Next-Level Digital Retail

Innovations in digital retail – both consumer-facing and on the company back-end – were making tremendous strides before the pandemic. The rapid shift to transforming systems almost overnight created a landscape that focused more on delivery, pickup, and inventory tracking and helped keep business going after the sudden loss of in-store customers. Technology has helped keep businesses of all types operating during COVID, and it will be essential for the new ways in which businesses will run after the pandemic.

Savantis is leading the charge by developing and implementing groundbreaking digital products and services that assist clients across multiple industries with the digital transformation of their strategies, operations, and ultimately, their businesses. Savantis's focus industries include entertainment (such as cinemas and sports/concert venues), retail, hospitality and manufacturing.



Keith Hontz, CEO, Savantis

Savantis Intelligent Enterprise Solutions help retailers digitize as never before and put customers at center stage.

The company – an SAP® Gold Partner – was founded more than 20 years ago as an IT solutions provider. It has since evolved into a leading partner for the implementation of SAP solutions including omnichannel commerce and marketing, consumer-centric merchandising, and digital supply-chain management.

"We brought together an IT staffing company and SAP consulting firm Savantis, and formed Savantis Solutions Group," says Keith Hontz, CEO and President of Savantis, who had previously worked for SAP for 23 years. He left SAP for a CEO position at email solution provider SocketLabs and then came to lead Savantis in July 2020.

"Savantis is highly focused on cost-effectively delivering SAP solutions," he says. "We implement and support SAP solutions and we also provide expert IT resources to ensure our customers have a seamless, successful implementation."

Savantis has grown to 750 employees serving about 280 customers globally.

"Originally, we were providing IT staffing and expertise to companies that needed a database administrator, web developer, or resource they wanted to outsource," Hontz says. "We wanted to deliver higher-quality service at a lower price, so we got involved in just about every IT discipline. Eventually, we began to see that we could become a go-to SAP consulting partner, an implementation provider, and a systems integrator. We began to use those same IT staffing experts to build new capabilities for retailers we serve such as Sports Basement."

Sports Basement is a Bay Area sporting goods retailer that needed custom mobile applications to check inventory in its stores that would allow retail associates to look up pricing or availability of products on an iPad to offer instant answers for shoppers. It didn't previously exist, so Savantis used its expertise and insights from Sports Basement to build what the standard SAP didn't offer.

"Sports Basement has about a dozen locations and we were the SAP partner that helped them migrate

to the latest platform called SAP S/4HANA," Hontz says. "This is the platform that runs financials, procurement and inventory management, and then we added the customized mobile apps they needed to help better manage customer interactions."

This is the type of innovation the industry will continue to see as retail moves to the next level of data-driven marketing with a stronger focus on the individual customer across all industries. This is something Hontz calls, "an intelligent retail enterprise."

Intelligent retail enterprise is based on being more customer-centric across the entire value chain – "like putting the customer at the center of all decisions," he says.

When Hontz attended the National Retail Federation conference, PetSmart revealed that "intelligent retail enterprise" was the cornerstone of its strategy. "Eighty percent of retailers say it's a vital platform, but not many can actually make it happen," Hontz says. "I see achieving it as a No. 1 priority."

He also iterated that hyper-personalization will be key. "We're moving towards serving a 'segment of one,' (meaning the customer) and that is absolutely critical. Only about 10% of retailers will be able to achieve the level of personalized service and experience we're talking about so those who can, should be at the forefront of this shift."

In an effort to more clearly illustrate the types of innovations Savantis provides, it showcases its Intelligent Entertainment Suite (IES). The platform is described as a first-of-its-kind cloud-based, omnichannel, fully integrated solution specifically developed for businesses in the cinema, sports and entertainment, restaurant, and retailer sectors. IES enables companies to modernize their operations and future-proof their business with its more than 25 embedded accelerators built by Savantis for consumer-facing and back-office operations.

A video on Savantis's website shows the range of use possibilities in the entertainment venue and cinema industries. Mobile applications will be used to extend personalized offers to customers, who can then purchase tickets, choose seats, and preorder concessions, with a click or two. Additional deals or offers relevant to the customer's tastes or previous purchases will continue to be introduced throughout the duration of his or her visit to the venue.

"We're in active conversations right now with large entertainment venue operators for IES," Hontz says. "Savantis has already invested during the pandemic to enable socially distanced seating, ticketing, and online food ordering with contactless check-in, so no one has to touch anything on the way into the venue. The goal is to build innovations to help support a safe and efficient reopening as we believe that there will be unprecedented demand for live entertainment in a post-COVID world."

The demand for live entertainment, Hontz says, will explode once the U.S. has a level of vaccination protection to open again safely. "Many experts have gone on record as saying any time there has been any type of lockdown or quarantine, the amount of pent-up demand for entertainment is unprecedented for the next three to five years following," he says. "This will be true for COVID and we'll start to see that play out late this year."

Hontz also says the way business is conducted, both for office work and retail, will be forever altered because of the platforms that have been developed and the comforts the world has become used to during lockdown.

"The food and beverage delivery industry is thriving during this pandemic," he says. "And a number of companies will be needing solutions for not only non-alcoholic beverages and food but also wine and spirits. That segment is very well controlled and needs a certain environment that we're very knowledgeable in. We see that demand continuing after lockdown is over."

He says the same pent-up demand will also be true for travel and leisure and establishing digital supply chains is imperative. "We are looking at technology innovations to help safely reopen and we're currently in talks with SAP others to design, develop, and potentially integrate 'immunity passport capabilities.'''

It's likely hotels and resorts, entertainment venues, and mass transportation will require proof of vaccination as well, Hontz points out. "We're also strategically investing in this innovation because we're well-positioned based on our entertainment industry experience," he says. "There are some exciting innovations we're going to be unveiling later this year to take digital retail to the next level." — By Susan Belknapp, California Business Journal.

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