

Microsoft Business Solutions Retail Management System

eCompanyStore

eCompanyStore Doubles Cash-In over Previous Traveling Stores by Using Retail Management System

eCompanyStore manages employee, B2B, and B2C stores for major corporations. When managing stores at their customers' conventions became an option for eCompanyStore, their implementation of Microsoft® Business Solutions—Retail Management System impressed the crowds and pleased management.

Employee stores demand extra record-keeping and pliable information capabilities from a point-of-sale (POS)/retail management solution. To help eCompanyStore expand client service, Microsoft Retail Management System hits the road with eCompanyStore staff to serve rushed conventioners in any city.

When the show is over, Microsoft Retail Management System lays out reports exactly the way each department needs to see them to make the next show even more successful.

The Situation

eCompanyStore closely watches its metrics on sales and customer satisfaction in the B2B, B2C, and employee stores it manages for demanding clients like Cigna Corporation, HBO eStore, Pacific Life, Hilton, Moen, Countrywide Insurance Services, Boise Cascade, Microsoft, and Xerox. eCompanyStore sells nearly 650,000 promotional products ranging from chic leather briefcases to logoed writing instruments and mugs.

As senior manager of eCompanyStore's four Microsoft employee stores, Phi Tieskoetter knows that employee stores not only face the same problems most retailers do, they also bear added information burdens.

Transactions must be verified to ensure an authorized employee, alum, or VIP is making the purchase. Every hire and termination changes the base of permitted customers. Temporary store access given to VIPs or convention-goers must expire with their visit. Because many companies limit employee-discount purchases of company products, individual buying histories must be tracked, constantly compared to allowed ceilings and ultimately cleared at year-end. While campus-based employee stores sell merchandise and services, eCompanyStore also creates and manages aesthetic and sophisticated e-commerce sites on the Internet or customer intranets. Products to be shipped might reside on shelves, in warehouses, at other stores, or be special-ordered or purchased with logos. Few economical POS/retail management systems offer adequate flexibility and control for these information demands.

Customer Profile

eCompanyStore, a leading provider of corporate merchandise solutions, received the Advertising Specialty Institute (ASI) Spirit Award for being the fastest-growing distributor in the \$17 billion promotional-products industry. Atlanta, Georgia
<http://www.ecompanystore.com>

Business Situation

In its third consecutive year of more than 100 percent growth, eCompanyStore has recently expanded from the complexities of running large corporations' B2B, B2C, and employee stores to managing traveling stores at far-flung conventions.

Solution

Microsoft Business Solutions—Retail Management System flexibly gathers customer-defined data and will soon be rolled out to four company stores. Store-level data from Store Operations will feed Microsoft Retail Management System Headquarters, and feed enterprise-scale financial tools.

Software Used

Microsoft Small Business Server 2003
Microsoft Windows® XP Professional
Microsoft BackOffice®
Microsoft SQL Server™ 2003
Microsoft Business Solutions—Retail Management System Store Operations
SAP® R/3 by SAP AG

Partners

New West Technologies, Inc.
Portland, Oregon
www.newestech.com

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Phi Tieskoetter, Senior Store Manager, Microsoft eCompanyStore

Information powers vigilance

Even with these complexities, eCompanyStore’s order accuracy is 99.33 percent. Inventory turns for its top ten customers are 9.52 annually and telephone waits seldom reach 30 seconds. Management required similar results when they expanded their service to Microsoft Company Stores by setting up temporary “stores” at conventions such as the Microsoft World Wide Partner Conference and its Developer Conference.

Adding more pressure for “the right data right now,” such traveling stores require that every product be packed and shipped to a convention center then unpacked for display. Because conventions have no warehouses, and inventory can’t be replenished, each stockout probably means a lost sale. After each show, unsold merchandise must be repacked and reshipped home, doubling logistics costs.

Performance demands

A twenty-second delay per credit card verification slows lines and generates long waiting times, potentially scaring off busy conventioners. Tieskoetter needed credit card transactions in five seconds.

Wrap-up reports of sales and inventory levels had to fit the diverse needs of vendors, client departments, and eCompanyStore managers. Predictions of stock to be allocated for the next convention are determined entirely by accurate sales records, stockouts and new-merchandise requests from the previous show. Before Microsoft Retail Management System, reports weren’t available in electronic formats except by writing a SQL query.

The new POS/retail management solution had to solve all these problems. And it had to be portable.

The Solution

New West Technologies of Portland, Oregon knew Microsoft Business Solutions—Retail Management System would address eCompanyStore’s in-store needs and the demands of traveling stores. Microsoft Retail Management System could also readily integrate with the extensive online capabilities that eCompanyStore provides customers. And New West suggested Microsoft Retail Management System Store Operations as the most well-rounded and expandable store-level solution.

