



Microsoft Business Solutions Retail Management System Customer Solution Case Study



Boutique's First Retail System Frees Owner for Ads and Creative Retailing

Overview

Country or Region: United States

Industry: Retail

Customer Profile

Originally offering one-of-a-kind handbags from its 1999 startup, DKM Accessories of Tampa, Florida, has grown to two locations and an online sales site.

Business Situation

With no retail management system to handle time-consuming paperwork and inventory management, owner Deborah Karam needed automation to help her focus on expansion.

Solution

Microsoft® Business Solutions Retail Management System delivers instant and accurate inventory, sales tax, and staff reports; dependable operation; and rapid customer knowledge.

Benefits

- Rapid installation as business continued
- Fast and easy operation
- Easy sales-tax reports
- Hour-by-hour sales reports
- Instant, accurate inventory reporting
- Dependable on-the-spot tech support

“Microsoft Retail Management System helps me generate timely and accurate information to run my business. Now instead of spending my time on day-to-day paperwork, I can focus on growth!”

Deborah Karam, Owner, DKM Accessories

During the many hours that owner Deborah Karam once spent on the onerous job of tallying sales and payroll tax figures, there was no doubt in her mind that she could use her time more profitably. “I wanted to spend more time on buying, advertising, and marketing,” she says. Fortunately, Karam discovered Microsoft® Business Solutions Retail Management System through a referral to Microsoft partner CoolTronics. “They really came through for me,” says Karam, “by taking the time to learn exactly what I needed, and then delivering.” The difference has been astounding. “I know so much more about my business, and my time is much better utilized,” Karam says. “The reports let me find out what I need to know. I can run my business more efficiently, with far fewer problems!”



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Deborah Karam, Owner, DKM Accessories

Situation

As happens with many retailers, when Deborah Karam opened DKM Accessories and started selling a small collection of handbags in 1999, she could only guess at how fast her business would grow. “I began with 15 handbags. For my bookkeeping and inventory, I kept notes in a [Rubbermaid] Spacemaker pencil box,” she says.

Since those days, Karam has expanded DKM to include private label clothing, jewelry, custom shoes, bridal accessories, and personal shopping services. She now runs two stores, including one opened in a local mall in 2003. “The growth has been amazing, but daunting,” Karam says. “Administratively, I needed a time-saving edge, but I didn’t think I could afford one.”

Growing Pains

Problems cropped up everywhere. “Stock reconciliations, inventory, purchasing, sales tax, payroll—you name it,” Karam says. “All our paperwork was done manually, which, of course, was just asking for long hours and unnecessary mistakes.”

Government-mandated sales and payroll reports were the most time-consuming. “Don’t get me started,” says Karam. “The time and aggravation involved was mind-numbing. I knew when I was stuck in the back, I should be training my staff or helping or learning from customers. When I was working at home, I should have been doing creative, not administrative work. But I was the only one who could do it.”

Another factor was the lack of time: she also needed to maintain a family life. “I’m a single mom with two school-age children,” Karam says, “so I literally couldn’t devote all my nights to get things done. Somehow, something had to change.”

Solution

Fortunately for Karam, she found someone she could trust to research and select the retail management system for her needs. “I depended on my Microsoft® partner Tyler Dikman of CoolTronics to do all the research. He is very sharp and always willing to help. If not for him, I don’t know where I would be.”

Dikman bottom-lined Karam’s needs. “I was looking for a simple and complete solution provided by a single software retailer at an affordable price,” he says. “QuickBooks Point of Sale was cheaper, but I was not at all confident about their support. The Intuit program significantly restricted a retailer’s hardware choices and had much weaker reporting capabilities and interoperability. Microsoft Business Solutions Retail Management System just answered all I needed to see.

“Microsoft Retail Management System lets Debbie expand her business without any IT pain, and it has a rich feature set that doesn’t restrict where she can buy hardware. With our support and the product’s easy-to-understand manuals, the end user has no problems getting to more and more parts within the program that keep lopping time off their tasks.”

Microsoft Business Solutions Retail Management System was installed in late September 2003, with no downtime in the store. “It was so fast, so easy,” Karam recalls, “that it was a non-event. The tech brought it in, installed it, and taught us. The system is easy to use. No one has any difficulty with it. As a matter of fact, it’s actually fun to use after all that pencil work.”

Benefits

The first benefit Karam saw from Microsoft Retail Management System was recouping free time. “I’m now untied from tedious tasks like government paperwork. I put those

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Deborah Karam, Owner, DKM Accessories

energies into sourcing, marketing, and creativity. Paperwork doesn't grow a business. Good ideas, creativity, and follow-through do that," she says. "Our latest mailing should bring in a huge amount of business. If there's one thing I know, it's ads and marketing."

