Cleansing and consolidating consumer data enables us to deliver the kind of personalized experience today's consumers deserve and expect.

Steve Brennan, Vice President, Data Strategy and Analytics, Carhartt, Inc.

Improving the consumer experience in an omni-channel world

Established in 1889, Carhartt is a global premium workwear brand with a rich heritage of developing rugged products for workers on and off the job. Family-owned and managed by the descendants of the company's founder, Hamilton Carhartt, the company has global operations in the U.S., Mexico, and Europe. Carhartt's “Made in the USA” line is inspired by American workers and features some of the company’s most iconic garments. These products are made in four facilities located in Kentucky and Tennessee. Over the past 15 years, Carhartt has produced more than 80 million garments and accessories in the U.S.

Consolidating consumer and customer data in one location

Carhartt is a multichannel brand that sells its clothing online, through its own flagship retail stores, and through a wholesale channel. The company sells to both consumers, who are individuals purchasing Carhartt apparel; and customers, which are brick-and-mortar stores or web accounts that buy wholesale and sell to consumer or industrial accounts. The problem for the company was that all these channels had their own repository of information. “Our consumers and customers use a range of channels to purchase our products, so our customer service staff couldn’t go to a single repository and find all their correct, up-to-date information in order to answer questions and deliver a personalized experience,” says Steve Brennan, Vice President, Data Strategy and Analytics, Carhartt, Inc. “We wanted that unified repository so we could enhance the customer experience, and do better reporting, planning and data analysis.”

Creating a unified consumer/customer view would require integrating five source systems, each containing information on different aspects of the purchaser. The systems are a POS system for stores, the website, a loyalty system, the company SAP ERP system, and a system tracking wholesale transactions. “We didn’t want our staff members to have to piece together that puzzle in order to get a complete view of the purchaser,” says Brennan. A unified system would also have to communicate with company's Salesforce CRM system to provide a complete picture of a purchaser relationship.

But another obstacle to creating that cohesive, unified view was that purchaser information in Carhartt systems could be incorrect, inconsistent or duplicated. “We knew we needed to cleanse and verify data from similar fields in forms residing on all those systems before we could integrate it and have it be accurate,” says Brennan. “So we began our search for a solution that could handle those data-quality tasks, and function as a ‘single source of the truth’ about consumers and customers.”

Why Talend?

Brennan says Talend rose to the top among solutions Carhartt considered for several reasons. “We liked the open-source approach because there’s a whole development community behind it, and we can buy only the capabilities we need,” he says. “At the same time, the licensing model is flexible and will allow us to add functionality from other Talend products as our needs grow. For example, it’s likely we’ll need an Enterprise Service Bus (ESB) in the near future, and that’s in Talend’s product suite.”

Another key selling point for Talend, according
to Brennan, was the ability to deliver a near-real-time integrated system. “Other products we looked at are what I’d call ‘batch-based,’” he says. “But Talend is one of the few that stepped up and said ‘we can build this system to be near-real-time.’ That’s important, because if a consumer places an online order and then calls in and wants to change it, we need that order information to appear in the CRM system in a few minutes at most. Talend demonstrated it could make that happen by ingesting data, cleansing it, and sending it quickly to the CRM. That makes it possible for us to deliver a customer service experience consistent with our brand image.”

The capability to create robust data quality rules within the Talend tools is also of critical importance to Carhartt and, once implemented, their value was immediately apparent. “In the first six hours of the initial migration of data onto the Talend platform, we de-duplicated 50,000 consumer records,” says Brennan. “That means those consumers, when they contact us now, are going to have a better experience based on the consistent, complete information at our fingertips.”

Creating a unified view of consumers and customers

Talend Master Data Management (MDM) now functions as a centralized data hub for Carhartt as an enterprise and provides trusted data to be used for customer service, marketing, product planning and more. “We’ve now got one consolidated record containing all the important information on a consumer or customer, and that’s going to help us better manage our mix of channels and use the best one to communicate with specific purchasers,” says Brennan. “We’ll be able to make it easier, for example, for a consumer to buy something online and return it to a store.”

He says product planning can use the unified data to adjust the mix of products Carhartt manufactures, and the sales team working with wholesale partners can recommend better assortments for stores based on regional purchase trends.

“Using Talend to improve data quality also greatly improves our analytic capabilities and helps us understand how to better serve our customer,” says Brennan. “The data rules we’ve put in place will ensure that the MDM and CRM systems use data everyone can depend on.”

Next up, according to Brennan, is adding the product domain to the Talend platform. “Understanding and centralizing the descriptions of our products and the stock keeping unit (SKU) price, Manufacturer’s suggested retail price (MSRP), shipping weight and so on for every product will improve our operations,” he says. “Combining that with the consumer and customer data already in Talend and our CRM will make a huge positive impact on our operations and on the quality of the customer experience we can deliver.”