

# Chez Pluie upscales its ecommerce business with Zoho Creator



# Table Of Contents

|                          |    |
|--------------------------|----|
| The company .....        | 03 |
| The challenge .....      | 04 |
| The solution .....       | 07 |
| Benefits and ROI .....   | 12 |
| About Zoho Creator ..... | 17 |

## The Company

In 2015, Chez Pluie.com was launched by Susannah and Hugh Cameron in France as an ecommerce business offering high-end antique furniture to clients in the USA and worldwide. Since then, it has grown to become the number one French furniture store according to Trustpilot, and it has been featured in industry leading publications such as Vogue, Architectural Digest, Wall Street Journal, Condé Nast Traveller, and The Times. Chez Pluie delivers decorative French antiques worldwide from France to the doorsteps of its customers. Also, the company's finders service connects customers with specific antiques they might be searching for.

Because Chez Pluie is exclusively online and operates from France with no need for international warehousing or brick-and-mortar shops, its pricing is more competitive than traditional importers.

The specific role of co-founder Hugh Cameron is to develop and implement a sound growth strategy for the technology, operations, and digital marketing aspects of Chez Pluie's business.



# The Challenge

Chez Pluie initially started out as a small business. In the beginning, it was only the two founders—Susannah and Hugh Cameron. Their initial challenge was to increase sales by growing their product range, which mandated a faster way of completing their operational work.

Then came the unique nature of their business. First, they sell one-off products. Second, they ship bespoke, custom-made timber packages to any destination in the world. This mandated that:



**They needed a very powerful solution for cataloging new products.**



**They needed a customizable solution for pricing, fulfillment, and after-sales service.**

Also, as Chez Pluie started out, Hugh realized they faced several operational problems. These were:



Loss of sales because they couldn't provide a quote with the speed, accuracy, and competitiveness that was required.



Having orders blocked by international customs authorities because shipment details were incomplete.



Difficulties with accurately pricing their inventory and managing cost fluctuations such as exchange rates, fuel prices, shipping rates, and packaging raw materials.



Having no visibility over their suppliers' inventory.

Prior to using Creator, Chez Pluie's business processes were very fluid and experimental. They were still discovering the market, refining their products, and working out how to best fulfil orders. They relied on a combination of MS Excel, MS Access, and Airtable, which were way too basic for their needs.

The early experimentation was essential to finding a niche market, but once they had developed a business model that worked, they knew they needed something more robust and scalable.

So after much planning, they decided to use technology and automation to its maximum extent. For their unique business model, they needed a highly configurable, cloud-based database that could integrate with their ecommerce platform.

Hugh researched online for months to find the best solution for their needs. They realized they needed a tool that could span several aspects of their business. They looked at various software tools specializing in inventory management, accounting, sales, and other functions.

Of all the solutions they looked at, either their business model didn't fit the architecture of the application, or they would have to stitch together a multitude of specialized apps that would add up to be a very expensive solution and would no doubt lead to unforeseen integration issues down the line.



# The Solution

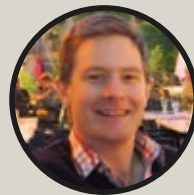
Hugh first came across Zoho CRM, then found the suite of Zoho Products, including Zoho Creator. Creator was a perfect fit, and they designed and implemented a database that could manage their operational tasks. This was because:

- **Creator is a blank canvas. Nobody else knows their business like the founders did, and with Creator they had the chance to configure the application in a way that exactly mirrored the best possible version of their business model.**
- **Creator is also one of the few online solutions that has both powerful features and an easy interface for administering the app. Also, there was a large network of affordable developers available to hire through marketplaces like Upwork.**
- **Finally, Creator is an enterprise-grade solution that is offered at a realistic price point for small businesses. Other solutions were asking for subscription fees that were far out of reach for most new or small businesses.**

For these reasons and others, Hugh found it very easy to get started with Zoho Creator.



*When setting up my database I was able to do all the code-free work myself, such as creating the overall design and how the data relates, the forms, fields, rules, and some workflows. Then for any functions that required specific code to be written, I contracted a specialist developer. I also use Zoho Flow for integrations with other apps, and the Flow technical support team even set up my flows for me at no cost.*



**Hugh Cameron**  
Director, Chez Pluie

Hugh contracted a Zoho Developer via Upwork. In order to fully set up a Creator app that tracked all their inventory, orders, and supplier activities, the total setup cost was the Creator subscription fee plus \$1592 in Upwork developer fees.





*If I was using another enterprise-grade solution, the same budget would probably have bought me one day of requirements gathering and nothing even remotely close to going live with a solution!*



**Hugh Cameron**  
Director, Chez Pluie

With Creator, Hugh has developed an application that allows him to:



**Instantly generate a quote for any client anywhere in the world from his PC or phone using the Creator app.**



**Manage all import and export processes, and generate signed and certified USA import documents directly from the Creator application.**



Set and continually update pricing for his entire inventory catalog in order to adapt to a rise or fall in the Euro, a surge in fuel price, or if a transporter is offering special rates for the next week.



