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**Independent garden retailers poised for digital business maturity overcome retail digital divide**
*OrderEase highlights opportunities during inaugural virtual Global Garden Retail Conference*

**[BARRIE, ON. 02.25.2022**] - OrderEase**,** a cloud-based wholesale order management technology and virtual trade show platform reports the inaugural Global Garden Retail Conference (GGRC) was a huge success. The first virtual B2B conference and trade show dedicated to the global retail horticulture industry brought together industry professionals, influencers and thought leaders from around the world.  In this 3-day event, new industry horizons and opportunities were brought forward to share, discover and discuss.

Almost 1,400 registered attendees participated from various countries including: United States, Canada, Australia, South Africa, United Emirates, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Russia, Japan and South Korea. Some of the biggest international suppliers in the lawn and garden sector not only sponsored the event, but also exhibited new and innovative products in the virtual trade show. "Independent garden centers and suppliers have expressed the need for such an event, laden with high-level education, access to the latest products being brought to market, and the opportunity to collaborate with peers facing the same retail challenges as a way to navigate through these unprecedented times," explains one GGRC Australian retail attendee.

The most impactful opportunity discussed at GGRC is that independent garden retailers can quickly and cost-effectively operate as mature digital partners in a digital commerce world to better compete with big eCommerce retailers.  Warren Patterson, CEO of OrderEase, and one of the key speakers at GGRC, knows first hand the challenges faced by these independent retailers. Having left PricewaterhouseCoopers supply chain e-commerce division in 2001 to open his own garden center he quickly learned the pain independent retailers experience in their B2B wholesale purchasing.  Patterson states,  "I encountered the frustrations of ordering, workflows and getting inventory from suppliers. I've witnessed the evolution of online and its impact on the in-store environment and customer experience. This is why I created OrderEase, to help small and medium sized players (SME's) across the entire supply/demand spectrum connect into a digital commerce network."

"The digital divide between big eCommerce retailers and independent retailers is continually widening. Tier one retailers are investing billions of dollars in technology infrastructure to improve inventory management, order management and  fulfillment, becoming high performance omni-channel retailers," shares Patterson.  This digital spend is leaving independent retailers playing catch up.  "Independent retailers play a very important

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role in the whole retail commerce space.  But as consumer demands continually shift, independent retailers need to become flexible in order to at least maintain the status quo with tier one retailers," explains Patterson.
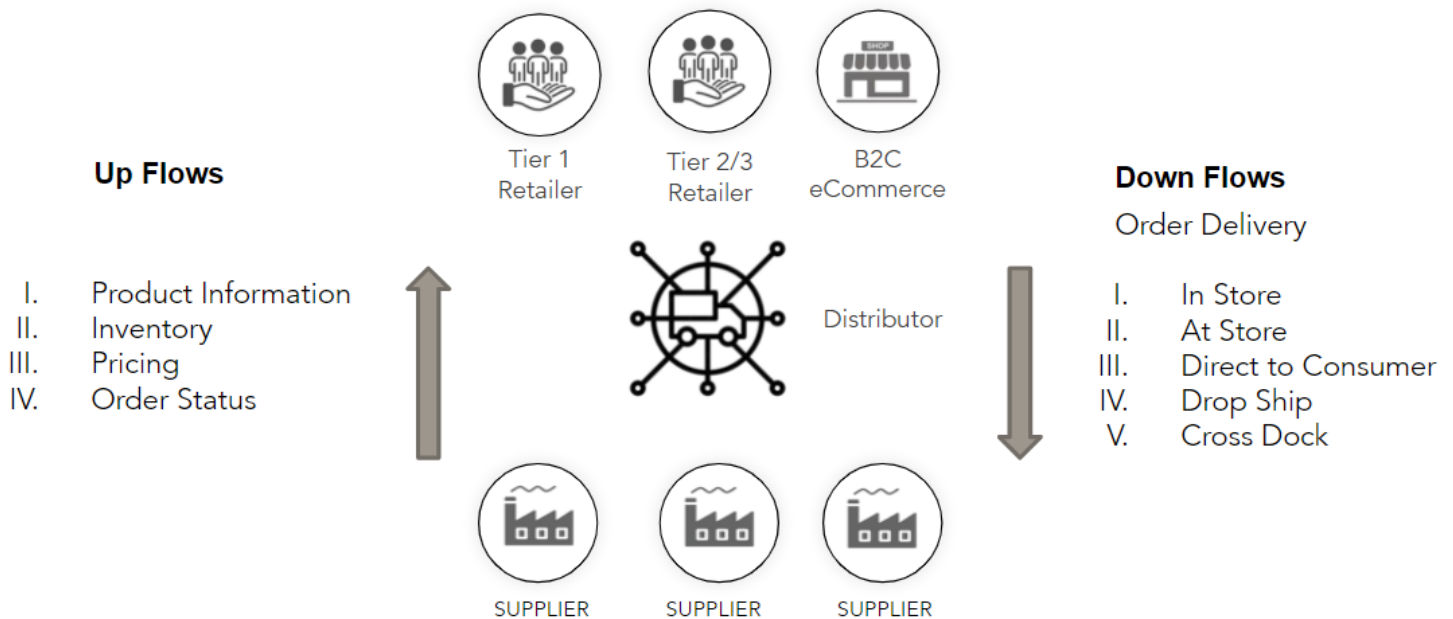


