

Nicole Whitesell, Founder of Adorn: Building a Successful Multi-Store and Online Boutique



From Online-Only to Four Storefronts Across Portland, Oregon

Nicole Whitesell has always had a passion for curating and selling products. She got her start in high school, bringing unique products to shoppers online through platforms such as eBay.

This continued to be a side hustle as she developed a career building homes as a general contractor. But when the recession hit, Nicole decided to pivot her career and move her family in with her parents.

This major life change presented an opportunity to do something different, and Nicole took the leap: With nothing but a credit card to jump-start her small business, she launched her online boutique and opened a storefront in Portland, Oregon. She called her business [Adorn](#).



Managing four retail locations and an online store created challenges for inventory management.



Existing software solutions weren't designed to support inventory sync and order management across multiple retail locations.



As the company grew, Adorn's staff couldn't keep up with the strain of manual inventory tracking. The boutique was at risk of having to give up on its retail store.

At first, Adorn attracted new customers by relying on community connections, word-of-mouth advertising, and its online presence. Two years later, Nicole decided to relocate the storefront to a better location just three blocks down the street.

This small move had a big impact: Adorn tripled its revenue in its new location. On the heels of this success, Nicole was able to expand Adorn into a second location. Today, Adorn has four locations in the Portland metro area, along with a thriving online store.

“We started online, and the storefront was really more of a requirement,” says Whitesell. “Eleven years ago, everyone was freaking out about online business putting brick-and-mortars out of business, and so a lot of manufacturers required you to have a storefront to sell their products online as well.”



Along the way, Nicole’s experience operating a growing clothing boutique has taught her the ins and outs of running a retail business—specifically, one that splits its service across multiple store locations and an Ecommerce site. As any boutique owner can guess, it hasn’t always been an easy process. Growth is rarely linear, and every day can bring unforeseen challenges.

In this case study, we’ll take a closer look at the obstacles Nicole and her team overcame as they grew Adorn into the thriving boutique it is today.

Building Adorn from the Ground Up—Twice

When Nicole first opened Adorn, she was the only person running the operation. It was 18 months before Nicole was able to bring in help. She started by hiring one full-time in-store employee, followed by another full-time team member to manage the online store.

The new team faced a major setback just three months after moving locations. A fire burned down their store location, forcing Nicole to start from scratch. Despite this difficulty, the company recovered and has steadily grown ever since. Today, Adorn employs 28 employees across four store locations and a business headquarters—the majority of whom are full-time employees.

Even as her business has grown and tasks have been delegated to other staff members, Nicole continues to perform a wide range of roles depending on the company's needs. She handles marketing strategy and buying for all four stores, which includes traveling to discover new products to carry in boutique locations.

A normal week can see Nicole moving products from one location to another, communicating with her director of stores and leadership team to ensure smooth operations, and handling big-picture tasks such as strategy development and response to new business challenges.

As a business owner, no two weeks—or even two days!—are the same. While Adorn has grown over the years, Nicole has had to continually problem-solve to find better ways of managing store operations and the Ecommerce site.

One of the biggest challenges? Ensuring inventory information was accurate across the board.

“We often appear online to be much larger than we are but we have a small core team all wearing a lot of hats.”

