

American Meadows Grows, Blooms, Thrives With Acumatica



WHERE CONFIDENCE GROWS

“ *I don't know how we would have handled the initial Covid-19 outbreak without Acumatica. We were able to make the switch to be fully remote within a few days.* ”

– Ethan Platt, President & Co-Owner ”

OVERVIEW

Since 1981, American Meadows (AMI) has been a popular online retailer of wildflower seeds, perennial plants, flower bulbs, and vegetable seeds to consumers and corporations in North America. When the Vermont-based company outgrew its legacy software, it deployed Acumatica Cloud ERP gaining one integrated solution, a solid foundation for growth, and the ability to pivot to work from home effortlessly when the pandemic hit.

KEY RESULTS

- Eliminated duplicate entry into multiple systems, saving employees time and reducing errors
- Gained a single solution to operate the business, unifying operations
- Acquired accurate and real-time data with a fully integrated ERP solution and online store
- Leveraged dashboard reporting for improved insights into financials & operations
- Increased customer satisfaction with greater transparency into the end-to-end ordering process

CHALLENGES

In 1980, Chy and Ray Allen moved to Vermont's Champlain Valley and started a farm to spread their love of wildflower gardening. Their farm soon grew into a national wildflower seed company with a gift catalog reaching more than one million gardeners.

The Allens were early adopters of the Internet, recognized as visionaries by Google as one of the first success stories, and spoke at some of the earliest Internet Retailer Conferences. Their online presence was so successful that they sold the farm and retail gift shop in 2002 to create a one-stop online resource for wildflower, perennial and flower bulb products.

The business thrived, and in late 2008, the Allens sold American Meadows to long-time employee Michael Liotte and his friend Ethan Platt. At that time, the company ran on a legacy mail order system and a legacy accounting ERP. Magento eCommerce fueled online sales. But the systems weren't connected.

“The ERP was not as robust and scalable as we needed it to be,” says Platt. “The system handled order processing and inventory but wasn't integrated with our accounting system. At the end of the day, we had to make journal entries to get the information into our financial system.”

The legacy systems were complicated, and it was time-consuming to train its seasonal staff how to use them, which became an annual challenge. Platt needed a modern solution built for the cloud that was easy-to-use, which could also handle a multi-company environment. The new ERP also needed to seamlessly integrate with Magento, Vertex for tax technology, and a secure payment gateway.

COMPANY

- **Location:** United States. Burlington, Vermont
- **Industry:** Agriculture, Online Retailer

NO. OF EMPLOYEES

- Approx. 50 full time employees, with 25 added seasonally

PRODUCTS IN USE

- Acumatica Commerce Edition with Advanced Financial Management and Customer Management, Native Magento eCommerce/Acumatica Connector, Bronto, StarShip, Vertex

CUSTOMER SOCIAL SHARING DETAILS



PARTNER DETAILS



KENSIMUM

Kensium

<https://www.kensiumsolutions.com/>

SOLUTION

American Meadows evaluated Oracle NetSuite among other ERP systems but didn't like its per-user seat-licensing model. "Because we are seasonal, we often don't know our peak number of users, and I didn't want to pay for 20 users that wouldn't be using the system for 9 months out of the year," says Platt.

"There was some sticker shock with Oracle NetSuite too. In the end, I struggled to find people who raved about Oracle NetSuite. Most people I talked with were just okay with it, but very few spoke to how it had radically transformed their business for the better."

The company chose Acumatica Commerce Edition for its innovative pricing model, connection to Magento, open API, and flexibility. "Our business is changing every year. I was more attracted to the scrappy technology disruptor in Acumatica than the entrenched monolith in NetSuite," Platt says.

Having confidence in Kensium, an implementation partner familiar with both Acumatica and Magento, was also critical to the decision-making process. AMI relied on a single internal employee to handle its Magento instance and wanted a backup. "We also wanted a partner who could support us and keep us on the cutting edge," says Platt.

