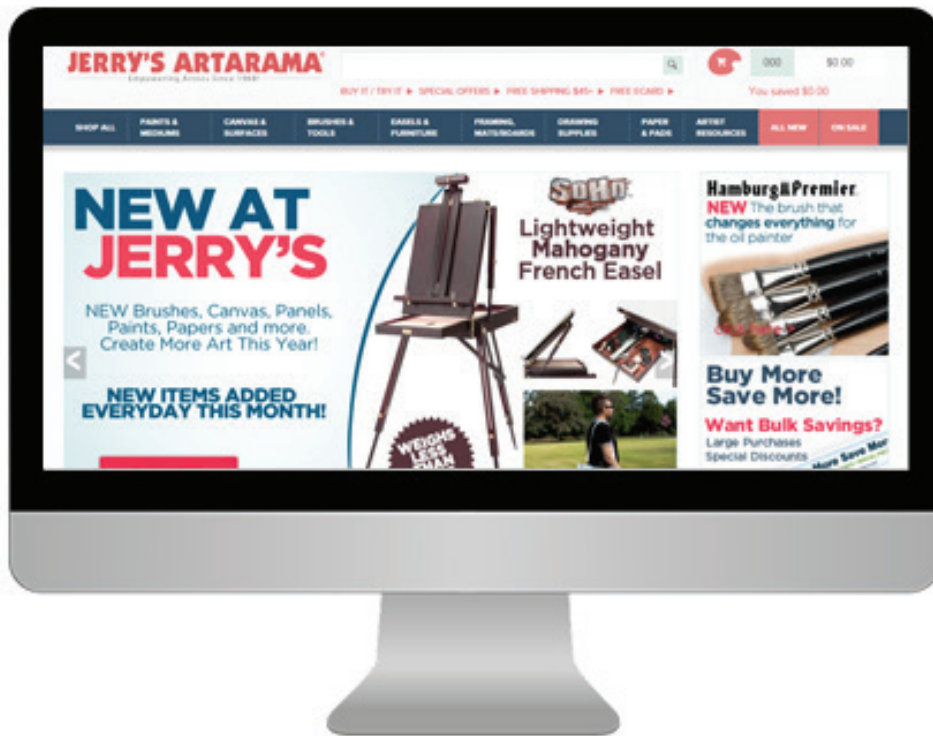


JERRY'S ARTARAMA

How to make e-commerce address verification a fine art



The world of e-commerce has seemingly digitized everything, from shopping to ordering and paying. Quick and easy, right?

Not quite: The one thing that's remained pervasively analog for many e-commerce companies is shipping, and that can often be their biggest weak link. If the shipping or billing addresses are not accurate, even by just a small bit, products might not arrive and customers can get very grumpy.

"Shipping can definitely be a pain point with e-commerce and mail orders, and problems here can really impact customer retention," said Michael Marchetta, director of marketing operations at Jerry's Artarama, a Raleigh, N.C.-based supplier of fine art painting supplies like brushes, paints, easels and drawing materials. With 16 physical locations in the U.S., and a substantial ordering business, Jerry's is a mainstay supplier for art schools, individual artists and hobbyists who want professional equipment.

But as with any ordering process, address verification has been a traditional challenge for Jerry's, Marchetta said. Online customers might mistype their addresses, or provide slightly off destinations during phone orders. Business addresses are usually treated differently than residences for delivery purposes, and misidentifying one for the other can cause lost packages and incorrect shipping charges.

"And with the increase in mobile phone orders, the 'fat fingers' syndrome has caused even more incorrect addresses," Marchetta observed.

It's bad enough when customers' patience is stretched to the breaking point because of lost or inordinately delayed orders. Equally painful to any supplier are credit card chargebacks, charges to cover return costs, and additional penalties.

TECHNOLOGY TO SOLVE A NON-TECH ISSUE

Some four years ago, Marchetta decided that more technological innovation was called for, using software tools from data quality software and address verification provider Melissa, to help when “it absolutely, positively has to be there.”

“We had been using Melissa for validating phone orders,” Marchetta said. “We then began to expand it, building out its capabilities on the Internet side.”

Today, Jerry’s Artarama uses Melissa’s cloud-based Personator, both to validate contact information and to update addresses for customers who have moved. In addition, the tool verifies the customer’s entire record, matching a particular name to an accurate email address, phone and physical address, while adding geographic and demographic data for better segmentation and targeting by the marketing team.

The process also calculates the shopper’s precise distance from distribution points, enabling quick calculation of shipping costs at several price levels, depending on how fast the customer wants delivery.

Marchetta then took things to a higher level, adding Melissa’s Magento plug-in to the Jerry’s ordering site. Magento provides an autocomplete address verification feature; as a customer types in an address, the tool automatically presents a suggested correct version, allowing the customer to choose a valid address that’s also easily recognized by shippers.

Magento-based sites also add missing components such as region or postal codes. It’s estimated that the automated process cuts data entry keystrokes in half, thus speeding checkout and reducing shopping-cart abandonment.

“The beauty of the Magento plugin is that it shows the customer right away that he’s going to get his package delivered to a correct and validated address, while protecting us against fat fingers,” Marchetta said.

When combined with Melissa’s Global Address Verification cloud service that parses locations in some 240 countries, Jerry’s now has address verification technology that covers much of the globe. And that fits in perfectly with the company’s expansion plans.

“The international market represents a key opportunity for us,” Marchetta said. “Having the correct tools not only means we can verify particular addresses that are matched with their countries, but also to accurately consolidate orders.”

KEEPING CUSTOMER ORDERS SAFE

Marchetta noted one more challenge facing all e-commerce sites: fraud. The unfortunate fact is that personal data, including credit card information stored in massive databases at banks and companies, are sometimes hacked by international operatives.

With Melissa tools, Jerry’s now has the capability of determining in real time if a customer is who he says he is, cross-validating shipping and billing addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, and even IP geolocation.

“We’re taking drastic measures to assure that our customers are protected,” Marchetta said. “Because banks can be a little slow to respond to suspicious credit card activity, that leaves us to do a lot of the work. But we’d do it anyway. It’s the right thing to do.”

Doing the right thing has a happy financial side as well. In 2016, the technologically fortified Jerry’s site enjoyed a 30 percent reduction in ordering mistakes, Marchetta said. With both reduced returns and foiled fraudulent orders, significant savings in shipping cost-backs and penalties have been realized. And customer satisfaction and retention mean repeat business, and more cross- and up-sell opportunities.

“Over time the benefits, savings and enhanced revenue are going to get better and better,” he said. You might say that Jerry’s Artarama is getting things down to both a fine art and a fine science.

About melissa

Since 1985, Melissa has been a leading provider of data quality and address management solutions. Melissa’s data quality software, Cloud services and data integration components verify, standardize, consolidate, enhance and update U.S. and global contact data, including addresses, phone numbers and email addresses for improved communications and ROI. More than 10,000 companies worldwide rely on Melissa to gain and maintain a single, accurate and trusted view of critical information assets.

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