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in association with **RBTE - Europe's leading retail event**Caroline Baldwin,
Editor

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Holland & Barrett uses Oracle to gain real-time visibility of stock

Holland & Barrett is working with systems integrator SkillNet, leveraging Oracle's CRM and inventory platform to gain real-time visibility of stock.

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Author: Caroline Baldwin

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Following an implementation of Oracle's retail platform, health retailer, Holland & Barrett, now has full real-time visibility of its 22,000-strong product range of vitamins, minerals and supplements.

After deploying Oracle's customer relationship management (CRM) suite, Siebel, in 2014, it has worked with systems integrator SkillNet to leverage the infrastructure to support the retailer's omnichannel developments.

Speaking at Oracle's Retail Industry Forum in Amsterdam this week, Harry Kundhi, head of IT service delivery at Holland & Barrett, said: "Giving our omnichannel initiative and considering our legacy systems, we needed a solution to cover multiple business entities, including geographical locations, eCommerce initiatives and our loyalty programme.

"We needed to fulfil store operations and the omnichannel strategy without affecting customer experience and the key requirement was real-time inventory."

Oracle's Store Inventory Management solution provides the retailer with visibility of stock adjustments in seconds.

"Area sales managers want to know inventory movement in real time," Kundhi said.

"It gives staff the ability to look up one of the 22,000 product lines because we need to be able to give availability for those products to the customer whether they're in a small store in Wales or a flagship in London," he explains, adding that real-time inventory also allows the retailer to write-off out of date items immediately.

Working with legacy systems

Kundhi said in addition to the roll out, Holland & Barrett had to integrate Oracle with its legacy systems in the back-end while still conducting batch data uploads every night.

"A key driver to the store inventory hub tool was for it to talk to the legacy system in real-time and also for the overnight sales batch process."

He said the enhancement using Oracle with systems integrator SkillNet in 2014 was the largest worldwide deployment at the time.

"No enhancement goes live without stumbling blocks, and there were pitfalls and times where we wondered why we set out on the initiative in the first place, but we had a key partner in SkillNet."

Kundhi also said the technology implementation helped to reduce technical support costs. "While we have a very aggressive expansion plan to continue across the globe, the technical team size has stayed the same, showing stability of system."

Real-time benefits

He noted the main benefits for having real-time inventory visibility is the ability to implement efficient click & collect, as well as allowing customers to order from one store and collect from another, as well as ship from store capabilities.

The 40-year-old business has 7,000 staff working across 1,000 stores in the UK, Ireland, Netherlands and Belgium and it is about to ramp up its international expansion with a new store opening in Sweden next month.

Loyalty

With a revenue of over a billion dollars, Holland & Barrett has managed to link its various customer channels using its loyalty programme which is also hosted on Siebel. Once deployed in April 2014, loyalty at the retailer increased by 70% and its loyalty card is now used for 54% of transactions.

"Loyalty enabled us to reach a much wider audience and feel what customer behaviour is," explained Kundhi. "Not everyone wants cod liver oil. And it was interesting seeing the same customer at 20 years and 30 years, and to see the change of products they buy."

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