

How CompuCart's Rowan Fine keeps diversifying

By  Maroefah Smith

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Rowan Fine came to the conclusion that he should pursue a career in the consumables market after he ran some numbers while ordering consumables for a restaurant he was working at in Johannesburg.



Rowan Fine

Putting the idea of a career in hospitality out of his mind, he started CompuCart with the aim of selling consumables to all of Johannesburg.

CompuCart was launched in 2002 and it has since become a one-stop shop for anything IT or office-related from hardware to office supplies and even outsourced procurement.

Fine let us in on the benefits and challenges of diversifying a business, dispelling the 'stick to your niche' myth, and the company's future plans.

What are the three words you'd like people to think when they hear 'CompuCart'?

Reliable, capable and caring.

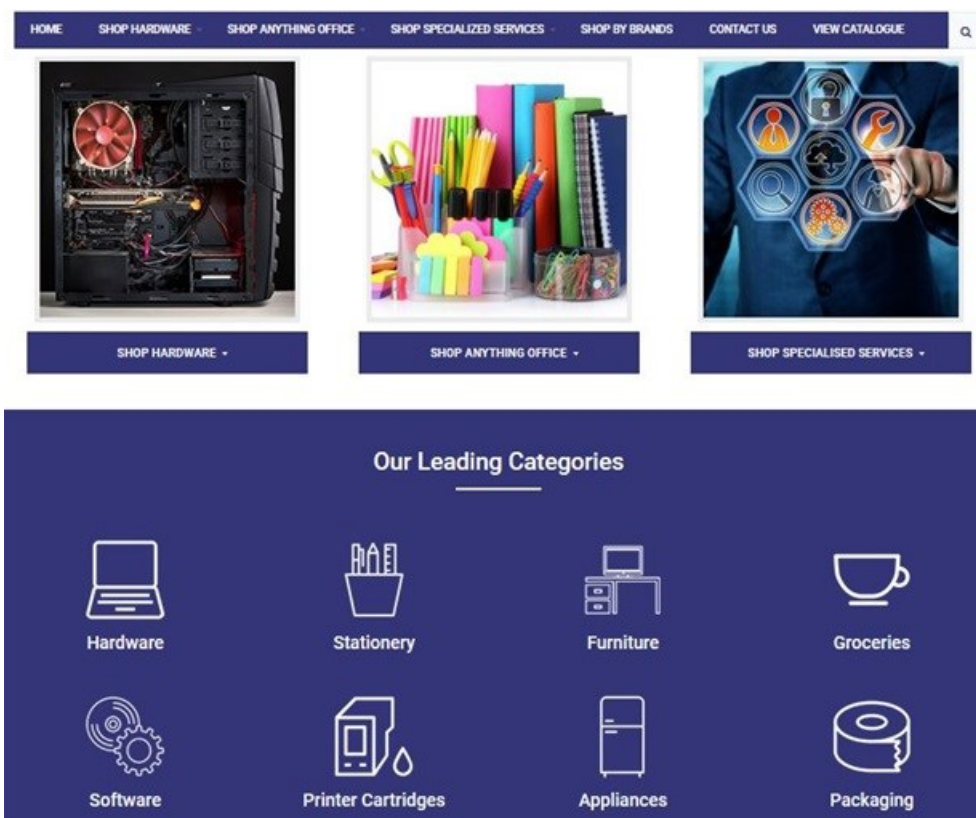
What do you think makes CompuCart unique?

Its ability to provide end-to-end office solutions for all business types and sizes. We can offer a true one-stop shop for our clients' procurement requirements without them having to waste time looking around for competitive deals. We will deliver quotes, brands and pricing to suit their needs and budget. 'Anything office' has always been our ethos and this has seen us grow our platform and our extensive product portfolio. We could never say 'no', hence our multiple ranges of products and services.

How did you start to dispel the 'stick to your niche' myth?

The more our clients leaned on us, the more we felt we had to deliver what they needed. We realised there was a need to deliver all related complementary services and products that fit our clients' procurement requirements and environments. Then, the more I heard clients talking about their IT guy, their coffee guy, or their paper guy, the more I was inspired to find them the best possible fixes for their problems.

I wanted to prove that we were not only a specialist IT supplier but also an office supplies provider. Niche suppliers tend to charge more than the competitive market rates for the same products and we realised that niche may solve the need, but it won't help the bottom line. And this philosophy has helped us to dispel that stick to the niche myth by proving that diversity works.



■ ***What are some of the benefits of diversifying your business?***

Diversification is the key to sustainable business growth and development. We knew that we would have to build on our original base of cartridge and paper sales so we could offer clients multiple supply options that kept our business flowing and the problems solved.

In today's uncertain economy, relying on a narrow range of products results in a finite number of clients. That's fine if the market is stable and big enough to support you and your competitors, but when there are budget constraints then both your business and your clients need to save money and diversity is critical.

Diversifying into new product lines can be essential for the long-term viability of a company. We adapted this method years ago before the economy started to stagger, and the more our clients throw at us, the more fun we have. We are faced with unique procurement challenges every day and this pushes us to excel.

■ ***And what are some of the challenges?***

All businesses have their challenges around back-office administration, cash flow and debt collection. But from a supply and service point of view, we have none. We grow alongside our client demands and expectations.

■ ***What's your advice for entrepreneurs wanting to expand their offerings?***

To grow, you need to offer more. If your clients trust you and rely on you, your business is in the ideal position to expand. The more you can help your client and save them time and money, the more you can grow your business. However, you need to ensure you have the right platform to back up your new offerings. Invest into what you are passionate about and focus on growth.

■ ***What else should we anticipate from CompuCart in the future?***

Our focus for 2019 is to continue investing in our hardware-as-a-service (HaaS) model by introducing Compucare. This is a unique approach that allows us to supply both hardware rental to our clients coupled with support.

We will also be launching our procurement cost savings model that provides customers with access to our pool of suppliers at cost price. Details of this will be released in the first quarter of the new year.

ABOUT MAROEFAH SMITH

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