

Michaels & Associates



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Corporate, food service



Grand Rapids, Michigan



135 employees

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> Gary Norman, Director of Information Systems,
Michaels & Associates

Michaels & Associates educates sales force around the clock using Mediasite.

Established in 1981, Michaels & Associates is proud to be celebrating their twenty-fifth anniversary. The company acts as a broker for large, national food brands, such as Nestle™. The company represents approximately 80 brands and sells to distributors, like Sysco Food Service, U.S. Food Service and Gordon Food Service that, in turn, sell the products to institutions, such as schools, prisons and restaurants. The company's combined business operations can successfully provide operators with a wide variety of products and services in all segments of the food service and deli/bakery industry across a 13-state area.

Challenge

Gary Norman is Director of Information Systems at Michaels & Associates. In this role, he is responsible for corporate network communications for the 135-employee company. One of the issues Norman's team wished to address was the varying needs of its geographically distributed sales force, located throughout the eastern half of the United States — from Michigan to Florida. Sales representatives already had to travel a great deal to visit customers in their region. Quarterly and monthly sales meetings only added to their busy schedules and cost the company hundreds of thousands of dollars in airfare and hotel expenses. Additionally, the company often needed to be able to transmit information to sales teams quickly when products changed or underwent unanticipated updates.

“Information is extremely critical in our business,” said Norman. “If we are not educating our salesforce with accurate and up-to-the-minute information they in turn are unable to provide the customer with critical knowledge to make an effective decision. We desired a solution which would allow for the seamless transfer of information.”

Two years ago, Michaels & Associates built a new corporate headquarters wired with overhead cameras in the test kitchen and in the multimedia room. Norman's team sought to use these rooms to film live sales representative training presentations. In this way, they hoped they could train new sales agents while they were still in the field. The goal was twofold: save the company money and prevent the sales representatives from taking unnecessary time away from customers in their markets. Norman hoped any new technology purchased for this purpose would be a solution for keeping the salesforce up-to-date on new developments within the company.



Solution

At the request of Norman and the Michaels & Associates CEO, Mike Wolfe, the company had a consulting firm visit their corporate headquarters and make recommendations. They recommended Sonic Foundry's Mediasite rich media recording and publishing technology, which seemed to be just what Michaels & Associates decision-makers were seeking.

"Once we saw what Mediasite could do, there wasn't a need to explore any additional products. It matched our needs perfectly," said Norman.

Norman first used Mediasite to demonstrate the technology to the salesforce. The sales team was immediately impressed with the manner in which the technology allowed them to view and participate in trainings at their convenience, allowing them to focus on interacting with customers during the day.

"Our sales team was quite pleased to know they could be kept informed of company news and announcements at a time that was convenient for their schedule," explained Norman. "Conducting trainings using Mediasite allows our sales team to stay productive during the day when interacting with clients is most important".

Result

One of the primary reasons Michaels & Associates selected Mediasite was for its ROI potential. In the two years since purchase, they have achieved a remarkable return on investment.

"Mediasite has saved us approximately \$100,000 per year just on travel and hotel accommodations for our 80-person sales force who would have had to travel to our corporate headquarters for quarterly meetings," said Norman. "Mediasite keeps the sales team off the road and in their markets. The sales reps can either sit in the comfort of their living rooms or view trainings at a later time on the network."

Today, Michaels & Associates uses Mediasite for at least two presentations per month and once every quarter, the company hosts a two-day meeting where they mediasite up to 20 presentations. Many Michaels & Associates departments now create Mediasite content, including updates on new products and hardware, such as ovens and fryers, which the company markets to distributors who in turn sell to restaurants.

Michaels & Associates also controls a web site called foodstage.com where they transmit information from distributors to customers. The company's long-term vision with Mediasite is to provide a communications platform allowing manufacturers to deliver sales training to sales agents throughout the United States.

"Mediasite has exceeded our expectations," said Norman. "With limited resources, we are able to not only create, but share compelling presentations and in the process save money."

Benefits

- Cost savings of \$100,000 a year on travel and accommodations
- Keep sales people informed while in the field interacting with customers
- Quickly transmit information to sales teams on product changes and new rollouts
- Allow sales force to view presentations at a time that is convenient with their own schedule