

## TALES OF THE UNEXPECTED GLITCH

## #2: The horse knows best

**MICHAEL BLOOM**, of specialist stock management company **Top to Toe**, offers a regular look at the difference technology can make to your business.

Looking back, Mrs Carter realized that she could track her website problems to two common causes. A shop's website had to have an automated feed of stock information, and secondly the stock system had to cater to the special needs of her industry.

She now understood that lingerie (and clothing in general) was not the same as other areas - where one product was distinct and different to any other product. For clothing retailers of all types, one product was in fact a combination of many sizes and colours. Mrs Carter considered that they had 400 web products to manage, but in their current stock system most actions had to be done on each separate size/colour variant - and there were thousands of them.

For example, to receive in a camisole with four colours and 10 sizes meant going in and out of 40 separate products. The system they had did many things, but every action had to be done many times over on each size/colour and it was taking forever. Often, before one lot of merchandise was processed, more arrived - they were constantly playing catch-up; while at the till, items with lost barcode labels were a nightmare, throwing off the accuracy of the whole system.

Mrs Carter's colleague, Mrs Equus, however was not daunted, she knew they needed a new stock system and she looked at every system with a claim to specialisation, she discounted references. From outside the clothing industry and she re-visited all the systems Mrs Carter had previously seen. She did not take the salesman's word that it was specialist or easy - she watched carefully and often used the systems herself.

With each system she tested every stage and a number of scenarios. If it was easy to enter a product with

many sizes and colours she then looked further and in depth at how top-ups were entered; if it handled size and colour throughout how did it handle fits; how orders were raised; how stock, shop sales and web sales were assessed; how the tills handle size and colour, and how the web links performed. When she had narrowed down her choices she then went on site visits to look at each system "in action".

Amazingly, now they knew what to look for. Mrs Equus and Mrs Carter did not find the choice of system difficult. The more they looked, the narrower the field became - truly specialist-systems for the lingerie and clothing industry seemed very, very scarce. So after careful consideration it became obvious that one product was the clear winner; it did what was needed, and in almost every key area it was easier, and often more powerful, than its competitors.

The reference sites were good too, and it also had a key bonus ingredient - flexibility. Mrs Carter and Mrs Equus knew what they needed today, but could not be sure what would be required tomorrow. Their chosen system seemed flexible enough to cope with alternative usage patterns, changes in their company procedures, and changes in their requirements - all without becoming over complicated.

So together, Mrs Carter and Mrs Equus embarked on the path to accurate stock management, and what they hoped would be a more secure future.

**Horse sense:** Foundations are critical, get the foundations right. Find the right stock management system, this is critical.

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## VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY

## Look beyond size and fit



**ELISABETH DALE,**  
founder, [TheBreastLife.com](http://TheBreastLife.com)

Wearing a bra may be an ordinary part of my daily dressing routine, but there's nothing more exciting than discovering a new style or brand that fits my body beautifully. For many women, finding a "perfect" foundation is like searching for the proverbial needle in a haystack. It doesn't matter whether she's looking for something to wear under a wedding dress, a professional power suit, or a yoga top. The challenge isn't so much about bra fit as it is about what fits her personal style. And if she fails to find what she seeks, she often blames herself.

This ongoing challenge is no surprise given that no two breasts are alike. Many of us won't acknowledge that our breasts continue to change in size, shape, and density. I've found that women are also unaware of the wide variety of bra sizes and styles available to them.

Educating and informing women of their lingerie options is too often focused on "fit" or the "right" bra size. We're reminded that "8 out of 10" of us wear the wrong size, even though some of us can wear more than one size in different brands. Then we're introduced to multiple measuring methods and ways to calculate. What good is it if all bras aren't sized the same or fit alike?

All this alphanumeric data can sometimes confuse and mask a more

important aspect of bra buying. Bra fit is personal and subjective. Women know what kind of fit they prefer whether it's found in a wired, push up, lace, contoured, or unstructured bra. We have our preferences. More important than size and fit is whether a bra "fits" a woman's unique fashion sense, sexuality, and lifestyle.

Some brands have responded to a growing consumer demand for greater diversity. Social media bra campaigns have claimed the more youthful DD+ market. A photo of two differently sized lingerie mannequins taken in an unidentified department store recently went viral on social media, and was hailed as a breakthrough in accepting and celebrating women of all shapes and sizes.

More can and should be done to broaden consumer views of the current lingerie spectrum. Sexy lingerie doesn't always have to be defined through the narrow lens of the straight, heterosexual male gaze. Post-nursing moms could use some help with lovely bras to reclaim their bodies and breasts after years of multiple pregnancies. Rising worldwide rates of breast cancer should translate into more post-mastectomy lingerie offerings.

Women shouldn't feel like they have to go on a scavenger hunt at multiple stores to find what suits them best. And that's where we could use a little more guidance from the lingerie industry.