

Drs. Foster & Smith thinks their shipping system is the cat's meow.



ProShip expedites tens of thousands of packages to waiting pet owners.



Challenge

Drs. Foster & Smith is adored by pet lovers everywhere, who count on them for home delivery of all things pet-related. From their headquarters in Rhineland, Wisconsin, the privately held catalog and internet company expedites tens of thousands of packages to waiting pet owners a day. When that involves items as diverse as live, exotic fish and catnip toys, keeping abreast of carrier requirements and rates is essential, as is finding the most cost effective method of shipping. Technical support from the shipping software then in use at Drs. Foster & Smith, however, proceeded at a snail's pace.

Adding a shipping location at the building next door took six months. Adding another carrier service took a year. "You can't imagine how we dreaded upgrading anything on our shipping software," said Ron Sasek, IT manager. "Upgrades always caused major problems and it would be work on our part to get it functioning again."

Another pet peeve was the interface between the shipping software and the company's warehouse management system. "We were never able to talk directly with our software vendor about problems," Ron noted. "It was always a case of 'He said-she said.'"

Continued...

 *Upgrades to our old shipping software always caused major problems. Not one worked.* 

*Audrey Schmidt
Warehouse Manager
Drs. Foster & Smith*



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The conversion went really quick. It was probably a maximum of two hours before we could ship packages.

Becky Ross

IT Specialist

Drs. Foster & Smith

Finally, the software vendor was discontinuing support for the shipping program in use by Dr. Foster & Smith, requiring a costly migration. "It was like installing a new system from a different company, not like installing an upgrade; all interfaces would have had to change," Ron said.

It was time to scratch the existing shipping software and install a new system that would provide responsive customer support, seamless integration with the warehouse management system, *Exacta by ASAP Automation*, and sophisticated rate-shopping and carrier compliance.

Solution

The impending obsolescence of the shipping software at Drs. Foster & Smith let the cat out of the bag: their IT people had wanted to implement ProShip for some time. They had discovered ProShip at a postal forum, viewed a demo and were impressed. "I came away from there with a real comfortable feeling about ProShip," Ron said. "We talked to these other shipping companies and weren't getting out of them the same information as from ProShip. ProShip answered our questions."

Still, the reputation of Drs. Foster & Smith was on the line. Friendly, personal service makes the company unique and they promote the shipment of all orders within 12 hours; a new shipping system had better be able to jump through hoops. "We were staking a lot on it with the rate shopping module, and all the things we were told about tech support," Ron said.

ProShip implemented a black box solution utilizing ProShip SDK. The integration flexibility of ProShip meant that Dr. Foster & Smith was able to retain the existing user interface. ProShip runs natively within Exacta and operates behind the scenes, keeping the Exacta Pack program for warehouse personnel. "We didn't have to retrain the packers, didn't have to have a whole new pack system," said Ron. "The way they were able to fit it in helped with a smooth conversion."

Software engineers at ProShip configured the system to accommodate the broad range of products Drs. Foster & Smith sells, and the designated shipping

methods for each. "Corals and fish are sent next-day air, larger buckets of salt and aquarium supplies go differently," said Audrey Schmidt, warehouse manager. In addition, pet pharmaceuticals require the recipient's signature. "ProShip took care of organizing with the different carriers that we were set up correctly, and managing details with how invoices and labels print out."

Dr. Foster & Smith scheduled the actual installation off-hours on a Thursday night, and set aside a 12-hour window. Within two hours of starting and testing, they were shipping real packages. "It was the smoothest changeover I've ever gone through in 25 years of doing them," Ron said.

Credit the end result to months of planning that preceded the transition. ProShip software engineers worked closely with their counterparts at ASAP to achieve a seamless integration, and personnel from both companies were on site during the conversion. "From my perspective their guys were really knowledgeable about the shipping industry and their product," Ron said of ProShip. "They seemed really willing to learn what we do and why, to get an understanding of our side of the business."



Results

Although the installation of ProShip was only recently completed, Drs. Foster & Smith is already seeing benefits. "The nice thing with ProShip is there are certain products that have to ship a certain way, like fish that have to go overnight," said Audrey. "We're able to tell ProShip which package has to go this way and which can be rate shopped; it's really flexible that way."

Unable to use rate shopping with their previous software, Drs. Foster & Smith appreciate its advantage, especially in a difficult economy. "Rate shopping was one of the big things the ProShip guys brought in, and we've been trying to do more and more SmartPost because it's cheaper," Ron said. "I do think our SmartPost volume has gone up and we're automatically going to save money there," Audrey added.

Also, the dog days of system "hiccups" and server down times are over. "We're more profitable from a productivity standpoint, not having to deal with our previous software and the problems and issues," Ron said.

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 *It was an overwhelmingly positive experience. They came through with what they said they were going to; bottom line, they exceeded our expectations.* 

*Ron Sasek
IT Manager
Drs. Foster & Smith*

ProShip

Unlike the old shipping program that charged Drs. Foster & Smith for making carrier-required changes, ProShip updates will keep them ahead of the pack. "They are very proactive about making changes, miles ahead, with labeling requirements, letting us know with weekly updates we can automatically download," Ron said.

And moving forward, Drs. Foster & Smith has a single point of support with ProShip. Whether it's a question about carrier compliance, warehouse integration, or software function, ProShip manages all aspects of the relationship. "One of the key selling points of ProShip is that we can work with them directly," said Ron. "They said you'll have direct tech support and an account representative."

ProShip has turned out to be just what Drs. Foster & Smith ordered. "From when I first talked to ProShip to now, they really did come through with what they said they were going to do—from what the sales guy said to what the tech guys actually did—they were really spot on with that," concluded Ron.



The ProShip logo is located in the bottom right corner of the page. It features the word "ProShip" in a bold, sans-serif font. The "Pro" is white with a black outline, and the "Ship" is yellow with a black outline. A black diamond shape is integrated behind the letter "S".

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