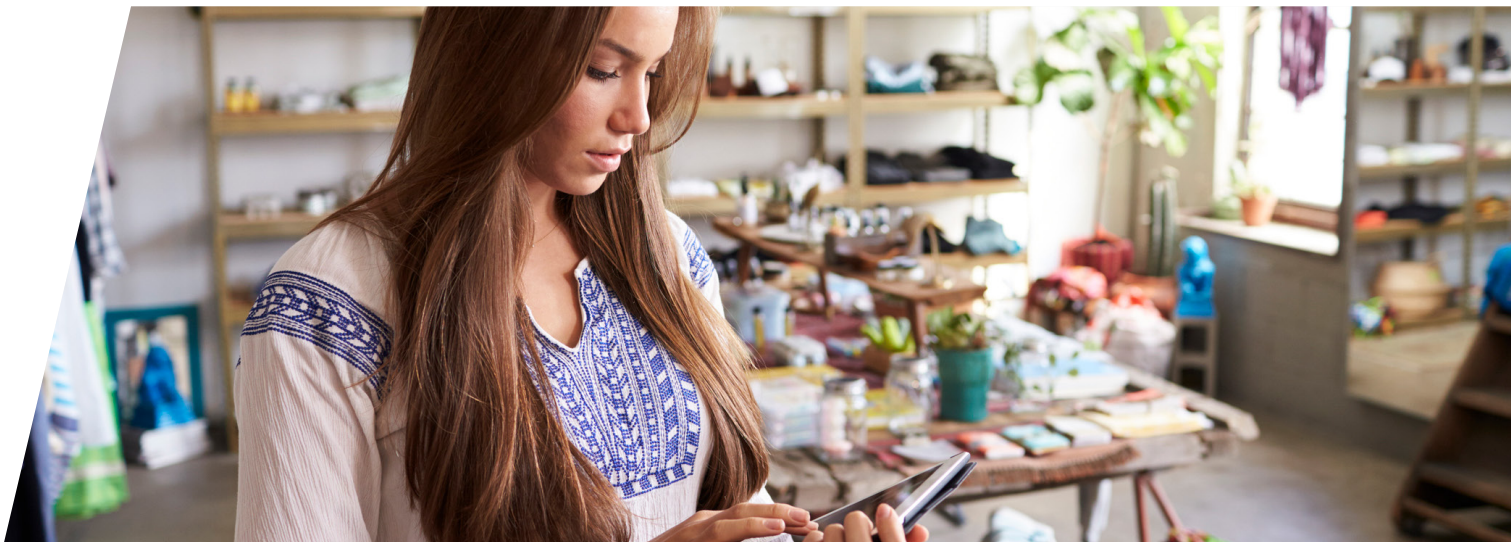
“We never knew what inventory was available at each location,” says Whitesell. “So we had a really tedious process of tracking inventory. If an item was available at two stores, we wouldn’t know how many of an item were at each store. So if it was a white tank top, and we had two at two different stores, we wouldn’t know if they were both at one location, or if those two items were split.”

Managing Inventory Online and Across Four Store Locations

Expanding to multiple locations was an exciting process for Adorn, but it wasn’t without its growing pains. As the boutique expanded, inventory management became much more complicated.

Adorn has used Shopify since its inception, but only online.

Shopify’s frequent platform updates and easy third-party app integration made it easy to work and grow with, but Adorn started to notice gaps as it expanded to multiple locations. Without an easy way to really manage inventory across multiple store locations, the team was spending hours manually tagging products and tracking inventory.



From the beginning, Adorn has used [Lightspeed](#) as its point-of-sale and inventory management solution. The platform's built-in analytics and reporting capabilities have helped Adorn gain more visibility into its inventory and its business, and features such as purchase orders and transfers have improved inventory tracking in each store.

When Adorn needed to upgrade to multi-store inventory management, Lightspeed had a basic integration with Shopify, but only one store's inventory could be featured on the company's Shopify site. This limited the quantity and variety of products that could be offered online.

“I would have had to give up having all 4 locations inventory available online which would have given our customers a smaller selection and limited our reach with product.”



To manage operations across four stores, plus the Ecommerce site, Adorn needed a tool that could sync inventory information across all stores and connect each location's inventory with the online store as well.

Nicole knew that a better tool would make life easier for her team and give their customers a better shopping experience. The hard part was finding a solution that checked those important boxes.

Saving Time and Energy by Putting the Right Tools to Work

To get the business functionality she was looking for, Nicole knew she would need to find a different way to connect and sync inventory data across all four locations plus the online store.

When a team member discovered Accumula, Nicole posed her situation to the Accumula team and found that they had a deep understanding of her existing tools and how to connect them in order to eliminate the manual steps her team was having to take to keep track of inventory.

“I really liked that I could talk to the same person every time, and they were super knowledgeable about the ins and outs of Lightspeed and how they were going to connect,” says Whitesell. “The verbiage they were using was very reassuring that they knew all of the red flags I had dealt with in the past.”