Track his suppliers' inventory levels in real time. He can even walk through their warehouse and inform them as to what they have in stock from the Creator app on his phone.



Hugh also uses Creator for managing all of Chez Pluie's order fulfillment activities. At least four people are involved with fulfilling an order, each with specific tasks relating to accounting, international transport, packaging, and management. This workflow is managed through Creator to ensure no steps are missed, the work is done correctly, and the order is fulfilled as quickly as possible.

Chez Pluie now uses Creator on the web, phone, and tablet.



*When a client requests an urgent quote and we are out of the office, we use Creator on our phones to instantly generate a quote of multiple bespoke furniture items to be shipped to the client's doorstep anywhere in the world, taking into account all direct costs.*



**Hugh Cameron**  
Director, Chez Pluie

This quote functionality includes calculating object and package volumes, packaging material costs, and comparing shipping prices from multiple service options to all destinations worldwide.

In the warehouse, the Creator application is used for locating and collecting inventory, marking off items as packaged, and entering the package size and weight. These actions automatically trigger subsequent workflows for the remotely based shipping team.

They use the desktop application for tasks that require a lot of data entry work, such as adding a batch of new products.

# Benefits and ROI

Initially, Chez Pluie thought it was perhaps premature to have implemented a solution on Zoho Creator akin to an **“enterprise management system”** even though it was just the two of them working on the business. In hindsight though, they now realize that it was the only way they were able to grow their business when starting with a small budget. Then, when they did bring on staff, the systems and processes were already there, so it made scaling up so much easier.

The other benefit of implementing Creator early in their business lifecycle was that it forced them to really think and plan out an efficient process for how they would source, catalog, market, and sell their products. This upfront work paid dividends as

it meant that they quickly moved away from ad-hoc informal processes that frequently hold back small businesses from scaling.



**With Creator, Hugh can now maintain complete control and visibility over his business operations at all times. He is able to know:**

- Exactly when he needs to change his pricing and by how much.
- When he needs to allocate more resources to the fulfillment team in order to meet shipping deadlines.
- Exactly when to pay his suppliers and how much, with total assurance that the goods have been delivered to Chez Pluie in satisfactory condition.

Hugh finds the reporting side of Creator to be extremely useful for Chez Pluie. Though they have many cloud-based apps that report on similar data, because Creator is so configurable, it is for them, by far, their most accurate source. For example, when calculating profitability on a per order basis, Creator has been found to be far more accurate than even Chez Pluie's dedicated accounting software!



Chez Pluie has also reaped numerous other benefits from deploying Zoho Creator.

For example:

- Through better inventory control, their order cancellations have reduced by 70% since implementing Creator.
- Through better pricing control, the gross margin has stabilized significantly. Prior to Creator, Chez Pluie's gross margin per sale wasn't even known. When they started using Creator, they discovered that their target vs actual margin was often over or under by 20%, which was totally unsustainable. Now their target vs actual margin is usually within +/-4%.



*For us, Creator is not a cost-saving tool—it is a business-building tool. That is to say, without Creator we wouldn't own a business, we would simply own a website. As a guide, our sales grew by 58% the year after implementing Creator.*



**Hugh Cameron**  
Director, Chez Pluie

At Chez Pluie, the operational methods are always being refined based on the philosophy of "If it doesn't get measured, it doesn't get done." For Hugh, Creator is the best way to measure the business activity, and if he wants to know something, he just creates a report, and the information is there in minutes.

For the team, it's really satisfying to finish something in the field, then take out their phone, open the Creator app, and swipe the task off their screen.

Every time a task is marked off, Hugh immediately sees this on his dashboard so he knows exactly what is done and what else is outstanding.



The great thing about Creator at Chez Pluie is how quick and easy it is to update information, especially for Hugh. A recent example of this is that some of their customers were receiving packages without realizing they were shipped in a huge timber crate. They were ill-equipped to accept the consignment when it arrived. Why was this? Because an employee was not sending them the preparation video like they were supposed to. Why wasn't that issue flagged earlier? Because it wasn't being measured. So Hugh got into Creator, added a new task into the fulfillment process, assigned it to the employee, added it to the application dashboard, and set up alerts, all within 5-10 minutes. To Hugh, this is a far better way of managing the business compared to admonishing the employee for not doing their job yet still not having any direct visibility over the operational status.



*Some businesses are still trying to become a paperless office. With Creator, we're already at the next step—we are a Spreadsheetless office.*



**Hugh Cameron**  
Director, Chez Pluie



# About Zoho Creator

Running a business is no mean feat, and we believe we can help. Rapidly build custom applications that are a perfect fit for your business, or choose from our extensive range of prebuilt apps and modify them. The best part? You don't have to be a programmer. Just signup, pick a plan, and start building!





[www.zoho.com/creator](http://www.zoho.com/creator)

We'd love to talk! Reach out to us:  
**[hello@zohocreator.com](mailto:hello@zohocreator.com)**



[zohocreatorofficial](https://www.facebook.com/zohocreatorofficial)



[zohocreator](https://twitter.com/zohocreator)



[showcase/zohocreator](https://www.linkedin.com/showcase/zohocreator)