Global Retail Technology Spend Tops $200B
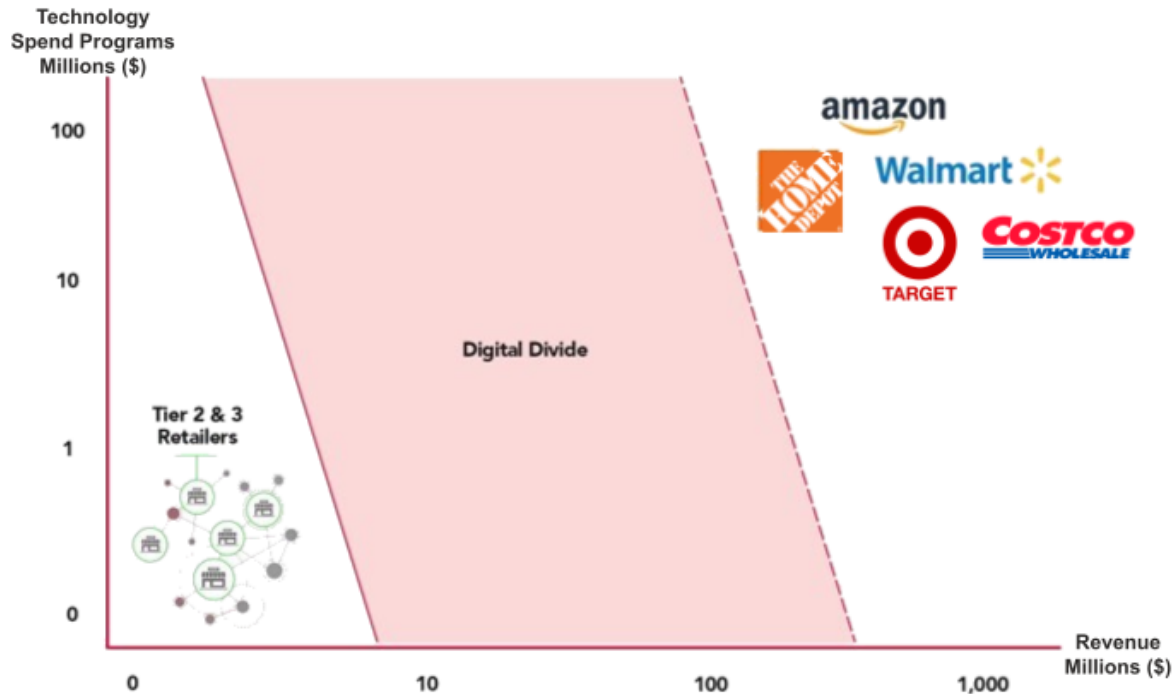
The pandemic accelerated this digital change. "Most garden centers were operating and serving customers only in-store. The sudden switch to online shopping left many independent retailers unprepared," adds a GGRC retail attendee from the United Kingdom.  Customer demands evolved as many got to the realization of what it meant to be able to buy in-store and online, and the various ways to get orders fulfilled.   "The end-consumer comes in and buys either in-store because of great staff, products and experience, or buys online for great service and functionality. The experiences they get in-store are expected to be available also online.  Then they want it delivered as quickly as possible, in the manner that suits them best: pick in store, pick up from store, ship from store, or ship by supplier," states a GGRC garden center retailer from the US matter-of-factly.  "Retailers who invested in technologies were well-positioned for a proactive response to capture those digital sales opportunities - becoming omni-channel leaders," Patterson expresses.