Nicole also appreciated how Accumula’s team members were able to help her think through big-picture strategy.

“A lot of times someone might know a lot about connecting two programs and building a connector, but they don’t actually understand what’s inside the point-of-sale,” says Whitesell.

For those reasons, it was the obvious choice to partner with Accumula to sync Adorn’s in-store and online operations, with the ultimate goal of making backoffice processes more efficient. Since the initial partnership, Accumula has been on hand to support the Adorn team each step of the way.

“When we contact Accumula and say, ‘We need this feature set up tomorrow,’ it always gets done. They’ve responded really quickly to our needs and requests. It’s been great.”



Transforming Day-to-Day Operations for a Better Customer Experience

After the initial setup with Accumula, Adorn was able to reach the level of ease and performance that Nicole and her team had been trying to achieve for years.

Having real-time access to omnichannel data across Adorn's four locations has increased Nicole's understanding of how specific units or categories are performing. This has helped the company improve its decision-making when stocking new items for the upcoming season.

The ability to automatically publish inventory to Adorn's website has made Ecommerce easier, reducing double entries and freeing up the team to work on more impactful projects. By including inventory from all four stores online, Adorn now reaps the benefits of expanded sales opportunities, increasing sell-through.

The new fulfillment process is easier on store staff, too, because Accumula automatically routes orders to the store that happens to have stock of that product. Now that products can be located right away, in-store teams can ship product faster, expediting the entire fulfillment process.

And if local customers aren't happy with their purchase, they can easily return items in-store at their convenience thanks to buy online, return in store (BORIS) service. The walls separating online and offline retail channels have been torn down, improving the customer experience while allowing Adorn to operate more efficiently.

Less Time on Technology = More Time Doing What You Love

With four locations plus an online store, it was no longer feasible to manage everything manually, even with a large team. Nicole's team wanted a way to retain the high-value insights offered by the Lightspeed platform, which they considered critical to understanding their customer base, while addressing the functionality gaps that burdened day-to-day operations for both the in-store and online teams.

Now that she isn't sinking time into inventory-related hassles, Nicole has more time to focus on what she is passionate about: growing her business and crafting the best possible customer experience. The company's 2020 focus is to reinforce existing systems and processes internally to better serve the needs and wants of its customer base. Nicole isn't looking to expand to new locations; she says four locations feels like the perfect size to keep Adorn competitive in its retail space while remaining agile and responsive to customer expectations for a rewarding, local boutique experience.

“Accumula took care of a problem we were having,” says Whitesell, “and it allowed us to have multi-store functionality and not lose the ability to have all of our inventory online. They took away the burden of not knowing where our inventory was, and it has saved us a ton of time.”



Delegating to Your Team AND Your Partners

As Adorn grew, its needs evolved. Managing multiple stores is much different than managing a single location or an Ecommerce site. Having all of your technology work together without a hitch can make all the difference.

“If you have multiple stores and you have a solid online business then you need that connection to happen, [Accumula] really is a no-brainer,” says Whitesell. “I like to keep things as low-cost as possible, but at the same time—you get what you pay for.”



Nicole started out wearing all of the business hats at once, and that instinct for multitasking will likely never change. But as all entrepreneurs know, there comes a point when managing everything on your own and taking on tedious manual processes keeps your business from moving forward.

In Nicole’s view, one of the most important parts of leadership is delegation—and not just to other members of a business team. Sometimes it takes the right software to remove barriers and provide the empowerment necessary to bring your business to the next level.

ADORN

About Adorn

Adorn is a unique styling boutique in Portland, Oregon, offering personal styling and a wide selection of beautiful brands including Prairie Underground, Velvet, Citizens of Humanity, Mother Denim, Sanctuary, Emerson Fry, and more!



About Accumula

Accumula unites in-store, online, and backoffice operations so that retailers can focus on their Customers, not their software. By seamlessly integrating point of sale, Ecommerce, digital marketing, ERP, and custom applications, SME and DTC retailers can get closer to their Customers and create brand-defining experiences across every channel.



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