Instant Reports Save Hours

Karam saw fast results. "My biggest single time-saver is that I now calculate all our sales taxes in about three clicks. I used to do dozens of sums and percents and double-checks manually. Now I send my accountant whatever sales and tax numbers he wants."

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The flexibility of Microsoft Retail Management System sales reports also saved enormous amounts of time. "I once kept a journal of daily sales, then a separate one for tax-exempt Web sales, then another for out-of-state shipments," Karam says. "Now each sale is characterized when it goes into the system, so I can break down or combine sales any way I want them!"

She also finds instant data generation vital to managing her business. "At the end of every day, I love to see hour-by-hour sales statistics," Karam says. "Yesterday, 60 percent of our business was done between one and four in the afternoon. That helps me schedule people only when I need them. I can even go back and find last year's heaviest hours, say, between December 26th and January 2nd. Information like that really helps me keep my finger on the pulse."

Saving Money, Preventing Loss

Karam has found that checkout lines go much more smoothly, too, and with far fewer

mistakes. "Manual business cycles create errors, and there's no avoiding that. We would all make errors in addition, or forget to include an item. When you're a small business, you can't afford to miss even one belt. Today, we don't."

The customer database permits Karam and her staff to see which customer bought what. "For my best customers, I used to do it all by memory," says Karam. "What a relief that Microsoft does all that now. We just push a button and we know a customer's level of repeat business, what was bought, and who gets a discount."

Loss prevention and recovery in the hurricane-prone state of Florida, was another concern. "Lost inventory in the state was in the tens of millions," she says. "Last season, I printed off my inventory list, item by item, the night before a hurricane. If I had a loss, I had everything printed out in black and white as proof of loss for my insurance company. I could never have gotten that done in time by hand. And your handwritten notes are not as believable as a Microsoft computer report."

DKM personnel also spend less time at retail's many mundane tasks. "Microsoft Retail Management System saves huge labor costs that would have been spent on handwriting price tags, or attaching them with a pricing gun. I want every customer to get instant and friendly attention. Our staff can't do that if they're writing labels."

Now she can keep a close eye on inventory in two stores. "I can't be in two places at once, but because I can use a report to spot-check, I'll know right away if everything's there that should be," Karam says.

She gets information that would previously have been slow to generate. One example is that employees now clock in on their

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For more information about CoolTronics products and services, call (813) 259-4407 or visit the Web site at: www.cooltronics.com

For more information about DKM Accessories products and services, call (813) 902-0044 or visit the Web site at: www.dkmaccessories.com

registers, making payroll hours easy to calculate.

The Road Ahead

Karam is looking forward to exploiting more and more features in Microsoft Business Solutions Retail Management System. "Our next goal is to use the system to get better control of reorder levels and improve our supply chain times," she says. "But whatever we do, I know CoolTronics will be right there to help us along the way."

There are three pointers Karam would give anyone looking for a retail management system. "Besides being affordable, Microsoft Retail Management System meets all our needs. We have two stores, and cost per unit is a major factor.

"Retailers should also know that since converting from hand-written receipts and documentation, we have saved hundreds of hours of record-keeping time, from sales tax analysis to inventory reports to shrinkage."

"The key to retail survival," says Karam, "is keeping your eye on your own bottom line. I prefer not to focus on competitors, but to be innovative. Consumers are discerning, and they deserve fresh ideas and exceptional service. We present the trends in our constant stream of new merchandise, and, with Microsoft Retail Management System, we are able to do our day-to-day business functions more time and cost efficiently."

Microsoft Business Solutions Retail Management System

Microsoft Business Solutions Retail Management System offers a complete store automation solution for small and medium-sized retailers, streamlining point-of-sale (POS), customer service, and store inventory management, and providing real-time access to key business metrics. Microsoft Retail Management System is a comprehensive solution for single-store and multi-store retailers that empowers independent proprietors, store managers, and cashiers through affordable and easy-to-use automation. Microsoft Retail Management System has the flexibility and scalability to grow with a retailer's business. It works with the Microsoft Office System, Microsoft Windows® Small Business Server, and leading financial applications to provide end-to-end support from the cash register to the back office.

For more information about Microsoft Retail Management System, go to: www.microsoft.com/pos

Software and Services

- Microsoft Office 2000 Professional
- Microsoft Windows XP Professional
- Solution
 - Microsoft Business Solutions Retail Management System

Hardware

- Dell OptiPlex SX270 with flat panels
- Epson T-88 receipt printer
- Metrologic scanner

Partner

- CoolTronics

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