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Omni-channel only works once the data flow is optimized.  "For simplicity, the data upflow is information that needs to be shared with the customer: product information, inventory, pricing and order status. This flows up from suppliers to distributors and to retailers. Order delivery data flows back down the chain - if your order starts at the eCommerce online store, it needs to flow down to the distributor, and distributor orders need to flow down to the supplier," states Patterson. "This data flow needs to be digital in order to become seamless, timely and efficient. That is what tier one retailers have and independent retailers need - and can have."

## Omni Channel Data Flows



**Up Flows**

I.   Product Information
II.  Inventory
III. Pricing
IV.  Order Status

Tier 1 Retailer

Tier 2/3 Retailer

B2C eCommerce

Distributor

**Down Flows**

Order Delivery

I.   In Store
II.  At Store
III. Direct to Consumer
IV.  Drop Ship
V.   Cross Dock

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Patterson believes brands, distributors and growers can easily support an independent retailer focusing on omni-channel by engaging in some simple business digital transformations.  He outlines the impact and steps to achieve success, "Digitization brings quick results and high ROI - and more importantly value to your retailer relationship.  First, brands, distributors and growers need to develop a core digital warehouse or "vendor hub" for product information so they can digitally share its contents with their customers. Secondly, brands and distributors need to create a digital workflow with their customers.Thirdly, for some brands, they need to build consumer fulfillment so that retailers can offer ship-direct by the supplier directly to the end consumer."  Many vendors that work with tier one retailers already doing this also work with tier two/three retailers. "Independent retailers need to have some conversations with their vendors to have them help support their omni-channel," concludes Patterson.

Digital transformation extends to 3 key pieces of technology that retailers need to be able to succeed at omni-channel: a modern POS, a flexible eCommerce platform and the vendor hub. The modern POS has better system-to-system connectivity, functionality that helps capture more and better consumer data, the ability to share inventory and pricing found in-store with online customers, and data analysis to see channel performance. The eCommerce platform needs to be able to connect and share data with the POS, plus have the flexibility to customize and show in-store inventory online, while also providing various delivery options. The vendor data hub allows product info  to flow  into the order workflow between the retailers systems and vendor systems.

Once technology is set, key business practices need to evolve from an in-store environment to an omni-channel environment for the whole thing to succeed.  Patterson outlines,"First step is to be able to digitally consume info and share it across the entire organization in real-time - and this happens with connecting front and back-end systems.  Next, inventory management will help optimize inventory for market segments, ensure  accuracy and share inventory with the online consumer. Lastly you need to create omni-channel marketing: consumable through any marketing vehicle; customize messaging as consumers in specific channels change; and keep marketing messaging consistent since brand consistency breeds trust."

This constant state of change should not be viewed with a fearful eye - but rather as a key opportunity for independent retailers to better position themselves and embrace the omni-channel approach. The timing is perfect with the business environments constantly in flux: changes to consumer behavior, labor shortages, new technologies evolving and relentless competition from tier one retailers.

**Patterson explains all of these concepts in detail within the video:  How to Compete Against the Big Box Stores |  Overcoming the Digital Divide, that you can watch [here](here).**

**To learn more about OrderEase contact us at [sales@orderease.com](mailto:sales@orderease.com).**

**About OrderEase**

[OrderEase](#) believes wholesale ordering can be easier—and so do more than 12,000 customers who use their solution. The OrderEase cloud solution synchronizes retailers with wholesalers utilizing a centralized hub that connects supply chain systems with online product catalogs for fast, accurate wholesale ordering. Uniquely positioned to capitalize on streamlined wholesale ordering, OrderEase's proven technology, growing customer base, and strategic business model makes it an ideal solution for industries with complex pricing models and customer tiers.

OrderEase serves multiple industries, including lawn and garden, lumber and building materials, pet supplies, craft beer, grocery, convenience, and home décor.

**If you would like more information about this topic, please call:**

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