

Universal Hotel Liquidators

never misses

a deal thanks to
AT&T collaboration,
tracking and mobility tools



- **Business Needs** - A furniture entrepreneur wanted to take advantage of every opportunity that came his way, whether he and his staff were working in the warehouse, at a job site, or on a delivery run.
- **Networking Solution** - AT&T CollaborateSM makes it easy for Universal Hotel Liquidators staff and customers to connect with one another, even on the fly. Additionally, the AT&T Fleet Complete[®] solutions enable the company to track pickup and delivery trucks and provide the best possible service to its clientele.
- **Business Value** - Being readily accessible enables the company to close more deals; receiving and sharing information faster supports responsive customer care and helps grow the business.
- **Industry Focus** - Furniture liquidation and sales
- **Size** - More than 10,000 hotel rooms liquidated

About Universal Hotel Liquidators

Universal Hotel Liquidators (UHL) is the largest liquidator of quality hotel furniture in the U.S. Founded in 1999 by David White, the company works with major hotel chains such as Marriott, Sheraton, Ritz-Carlton, and Hyatt. UHL has been featured in numerous publications, including The Wall Street Journal, USA Today, and the New York Post, and has earned a reputation as a company with a heart. After a trip to Gambia, where White saw firsthand the crushing poverty, he helped form an employment agency that helps Gambians get good jobs on cruise ships and in other industries. UHL also donates beds, desks, and other furniture to improve the quality of life of people in Gambia and other developing countries.

The situation

UHL is a small business with a huge inventory, which it showcases in a 60,000-square-foot warehouse in West Haven, Connecticut. Every day, the company hears from major hotels looking to offload furniture, and from smaller and unbranded hotels interested in buying quality furniture

at significantly discounted prices. UHL maintains a small staff to keep prices low, and employees are often deep in the warehouse, or out on a truck making a pickup or delivery. White needed a way to ensure that customers could always reach him and his staff. To further ensure excellent customer care, White also wanted a better way to track his fleet vehicles.

Solution

AT&T CollaborateSM gives UHL a flexible hosted solution with the voice features and collaboration tools the company needs, no matter where its employees are working. UHL also uses AT&T Fleet Complete[®], a suite of GPS-based tracking and management tools that connect its warehouse staff with company drivers. The solutions improve efficiency and support the high standard of customer care that distinguishes UHL in its market.



Building on early business success

Universal Hotel Liquidators has become famous throughout the New England area for providing outstanding bargains in quality furniture. Founder and CEO David White is a business whiz who launched his first successful company while still in college. “I was always entrepreneurial,” he said. “I started making T-shirts for my fraternity and eventually we employed 150 people.”

One of the company’s most successful items was a shirt that satirized the preppy polo shirts featuring an alligator logo. “Our shirts showed an alligator wearing a shirt that had a logo of a little man on them,” White said. He sold the shirts to U.S. department stores, including Macy’s and Bloomingdale’s, and to stores in a number of other countries. According to White, they shipped 35,000 shirts out of his parents’ basement in the suburbs of New Haven, Connecticut, on a street that had never even had a tractor trailer on it before.

White built on his early success and expanded the company to include upscale resort wear retail shops in the U.S. and the Caribbean. “At the same time, we were designing and printing shirts for Adidas, Puma, and Reebok,” he said. “And we did 250,000 T-shirts as part of a promotion for MTV.”

After selling his clothing business, White recognized an opportunity in the hotel furnishings market when he noticed how often high-end hotels refresh their rooms and common areas. He figured that small to mid-range hotels, other businesses, and even individuals would jump at a chance to pick up top-quality furniture at discounted prices. “I always liked historic hotels and I met a gentleman that

was liquidating a hotel in New Haven,” White said. “A year later, I invested in a project he was doing in Puerto Rico that involved two hotels and a convention center, and that’s how I started Universal Hotel Liquidators.”

Much of UHL’s massive inventory comes from top-tier hotels that take great care of their furniture, but replace it every few years to maintain their aura of luxury. The company also sells brand new, commercial-grade furniture it purchases directly from manufacturers. “Our customers are happy because they’re able to afford something that they otherwise might not be able to afford,” White said. “The quality is a lot better. Hotel-grade furniture is made to last.”

