

ACTIVANT EAGLE BRINGS A BROAD SPECTRUM OF SUCCESS TO COLUMBIA PAINT AND COATINGS



PROFILE

Headquarters: Spokane, Washington

Annual sales: \$50 million

Sales breakdown: 60% contractor,
20% retail, 20% commercial

Number of employees: 250

Locations: 2 factories,
37 retail/wholesale store locations

Founded: 1948

"With Activant iNet, our customers can go online and check their accounts, view invoices, statements and previous purchases. This service gives us a competitive edge."

ANNA PHILLIPS
STORE SYSTEMS ENGINEER
COLUMBIA PAINT AND COATINGS

Executive summary

Columbia Paint and Coatings, headquartered in Spokane, Washington, depends on its innovative research and development team to create new paint formulations that can withstand extreme climates. So it's no surprise that Columbia chose Activant — and its expert Activant Eagle™ development team — to install and customize an Eagle system to meet the demands of their \$50 million business. With two factories and 37 retail/wholesale locations in the West, Columbia is the 34th largest paint and coatings company in North America; they consistently rank 1st throughout their market region.

Before converting to Eagle in 2001, Columbia used a UNIX-based system with limited functionality-and virtually no inventory management capability. Now Eagle's inventory tracking and point-of-sale applications deliver measurable support for two major business goals: inventory control and customer retention.

With Eagle, Columbia mixes up the paint, not the inventory

Columbia's greatest business challenge is inventory control. From plant to warehouse to retail locations across seven states, "Our paint products are everywhere!" says Anna Phillips, store systems engineer. "On trucks . . .back and forth between stores. With Eagle, we're able to transfer inventory quickly between the warehouse and our stores. I don't think our competitors have that ability. They're still back in the Dark Ages without the technology."

Stocking the proper quantity of high-demand products and reducing stock on slow-moving products is a goal for any retail business. Eagle helps Columbia do both. "If an item doesn't sell in a year," says Anna, "we consider it to be obsolete and sell it at a clearance price. This makes more room for the faster-selling items-products the customers want."

Eagle Viewers assist sales associates and management

Quite often, customers bring their questions right to the register. And during busy periods, sales associates must find answers quickly. That's why Anna appreciates the convenience of the Viewers in the Activant Point-of-Sale (POS) application. "Our sales associates can find answers without leaving the screen," says Anna. "They can review inventory levels, customer information-anything they need-without going to another application. Viewers are my favorite part of POS." Because all 37 retail stores can access company-wide inventory levels, sales associates can easily locate items in stock at a nearby location and tell the customer, "We can transfer that product and have it for you in an hour or two." At Columbia, an out-of-stock situation in one store doesn't mean a lost sale.

Viewers also give management immediate access to the information they need to make critical business decisions. "I think the stress may even be down a little, now that we use Viewers to evaluate what's happening with our business," says Anna. Gone are the stacks of green bar paper reports and month-long gaps between reports. "Now we look at daily gross profit. If one store shows a negative profit margin, we can fix it quickly."

Activant iNet™: a formula for great customer service

Seeing yet another opportunity to out-perform the competition, Columbia recently invested in Activant iNet. Customers can now check their accounts online and view invoices and statements. In the world of paint and coatings, iNet is especially helpful to a contractor who needs to review specifications from a previous job. "With iNet, customers can drill down at the invoice level to see the colors and formulas they purchased in the past," says Anna.

Eagle purchasing functionality links factories to stores

Columbia manufactures its own paint and then distributes finished products to its warehouses. Columbia uses Eagle purchasing features to bring the products into inventory. "Our warehouses purchase the paint from our factories using a purchase order and vendor code, just like any other supplier," says Anna. Stores then submit transfer requests to bring products from the warehouse to the stores.

Columbia relies on the Suggested Order feature to recommend quantities and guide factory production. "Suggested Order allows us to see when stores need more products, so we can produce larger batches. This helps us eliminate stock-outs. Suggested orders are based on sales history-with Eagle it's not guesswork anymore."

The same price and the same margin-every time

Consistency in wholesale pricing was rare before Eagle. Contractors and store managers set prices on a handshake, and store managers kept manual price logs at the register. If a contractor visited a different Columbia location, the sales associate had no easy way to verify the contractor's "handshake" price. Now, the negotiated price is part of Eagle POS, so when the associate enters the customer's name, the correct price appears on the screen. "It really helps to have the established price for that contractor available at POS. It's a win-win. The contractor has confidence in their pricing and we have confidence in our gross margin."



One way Columbia employees provide great customer service is through their Design Center.

ABOUT ACTIVANT

Activant is a leading provider of business management solutions designed for companies with complex products in high-service distribution environments. Over 17,000 wholesale, retail and manufacturing customers use Activant to help drive new levels of business performance. With proven experience and success, Activant is fast becoming an industry standard for companies seeking competitive advantage through stronger customer integration. Our business management solutions include advanced software, professional services, content, supply chain connectivity and analytics.

To learn more about this or other Activant products and services, please call 888.463.4700.



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