

Streamlining the Supply Chain and Boosting Customer Engagement

How The Bruce Co. found a way to simplify wholesale ordering and increase customer engagement through technology.

By Teresa McPherson

Warren Patterson knew there had to be a better way. As owner of Barrie's Garden Centre in Barrie, Ontario, Canada, his biggest challenge was finding the time to place and receive orders from the multiple supplier companies he did business with. And as the world became more digital, he began to seek a way to make wholesale ordering easier.

The result was forming the company LinkGreen, an online ordering solution for independent retailers and an online ordering solution for their vendors.

"Think of Amazon for the business world," says Ken Klopp, who handles business development for the company, "except it isn't putting vendor against vendor for pricing but a secure connection between vendor and customer.

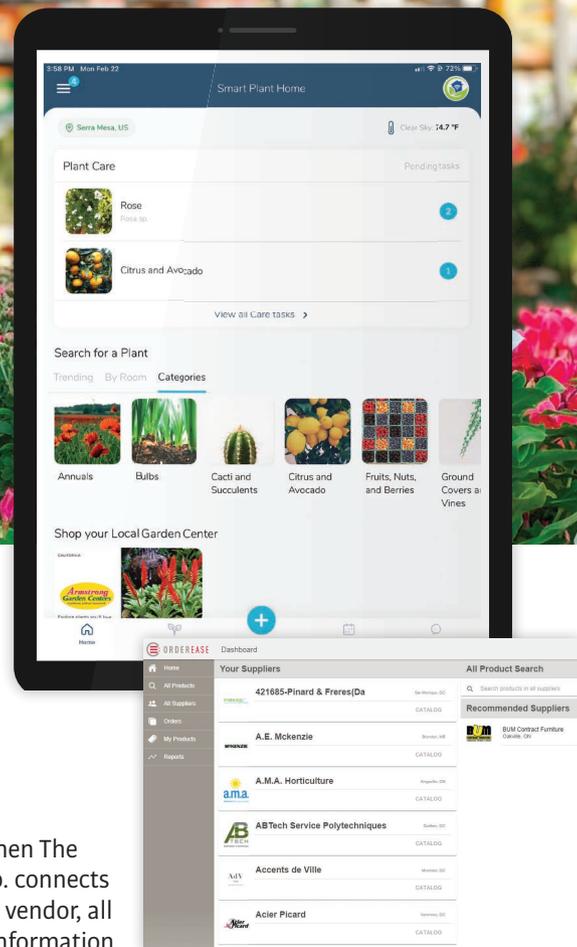
"It was called LinkGreen because it was for the green industry, but within the last two years, they had to rebrand themselves to OrderEase because it's not only exploding within the green industry, but the same technology is solving the same problems in other industries as well, particularly with family-run small businesses.

"If you're not a big box store, your struggle is the same because it's a family-run business that needs a better way to manage their information, place their orders, see what they get, have information flow up to their website, connect to their vendors," Klopp says. "The struggle is the same."

A Garden Center Solution

It's the reason Middleton, Wisconsin-based The Bruce Co. implemented the system in their stores. "They said, 'We've been trying to do this for years, and here is the solution that will help us build our business better.'"

Klopp describes OrderEase as a funnel that allows all the vendors that a garden center works with to be present on one platform — pricing, inventory, and product information such as pictures, descriptions and attributes.



"So when The Bruce Co. connects with the vendor, all of that information flows up into

OrderEase and into The Bruce Co.'s point of sale system and/or their website," he says. "For example, if they purchase a product from Prince, all that information flows up to the IGC's website, and that's one less thing that the Bruce Co. has to figure out how to manage. If an image changes, if the description changes, all of that naturally flows from Prince up to The Bruce Co.'s website.

"It also naturally flows into their point of sale (POS) system," he says, allowing The Bruce Co. to push orders electronically from the POS system into the ERP system of the vendor — eliminating errors, getting orders in quickly and allowing the IGC to check against inventory.

"Once the order is pushed down, the invoice and the packing slip or anything else can actually get pushed up to The Bruce Co. electronically, again eliminating errors and eliminating that manual entry."

Through the platform, The Bruce Co. has access to vendors that they work with. "Those vendors can't see each other's information, but it allows the Bruce Co. to go to one place and order products from Prince, Morning Dew Tropicals, from TDI Brands, De Vroomen, etc. and it's all managed through one technology."

Ordering on the Go

There's also a mobile app that allows for The Bruce Co. to place orders with their vendors and get that information from them on the road. In addition, Klopp says a manufacturer or supplier rep that works with The Bruce Co. can actually place an order on behalf of them with the Distributor. The order gets digitally placed through the system, and it's captured by the

supplier for them to pick it and ship it to the Bruce Co.

“So now you actually have this ecosystem where it’s not just a distributor and retailer, but the distributor, the manufacturer and the retailer all working together.”

Quoting Capabilities

Klopp notes that OrderEase is also connected to The Bruce Co.’s point of sale system, Counterpoint, and their landscape software, Navision. This allows The Bruce Co.’s IT people to pull real-time information from the system, including pricing and availability, into a quoting tool for a project or installation.

“So now they can be with a customer in an app that The Bruce Co. is creating that allows them to pull real-time information on the products that they need for an interiorscape or other project, tie it in with their labor costs, and give a customer a real-time quote.”

Plant Problem Solver Becomes Ecosystem

Klopp’s company Marketing Garden introduced The Perfect Plant, which he says is a plant problem solver for retailer websites and in-store engagement. Recently acquired by Smart Plant Home, the plant and problem solver is now part of a much larger platform that includes a successful consumer-facing app. Both the app and plant problem solver are part of a large ecosystem that provides monthly care instructions to gardening consumers, allows users to ask a U.S.-based green industry expert questions, ties engaged consumers to products they need and to local retailers near them, turnkey

e-commerce sales for retailers of all sizes without the need for inventory, a new plant introduction program, subscription revenue sharing, and scannable plants all for local independent retailers to increase their profits.

The Bruce Co. liked it and asked Klopp to engage their current customer base, as well as bring in additional customers who might not be familiar with The Bruce Co.

“Because our app is consumer-facing and because we work with consumers direct, we have the flexibility to take that relationship and point them back to their local garden center,” Klopp says. “The Bruce Co. loves that because a lot of people know them, but then there’s also a lot of people that don’t, and so we help with that all of them.

“So whether it’s the care instructions or it’s the expert answering the question, the app will always point that customer back to that local garden center.”

Klopp says that’s especially important now, as the number of new gardeners increased last year by an estimated 16-20 million. “We have new gardeners, new people, black thumbs, lack of experience, whatever it is, and so engaging with them and giving them that peace of mind is absolutely critical, because if they don’t succeed, then it’s a lot easier for them to revert back to their and those discretionary funds goes elsewhere. They say, ‘Oh well, it didn’t work, it wasn’t for me,’ and then they move on.” 🌸

To learn more about OrderEase, go to www.orderease.com. For more information about The Perfect Plant and Smart Plant Home, go to SmartPlantHome.com

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