



What can a sporting goods company teach you about the future of work?

The digital transformation of **HIBBETT**
SPORTS

Welcome to the era of:

Game
Changers



Sports Retail Game Changer Meets Customers Where They Are

Omnichannel retailing—the ability to deliver a seamless and consistent shopping experience across all channels including in-store, online, and mobile—is simply expected by consumers today. And Ron Blahnik, Chief Information Officer of Hibbett Sports, knew that’s what he had to deliver when he joined the company in late 2016.

Connecting Employees and Customers

Hibbett’s new, transactional e-commerce website provides customers with a robust, user-friendly experience and features an expansive assortment of footwear, apparel, and equipment items. The site is fully integrated with company stores, including visibility of in-store inventory, the ability to fulfill online orders from stores, and the capability to return online purchases in stores. Plus, it all syncs with the sporting goods retailer’s rewards program.

The emphasis the company places on delighting its customers extends to its employees as well. “We operate as part of a ‘WOW Experience’ culture that empowers us to do the right thing for our customer and each other,” Blahnik said. “While there are numerous pathways in our communication architecture, the most favored is the human voice—employees are encouraged to make the call, solve it quickly, and move on.”



“Hibbett had spent the last few years modernizing its tech infrastructure to include store, merchandising, and warehouse management systems,” he said. “When it came time to launch our e-commerce initiative by late summer of 2017, we had a great foundation on which to build.”

Hibbett also plans to expand features on its Store Portal, as well as provide its store associates the option to leverage their preferred mobile devices as part of the company’s “bring your own device” policy. Allowing real-time collaboration through this convenient medium will encourage employees to become much more proactive in their problem-solving with customers.



Taking Collaboration to the Next Level

Hibbett has leveraged agile methodology and principles to build a flexible organization capable of reacting quickly to unpredictable changes. Individuals have growth mindsets and are allowed autonomy, continually focusing on improving the delivery process. Teams and groups have strong communication skills, allowing them to make adjustments rapidly. As a result, employees become active stakeholders, feeling engaged and willing to respond and adapt their processes to meet new business demands.

To support internal digital collaboration, Hibbett is testing Microsoft Office 365 and is evaluating the potential to leverage the many apps in its connected framework. "A centralized or hub-based communication platform will let our employees more easily share documents while reducing the confusion caused by multiple updates and cumbersome version control," he said. "It's definitely a step in the right direction since speed is essential, particularly in modern retail."

"The exercise has taught us that all of our learnings are important; it's not about right or wrong, good or bad," said Blahnik. "It's more a matter of determining just the right time to expose a particular feature innovation as part of the overall customer experience."

In the future, Blahnik is planning for store-to-store communication via chat channels for the purpose of sharing best practices and product positioning ideas that might drive higher item turn on sales floors. He said, "The ability to test, learn, and share across our 1,000+ stores is powerful. An idea channel monitored by our corporate team would allow innovative ideas to be rapidly shared and implemented across the chain, quickly and directly enhancing our customers' shopping experiences."

Being Smart About Innovation

Regarding innovation, Blahnik has this to say: "Many of our new business efforts follow a 'test and learn' pilot approach to validate a business case. We subscribe to a concept of ideation and learning in a sandbox or lab environment in order to tease out only those solutions which represent the greatest potential for a solid return on investment."

For example, in designing and building its e-commerce site, the "feedback" tab was extensively storyboarded. This feature was originally positioned in several ways, from a fairly traditional location to a more innovative placement. Invitation-only crowdsourcing and facilitated focus group testing allowed the team to rapidly determine the optimal specifications for the feature, as well as accelerate many other parts of the online prototyping design journey.





“Being smart and efficient about how you design your customer experience is key. “Resource constraints will not allow you to execute as many proof of concepts as you might like in any given year,” said Blahnik. “You need to choose wisely.”



NAME:

Ron Blahnik

COMPANY:

Hibbett Sports

TITLE:

Chief Information Officer

INDUSTRY:

Retail

EMPLOYEE COUNT:

9,200

HOW HE CHANGED THE GAME:

Successfully transformed a traditional brick-and-mortar athletic specialty retailer into an omnichannel enterprise.

Visionary leaders are changing the game for the modern workforce.

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Game Changers