UHL’s business model also benefits the environment. “It’s hard for hotels to get rid of their used furnishings,” he said. “Some were just throwing beds and other furniture into landfills. Now we’re helping the hotel industry become green, because we recycle everything. We take it off their hands and sell it, and they look good.”

Seizing every opportunity

Smart management is part of the reason why UHL can offer furniture at such attractive prices. “When we first started in 1999, the internet was just starting,” White said. “I hired kids from Teen Challenge to call hotels all over the country and ask the chief engineer if the hotel would be liquidating rooms any time soon.” According to White, they would usually get hung up on. “Now, people are calling us because of Google and other search engines,” he said. “We’re not out there aggressively looking for hotels, but people are coming to us because of our reputation.”



“We’re a small company. We don’t have secretaries or anything like that. We use AT&T Collaborate for communicating around the office and transferring calls when someone is on the road.”

David White

Founder and CEO, Universal Hotel Liquidators

UHL has expanded significantly since those early days, but they continue to operate with a lean staff, which means that most workers have several responsibilities. They could be on one of the company’s trucks, working at a hotel, or assisting a customer in the warehouse. Some staff do most of their work at a time when few other businesses are operating. “We’ll often go into a hotel during the night while guests are sleeping and take all the furniture from an entire floor,” White said.

Like most successful business owners, White wants to take advantage of every opportunity that comes his way, whether it’s a hotel looking to replace

hundreds of rooms of furnishing, or a student from Yale or the University of New Haven who needs a few pieces of inexpensive furniture for their apartment. He needed a way to ensure that staff was available to respond to the company's diverse clientele and prospective customers.

Communicating more effectively

AT&T CollaborateSM, a cloud-based voice solution, enables UHL's workers on the go to be more accessible to White, to one another, and to UHL customers. The solution includes features such as employee availability, instant messaging, and conferencing to make employees as productive as their dynamic CEO.

"We're a small company. We don't have secretaries or anything like that," he said. "We use Collaborate for communicating around the office and transferring calls when someone is on the road." When White or his staff are traveling, he appreciates receiving emails of recent voice messages. "Everything is online, so we can set up our hunt groups and check anything we want to. It's very sophisticated," he said.

The solution helps the small company operate like a much bigger organization, improving communication by routing calls to the person who can best help each caller. "We can determine the order in which incoming calls will ring," White said. For example, UHL can program the system so that calls go first to the sales manager, then to another staff member, and finally to voicemail if the first two staff were unavailable. "We don't want it ringing a lot," he said. "We want it finding someone. We want that call to be answered. I like being able to manage things so that we never lose a call. One call could be very important."



"Where's my truck?"

UHL also uses AT&T Fleet Complete[®], a system of tracking and management solutions that further connect White and his staff with the company's vehicles. He calls the system "amazing," and says it helps solve the business owner's age-old problem: "Where's my truck?"

"When you have 6 guys in your truck and they're waiting for you at the Ritz-Carlton in New York and the hotel manager is saying that he needs those rooms cleaned out now, we don't have to call and ask our guys where they are," he said. "Especially when they were there, in their truck, the whole time."

Fleet Complete also helps UHL when the drivers are in the neighborhood making small deliveries. "We just like knowing where they are," he said. "Plus it lets us know how fast the driver is going, and where and when he stops. It's an amazing service."

White plans to add to the Fleet Complete features that UHL currently uses. "I just talked to a salesman today about putting in a dash cam to further protect

our drivers,” he said. The system can notify drivers of speeding, tailgating, and lane departures to discourage the behavior, and it can help clear the driver’s name in case of an accident or accusation of bad driving.



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David White

Founder and CEO, Universal Hotel Liquidators

Big solutions for the small business

White says his staff was somewhat surprised at the level of care they receive from AT&T. “If we ever have a problem, there’s always someone there,” he said. “They worked with me to get every situation solved.” As the owner of a successful business, he understands the importance of listening to his customers. He just didn’t expect it from a global powerhouse like AT&T. “I thought they would want to work with larger businesses, but it’s clear that AT&T cares about the small business,” he said

AT&T’s attentiveness to his company’s needs has led White to recommend AT&T to other business owners. “AT&T is a great company for a small business to deal with,” he said. “And they’re huge – I get great service from them.”