

## Case study

# The Tot delivers on the needs of parents globally with international shipping.

### Client profile

#### The Tot

thetot.com

- Online retailer of apparel and gear for young families
- Serves parents and children from pregnancy through school age
- Content and commerce provided in a single place



### Overview

New parents live in every corner of the globe, but those in some locales have better access to resources that help make family life more manageable. The Tot launched in 2016 to provide parents with educational content and useful products. Based in Dallas, the online store initially served U.S. customers almost exclusively, due to process inefficiencies. Customers outside the United States had to place orders via email, which was inefficient for The Tot staff and inconvenient for customers. The Tot turned to Pitney Bowes to facilitate seamless, automated international shipping through the same interface that processes U.S. orders.

### Business challenge

The Tot is a website and online store that publishes articles on topics from fertility and maternal wellness to child nutrition and development. It pairs this content with a wide range of curated products for parents and children. When it launched, The Tot was focused on a U.S. audience, but by building a robust social media presence, it soon developed a global following.

“From the beginning, our long-term goal has been to help parents around the world give their children the healthiest upbringing possible,” says

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Tim Forman, director of marketing for The Tot. “That appeals to every mother in the world.”

Unfortunately, The Tot’s ecommerce system couldn’t handle cross-border shipments. When customers placing an order in the online store entered an address outside the United States, they would receive a message instructing them to email their order instead. For each emailed international purchase request, The Tot staff had to check product availability, then travel to a local shipping store to determine which carriers could handle the delivery and to calculate taxes and customs duties before emailing the customer back with confirmation and details.

“The manual work made this process expensive for us and inconvenient for customers,” says Kathy Kipriotis, CEO of The Tot. “Still, we were getting emails every day requesting international deliveries. It was clearly a missed opportunity.”

## Solution

The Tot needed assistance developing an automated and efficient process for fulfilling international sales. The company selected a fulfillment vendor, but the attempted implementation did not go well. “It became clear that they didn’t have much more experience than we did,” Kipriotis says. “Unfortunately, we wasted three months trying to integrate with them.”

As the holiday season approached, The Tot started the process over and looked for a new solution provider. “We wanted to find a partner with a large network of clients in our industry,” Kipriotis says. “Different markets have different safety laws and regulations for kids’ products. We needed to work with a company that already understood how these laws and regulations worked.”

The Tot also needed to ship to a wide range of countries. China and Russia were particularly important new markets, yet some prospective fulfillment vendors excluded those nations from their offerings. Finally, The Tot needed a system that would appear seamless to customers.

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—Kathy Kipriotis, CEO, The Tot

After a thorough due diligence process, the company selected Complete™ Cross-Border—part of the Commerce Complete® solution platform from Pitney Bowes. “We evaluated six solutions,” Kipriotis says. “Pitney Bowes had the best technology integration by far. Even more important, we were highly impressed with the level of industry knowledge of our Pitney Bowes representatives. On our very first call, Pitney Bowes was describing all the different regulations affecting a certain product in various regions around the world.”

The TOT uses Pitney Bowes APIs to convert their USD prices into a customer’s local currency. Now, when customers access The Tot’s U.S.-based online store, the site automatically determines their location using their IP address. Those outside the U.S. are passed to the Pitney Bowes-hosted proxy, which greets them in their native language. (See Figure 1.) They can confirm the destination country by proceeding to the store or click a flag image to choose a different destination.

With the country established, the site displays products from The Tot, priced in the local currency. Shoppers place items in their cart just as U.S. consumers would. Some products, such as car seats and strollers, cannot ship abroad because regulations vary so substantially from country to country. The proxy site does not allow international customers to place these items in their shopping cart.

Next, during checkout, the solution displays the shipping options available for the selected delivery location, as well as customs and tax costs. (See Figure 2.) Pitney Bowes validates the international customer’s payment method and coordinates shipping, providing a tracking number from the carrier.

“Now, customers see the full cost of the transaction, in their local currency, the minute they place their order,” Kipriotis says. “That is much better customer service than we could provide in the days when these orders had to be emailed back and forth. We are very pleased with the API integration between Complete Cross-Border and TheTot.com.”



Figure 1: As they enter The Tot’s online store, international customers see a welcome screen in their own language, as determined by their IP address.

## Technology used

- Complete™ Cross-Border — part of the Commerce Complete® solution platform from Pitney Bowes

*"This solution gives us great insights into trends, which enables us to make better strategic decisions."*

—Kathy Kipriotis, CEO, The Tot

## Benefits

The solution was completed in six weeks, so the international store was fully functional just in time for the holidays. In its first six months, The Tot shipped to customers in 38 countries. Better yet, around 20 percent of its sales over that time period originated outside the United States — and almost all of that 20 percent was incremental growth. "Our reach has gone from one country to 200," Kipriotis says. "It's exponential."

It's also highly efficient. "Before, we never wanted to say no to a sale, but I have a very lean team, and international shipping was not our core competency," Kipriotis says. She estimates staff were spending several hours a day managing the company's few cross-border orders. "We wanted to focus on making the best possible products available to our customers. My team is much more productive now that they don't have to worry about manually preparing all our international shipments."

Complete™ Cross-Border provides The Tot with reports that show trends in international sales. "The data we get out of Complete Cross-Border really helps us understand global demand," Kipriotis says. "In the Middle East, which has become a big market for us, it's all about furniture. In the U.K., it might be apparel. This solution gives us great insights into trends, which enables us to make better strategic decisions around where we should have a presence and how to target our limited advertising resources."

The Tot is now evaluating other ways in which Pitney Bowes can help it streamline business processes. "The best thing about this solution is how seamless it is," Kipriotis says. "Pitney Bowes Complete Cross-Border is driving a significant amount of new revenue without requiring much time or effort at all from my staff. I wish we had done it earlier."



Figure 2: The international store, hosted on Pitney Bowes servers, presents prices in customers' local currency. It also shows all shipping options available in the customer's location, as well as appropriate duties and taxes.



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