New West also knew which PCs and retail peripherals were road-tough and they had experience shipping corporate data reliably and securely across cyberspace.

Microsoft Business Solutions—Retail Management Systems has two tiers, both with superlative, built-in reporting and security measures. At the store level, an installation of Store Operations manages sales, marketing, inventory, and operations at each location. At corporate, Headquarters collects and organizes data from all Store Operations installations in the chain to centralize visibility and controls. Headquarters lets chain managers delegate or retain management functions as they choose while it allows very broad and very specific controls at the headquarters level.

"You want Microsoft reliability and consistency from your system software up through retail management and integration. That simplifies everything."

Phi Tieskoetter, Senior Store Manager, Microsoft eCompanyStore

"When it comes to integrating multichannel marketing, then shoving all its data to a sophisticated accounting package," says Dan King, New West president, "my retail offering better be smooth and reliable under all sorts of conditions. If not, my company's reputation bears the brunt! That's a large reason we suggested Microsoft Retail Management System. We've seen it satisfy a huge variety of demanding retail requirements."

The Benefits

"The first thing that hit us was seeing Microsoft Retail Management System do credit card verifications in two or three seconds," says Tieskoetter. "Microsoft Retail Management System was fantastic. Dan [King] and his team [New West] had the system set up and input our inventory in a matter of hours."

After more show experience, Tieskoetter adds, "Our cashiers instantly loved Store Operations. Though many had little retail experience, its screens made total sense to them. They learned it in under an hour. Not only does Microsoft Retail Management System speed up all those details like entering customer data and serial numbers, it rolls everything up into our existing business rules so we can do purchasing and inventory like we want to. Then it pops out the reports we need—even sales stats by hour so we can staff up or down per expected customer load."

Cash-in per hour

Not surprisingly, Tieskoetter says the checkout speed of Microsoft Retail Management System translates into individual customer satisfaction, which spells profits for our clients and eCompanyStore. He notices less employee time in inventory control and sees indications that Microsoft Retail Management System will reduce IT costs. "We'll be running a leaner, meaner operation behind the scenes," he says.

"Microsoft Retail Management System even helps pick up those unavoidable, time-wasting retail tasks. When tags fall off, you look up products by several criteria to get price and SKU. No stalling a line of customers while somebody runs to get a bar code." The surprise feature was the ease and power of Store Operations in printing labels. Users can add store logos and messages, and print nearly any size tag.

The right partner

"New West was great!" said Tieskoetter. "They loaded inventory records, helped us hands-on at the first show and gave us phone and remote-access support on the second. When one venue had a problem with Internet bandwidth, they handled that."

After rollout, the Store Operations installation in each Microsoft employee store will communicate via Internet to report product sales, customer buying histories, inventory changes, cash receipts, employee log-in/out and other store-level data to Microsoft Retail Management System Headquarters at the Redmond store. Headquarters gives retail managers a centralized tool to intuitively receive, see, and control operations by

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store and department in small to mid-size chains and franchises. "We'll see big-picture and very specific views of the chain. We can put entire lines on sale in all stores, reprice specific SKUs in specific stores, and give the right amount of control to each store manager," says Tieskoetter. "Headquarters lets us manage broadly or microscopically and change our minds when circumstances change."

A requisite selection criterion was the well-known ability of Microsoft Retail Management System to interface with other Microsoft products and respected financial solutions. Microsoft Small Business Server 2003 will be configured as a Microsoft Active Directory® server to control Headquarters for all stores. Microsoft Retail Management System Store Operations and Headquarters will transmit data to SAP R/3 where it can be included in eCompanyStore's overall reporting, planning, and other financials. New West provided its own retail-hardened PCs, Epson Printers, and Symbol Scanners to handle the rigors of frequent travel and crating.

Gray Box, eCompanyStore's legacy database, serves as a data aggregation point. King expects that integration between Gray Box and Microsoft Retail Management System will be straightforward due to the easy extensibility of Microsoft Retail Management System.

"This installation exemplifies the ability of Microsoft Retail Management System to conform to nearly any retailer's wide variations in inventory, circumstances, and business rules," said Dan King. In very large enterprises, Microsoft Retail Management System can feed data to sophisticated forecasting, CRM, and supply chain management tools, just as it will at eCompanyStore.

"I'd advise mid-sized to small retailers to put Microsoft Retail Management System on their shortlist," says Tieskoetter. "First define all your needs, then see if Microsoft Retail Management System meets them. It probably will. You want Microsoft reliability and consistency from your system software up through retail management and integration. That simplifies everything."

For more information about Microsoft Business Solutions–Retail Management System, visit www.microsoft.com/BusinessSolutions/POS.

Date Published: February 2004

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