



Making a House a Home: At Home's Journey to Becoming the Leading Home Décor Retailer

What makes a house a “home?” Ask a dozen people that question, and you’ll get profoundly varied answers – from the kitchen or living room to highly personalized decorating touches. Great homes combine the core structure of the house with the vision and style to make the dream a reality.

At Home, the home décor superstore with 136 large format stores, knows the touch of “home” means different things to different people. With this in mind, the retailer’s mission to offer the largest and freshest assortment of home décor at the lowest prices in the industry taps into the desire for value and individuality. However, for At Home to do this profitably depends on the ability to efficiently plan and allocate a broad mixture of product categories to each of the retailer’s stores at just the right time.

“Decorating a home is a continuous, ever-evolving process that can be as simple as replacing patio cushions with a new seasonal pattern or as

involved as updating the look of a whole room or the entire house,” said Kim Ramsey, VP of inventory planning & allocation.

Expanding Planning and Allocation for a Better Customer Experience

In order to remain competitive and maintain their ability to rapidly bring the most popular trends across all categories including bedroom, living room, dining & kitchen, bathroom and patio & garden, At Home needed to transform their inventory management system through a revitalized merchandise planning and allocation strategy and toolset.

Previously, At Home lacked several key internal components within their staff, processes and tools to effectively deliver on their product promise to consumers. For example, At Home had only

a small planning team and lacked an allocation team. Consequently, the lack of staffing resources led to inconsistent allocation and merchandise planning processes. This, along with limited technology and restricted set of key metrics, made it extremely difficult to accurately and effectively forecast and fulfill sales and inventory. “At the beginning of the project, there was really no planning and allocation team,” said Ramsey. “There was just one planner that was doing all of the plans in one home-grown spreadsheet.”

The challenge was that At Home wanted to build on its reputation of outranking its competitors in product assortment and quality; adding more than 20,000 new SKUs into its inventory system annually – an average of 400 additional SKUs per week.

“We needed to implement the proper business processes and tools if we were to have a realistic chance of supporting this rate of growth strategy,” said Ramsey. “We needed a robust allocation, planning and technological foundation to successfully continue to build out At Home.”

As well as addressing a core merchandise financial planning process and allocation efforts, At Home required the solution to easily manage new store planning, space and volume constraints, new category and key item opportunities, as well as seasonal events including promotions and the rollout of new business units. If the At Home team was not thorough in planning any one of these initiatives, it could mean dealing with financially damaging consequences.

Columbus Consulting as the At Home Design Specialist

At Home turned to Columbus Consulting International for their expertise in merchandise planning and allocation to develop a complete plan for staffing developments and business processes, and to identify the best technology solutions to take their merchandise and allocation strategy to the next level.



“The Columbus Consulting team was a perfect fit from the very start,” said Ramsey. “From day one, At Home’s main motto for this project was to be ‘simple, smart and scrappy’ and create an efficient environment that focused on all the key metrics. We thought carefully about the kind of partner we needed from a cultural standpoint; we didn’t want to over-engineer it and we needed someone who understood our trajectory.”

Columbus Consulting worked with At Home to review a selection of nine technology vendors and selected JDA’s Cloud Services suite to help At Home manage allocation and merchandise planning strategy.

“The Columbus consultants have sat in our seats in previous roles, have the knowledge and experience in successfully working with organizations of our size and understand the challenges and proper steps for a retail world that is constantly changing and evolving,” said Ramsey. “This team likes to roll up their sleeves and really get to work – which was ideal for us.”

Building an Assortment to Make Every House a Home

With the help of Columbus Consulting and JDA's applications, At Home successfully implemented the standardized processes to drive product growth. Additionally, Columbus Consulting helped At Home enhance its inventory allocation capabilities and leverage the systems and functions to improve the inventory lifecycle management efficiency.

"We are a high growth retailer, so one of our biggest challenges was getting our stores stocked with the appropriate inventory," said Ramsey. "The new approach has ensured we pay attention to the opening inventory levels. We now have the flexibility to support our continually evolving merchandise strategies, too; before, we weren't able to assign minimums and maximums. Being confident in our allocations and ensuring stores get just the right inventory is a huge deal."

As a result of Columbus Consulting's work with At Home, the retailer has been able to create an organization that is structured for maximum efficiency. These resources when combined with transformed business processes and robust and

scalable merchandise planning and allocation processes, take the capabilities of 'scrappy' to a whole new level.

Through their work with Columbus Consulting and JDA, At Home has achieved higher inventory service levels on "never out" items and can ensure the right product is in the right store at the right time. Additionally, with the proper systems in place, At Home has been able to align their marketing campaigns to inventory levels, open new store locations with the perfect assortment of merchandise for the local demographic, and ensure the retailer is set for the holiday season, making At Home the preferred destination every holiday season.

Today, At Home's planning and allocation teams use the latest cloud services technology and processes to live up to its brand promise of offering the latest in-home décor to help consumers turn a house into a home.

"Now we have the foundation in place for future growth, we can support a multitude of diverse business strategies, which lets us focus on best serving our customers and their beautiful homes," said Ramsey.



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