordan Ste. Marie
Sr. Manager, Ecommerce Marketing
Dr Pepper Snapple Group*

but they knew it was a hard technical problem to solve. With other competing priorities in the IT department, building would take years — time Dr Pepper Snapple Group didn’t have. The puzzle became more complex when their initial search for vendors proved that none could handle the full scope of the challenge.

“Our first meeting with Salsify was eye-opening. They had all the capabilities and agile functionalities that we needed to dynamically manage our digital product content — it was a no-brainer,” says Jordan.

Dr Pepper implemented the Salsify Product Content Management platform in June 2015. Salsify has become the trusted source of content at Dr Pepper Snapple Group.

“We can share the data with all of our retail partners and anybody else that is displaying our product content online, and we know

and trust that it is brand-approved, legal-approved, and has all of our most up to date packaging,” says Jordan. They are now in control of their brand experience — no matter where or how the consumer is shopping.

The first initiative Walmart rolled out was the SAO program, which began in 2015. When a consumer is researching a product — especially when in store — Walmart wants to make sure they can find it online when they pick up their phone to do so. Without this content, Walmart can’t surface the right products; consumers can’t discover what they’re seeking, and they’re likely to choose another brand or not to buy at all.

“What we are asking brands to give us is the information the customer is asking for. If they are not able to search and find the product on our site, there is no point in setting up all these products on our site. Every time a brand fills out a form, they are not only setting up the item so it is in the system, but also so buyers can search, find exactly what they want and complete the transaction seamlessly,” says Ram.

Using Salsify, Dr Pepper Snapple Group was one of the first brands to leverage the Walmart.com API. They are now delivering product content for over 900 SKUs to the retailer.

“Walmart is an important retail partner. And when they set a content request deadline for CPG manufacturers last year, we were so thankful we had begun to implement a system to deal with our data at scale. I don’t think we would have ever come close to reaching that deadline without Salsify,” says Jordan.

For Dr Pepper, the benefit is a new level of control for its brand messaging and convenience. “Our data is published directly

THE VALUE OF THE ENDLESS AISLE

For Walmart, getting a complete product catalog and all of the content that goes along with it breaks down into three core components:

1. **MAKING THE ENTIRE CATALOG BROWSABLE ONLINE.** That means getting content for products sold only in-store today so they can be found online, an initiative they call SAO (Store Assortment Only).
2. **COLLECTING A COMPLETE CATALOG FROM ALL OF THEIR SUPPLIERS.** To truly meet consumer demands, it’s not just about listing all the products Walmart has today, it’s also about making sure every product their consumer might want can be found on their dot-com properties.
3. **EXPANDING THE QUALITY AND COMPLETENESS OF THE PRODUCT CONTENT.** By providing customers more detail about each of the products Walmart sells it hopes to improve the shopping experience, no matter the channel.

THE CONTENT THAT CUSTOMERS SEEK

“If you look at all the attributes that we are mandating, they pretty much fall into two categories — either the customer is searching for it, or compliance is regulating it,” Ram explains.

Every brand knows its customers best. Ram advises brands to consider the customer’s search for information when developing your content.

- Search-friendly product content — be specific!
- Detailed product content — describe all attributes
- Update product availability — Is it in-store or online only?

from Salsify to Walmart. We don’t have to send it off to a black box for someone else that doesn’t own our brands to change and translate our data to something that we didn’t approve, and then try to follow up and understand when it was going to show up on Walmart’s pages,” says Jordan. “Our products are discoverable, our brand looks the way we want, and my team can spend their time on things outside of spreadsheets.”

Looking Ahead

Elevating the Conversation

The opportunity of the digital channel is just beginning for Dr Pepper Snapple Group. Jordan explained that while ecommerce is still a small piece of Dr Pepper’s business today, it holds some of the highest growth potential. “On one retailer alone, we’ve seen triple-digit growth over the last two years in part due to the significant effort we’ve made to optimize our digital shelf,” he says.

Walmart is working towards helping its other suppliers use its API and other technology platforms to deliver all the product content it needs.

“There are three steps for every supplier we work with to take. First, we want to get brand content flowing through one channel to our API. Second that the content is high quality and up to date. The third thing is that we get their entire product catalogs on our site,” says Ram.

With the right product content in place, Walmart can apply data science technology and optimize sales. Ram said the brand uses data to target specific buyer types with custom product selections. Walmart also can send back information to its brand partners for what is working or not working within their product catalog.

“We have the opportunity to elevate the conversation we have with brands from beyond, ‘What does your product do?’ With all the data already in place, we can have a more intelligent conversation. We can share data on the searches for brand

products from our shoppers. We can suggest exactly which products we should carry.” says Ram.

That level of partnership and coordination only became possible once Walmart and Dr Pepper Snapple Group tackled the practical aspects of managing digital content. “At the beginning of this process, our conversations with each of these companies were all about the pain points in the process,” says Jason Purcell, CEO at Salsify. “We were able to remove those technical barriers, and it’s remarkable to see the full power of their content. Buying decisions are driven by product content — more and more retailers and brands are understanding that taking control of their product data is a way to move forward and drive better results.”

Both Walmart and Dr Pepper Snapple Group are seeing the benefits of coordinating their efforts and investing in product content and responding to the demands of today’s consumer — the new point of sale for every retailer and brand manufacturer.

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Jason Purcell
CEO and Co-founder
Salsify

ADVICE FOR OTHER BRANDS

Dr Pepper was struggling to manage digital content across a large organization and multiple IT systems and stakeholders before using Salsify. Jordan shared his advice for other brands struggling with the same challenge.

FIX THE BASICS FIRST. The two most important things to update on any retailer's website are your product image assets (provide multiple shots if possible) and a clear product title. **"If a shopper doesn't understand what a product is on the search results page, they will likely move on and choose a competitive brand."**

SPEAK TO YOUR CUSTOMER. Ensure your product descriptions, features and attributes are written for the shopper, not an internal audience or campaign-specific. **"You want to be speaking 'why-buy' to the shopper when they are at that critical point of purchase."**

CENTRALIZE DATA ACROSS YOUR ORGANIZATION. Retailers like Walmart and Amazon may ask you for a lot more data than what a marketing team likely has. Work cross-functionally across many departments to aggregate all of these data points at a SKU by SKU level. **"Keep beating down doors and identifying people in your business that have this data. Then centralize it in a place where each stakeholder can update their data set or you can create automated system linkages."**



Steve Breen, Chief Merchandising Officer, Walmart.com. Steve has held senior merchandising roles with Walmart since 2007, including Chief Merchandising Officer, Brazil. Prior to that he held roles at Molson-Coors, Procter & Gamble and Abbott.



Ram Rampalli, Global Head of Content Acquisition, Walmart. Ram's current role involves evangelizing and acquiring high-quality product content to support Walmart's global omnichannel initiatives. He first joined the company to launch the @Services group of @WalmartLabs, Walmart's technology hub for innovation in online and mobile shopping. A former engineer, Ram established the crowdsourcing catalog program at eBay before joining Walmart.



Jordan Ste. Marie, Senior Manager of Ecommerce Marketing, Dr Pepper Snapple Group. Jordan has held several digital roles at Dr Pepper Snapple Group since 2012. Before that, he lead digital initiatives at other top tier brands including GE Capital and DIRECTV.



Jason Purcell, CEO and Co-founder of Salsify since 2012. Before Salsify, Jason ran Endeca's e-commerce business. He spearheaded Endeca's global marketing and product management organizations, responsible for core product marketing, strategy, and messaging.