American Meadows integrated several third-party applications with Acumatica in addition to Magento, including StarShip, Advanced Solutions Co.'s AR matching tool, Vertex for sales tax, and a custom app named Ship Season that provides information to customers about when an order will ship based on their plant hardiness zone. Other integrations included PayPal for a payment gateway, and Bronto, an email marketing automation platform.

BENEFITS

Single Source of Truth Between Financials and Web Store

With Acumatica and its connection to Magento, AMI's online orders now flow into the financial system in real-time. Order information is automatically sent to all departments, eliminating manual data input into various software and reducing errors.

The company gained a more secure payment gateway, the ability to issue credits, and the ability to charge credit cards at the time of order instead of the time an order shipped.

Speedily Pivot to Work from Home

Installing Acumatica was a lifesaver for American Meadows. "I don't know how we would have gotten through the initial Covid-19 outbreak without Acumatica," Platt says. "We were able to make the switch to be fully remote within a few days of making the decision."

"We were also able to handle our onboarding training remotely, which we would have never been able to do with our old system."

The ability to quickly pivot also allowed American Meadows to tackle unforeseen growth. "We are among the guilty few that have benefited from the pandemic," Platt explains. "Our sales are up over 75 percent year over year. Everyone is home and gardening, and we've been able to scale very quickly."

That's a remarkable feat given that American Meadows brings on some 25 people in the spring to handle its seasonal burst in business. Upon hearing from his peers about the difficulties they were facing from dealings in China, Platt recognized the potential impact to American Meadows, and he began planning quickly. "It's a blessing that we were an early adopter of Microsoft Teams so there wasn't a learning curve with a lot of the technology that other companies had to figure out," he says.

In addition to distributing the technological tools needed to operate the business, Platt's team had to train its new employees remotely as the pandemic hit. It was a lot easier than expected thanks to Acumatica, he says. "A lot of the new employees don't know about gardening and we have to cram a lot of information into a short time," Platt explains. "Thankfully, we have built out very good documentation with Acumatica that allowed us to train them on how to use the system quickly."

Data-Driven Insights Powers Customer Experience

Through Acumatica's General Inquiry capability, AMI staff mines its data for greater insights. "We can create really amazing views that have an impact on our business," Platt says. For example, they can now quickly identify potential shipping problems and act before it impacts the customer. "We have dashboards that show orders printed but not shipped and are greater than a day old," he says. "We can build views that identify potential issues before they become a problem."

For example, he cites an incident that happened as they moved into a 10,000-square-foot seed warehouse in Vermont, which coincided with the Acumatica Cloud ERP deployment. As part of the move, the team found 12 orders printed and set aside but not shipped. "We quickly identified them, got them shipped, and kept those customers satisfied," Platt says. Avoiding delays and problems boosts customer satisfaction and keeps buyers returning frequently and on an annual basis, essential drivers of American Meadows' business strategy.

While that example may seem trivial, "this is the level of gritty detail that matters to us and to the customer," Platt says. Amazon has set the bar high for speedy deliveries, and consumers' expectations of every business have risen as a result. "It's a challenge for small organizations like us to meet, but customers expect it," he says. "You need to have a tool like Acumatica that's integrated with all the other tools you have in place to meet Amazon-level consumer expectations."

Executives now have a high level of access to data that they previously lacked, critical to decision making. Platt also likes that he can securely access data from anywhere and at any time using the Acumatica mobile app.

Since American Meadows' strategy is to grow through acquisitions, as exemplified by the addition of High Country Gardens to serve the unique needs of gardeners in higher altitudes in 2013, having a solution like Acumatica in place that can handle a multi-brand company environment was also important, Platt says. "Just as gardening is different depending where you are at, we now have the flexibility and power of information to treat every customer with a uniquely personalized approach," he says. "We now have the data visibility and accessibility to identify our core customers, understand their challenges, and support them with tailor made gardening solutions. We can do all of this at scale now by leveraging cutting edge technology thanks to Acumatica."

 *Acumatica has given us a robust eCommerce solution to keep us on the cutting edge. We have the flexibility and data access that we need to scale our business as we grow, and to identify and resolve potential problems to our customer's satisfaction quickly.*

– Ethan Platt, President & Co-Owner 