



Microsoft Business Solutions Retail Management System Customer Solution Case Study



Intimate Apparel Store Finds Flexible New System a Perfect Fit

Overview

Country or Region: United States

Industry: Retail

Customer Profile

Described by the owner as a “mini department store for women,” Tina’s Closet in Lisle, Illinois, stocks a wide variety of women’s undergarments, dresses, blouses, and purses, plus candles, soaps, and jewelry.

Business Situation

An inefficient and untrustworthy point-of-sale (POS) system plagued the owner by losing thousands of customer and inventory records, crashing regularly, and costing thousands in unsuccessful repairs.

Solution

Microsoft® Business Solutions Retail Management System speeds checkouts, delivers on-the-spot customer buying histories and inventory data, is easy to learn, and is readily adaptable for new tasks.

Benefits

- Fast, easy transactions at POS
- Matrix manages size, shape, and color
- Customer tracking enhances service
- Instant inventory reports reveal successful products and promotions
- Dependable on-the-spot tech support

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Tina Karakourtis, Owner, Tina’s Closet

After 17 years, Tina’s Closet had outgrown its retail space and computer system. Customers loved the accessories, jewelry, formal wear, swimwear, complete range of intimate apparel, and the renowned skill of owner Tina Karakourtis in personal fittings.

But after such attention, clients had to wait at the register. The system lost their measurements, preferences, and purchases. Staff grew frustrated with unreliable stock levels and system slowness in dozens of tasks. And Karakourtis chafed at writing checks totaling “thousands of dollars” in unsuccessful system fixes.

She chose Microsoft® Business Solutions Retail Management System because of its ability to manage and flexibly report on her wide range of apparel, services, and boutique items. Today, Karakourtis says her new system and nearby Microsoft Partner Computer Analytics gave her back cheerful hours for customers.



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Situation

Tina's Closet sells an expanding inventory of women's items that often require careful descriptions and management of manufacturers, sizes, colors, and styles. Purses, candles, keepsakes, soaps, and jewelry also fill the shelves. Owner Tina Karakourtis describes her shop as “a mini department store for women.”

Personal Service Is Key

Outstanding personal service is paramount to Karakourtis because her true specialty is custom bra fittings and alterations. “This really matters to customers,” she says. “No woman wants to be treated impersonally in these matters. College may teach you about inventory, bookkeeping, and profit and loss. But no school teaches you how to greet a customer and make her feel welcome and comfortable.”

Because 80 percent of customers need alterations, warm customer relationships are vital. “Bras may come in 120 sizes,” says Karakourtis, “but they're made in factories. Women are not. Nearly every woman can benefit from a custom fit.”

Part of Karakourtis's success derives from her 17,000-customer database that includes style preferences and many personal measurements—a touch that helps to ensure repeat business.

“We encourage return customers and referrals through our unique customer club,” she says. “We don't advertise because our customers do it for us by word of mouth.”

Personal care has helped Tina's Closet recently expand its retail frontage to two-and-a-half times its former size, taking over adjacent retail space. “But when I wanted a loan to start the store,” says Karakourtis, “the banker told me women didn't want help with

intimate apparel. Now I've just finished writing a book on it that's about to publish.”

An Unreliable System

Karakourtis's previous point-of-sale (POS)/retail management system wasn't keeping up with growth. “Our old Shopkeeper system was losing records and couldn't keep up as our numbers grew,” she says, “We wanted to track customer information and their referrals, yet it lost thousands of customer records. How could I tell women that their personal information was important if my system lost what they had confided in me?”

“The developer sent upgrades,” she says, “but if I didn't get all of them, or install them just right, I kept getting glitches. Their tech-support people I talked to were mystified.”

Reliability was erratic. “It kept crashing,” she says. “I had six different companies try fixing it—and these were national chains. I was paying from [U.S.]\$60 to \$150 an hour for no results. That literally cost me thousands of dollars.”

Daily tasks were cumbersome. “Adding new items to the database used to take me hours,” Karakourtis says. “It wasn't what I needed to automate tasks. In fact it cost me time and aggravation instead of saving it.”

Solution

In researching a new management retail system, Karakourtis determined not to make the same mistake twice. “I looked at several others. I chose Microsoft® [Business Solutions] Retail Management System because it had every tool I would need. But the deciding factor was the Microsoft reputation for standing behind its products,” she says. “With Microsoft, I knew I could count on a world-class product. I was advised not to spend money on a cheap solution, but to go with a product I could be sure of. A new

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Tina Karakourtis, Owner, Tina’s Closet

system really affects every minute of your working day.”

Her prior experiences with technical support were another deciding factor. “Other software developers didn’t have a local presence, and that scared me,” she says, “I knew Microsoft would have qualified support who knew their product. I was tired of paying computer chains to hear ‘I don’t know.’”

“My husband urged me to stick with Microsoft because they would solve whatever I threw at them. I needed a dependable product from a company with dedicated people who want to make clients happy. I went with Microsoft, and I’m glad I did.”

Karakourtis found system installation fast and easy. Learning the software proved simple, according to Karakourtis. “I taught myself by reading the screens and the manual and doing what they said. That manual is so sensible, so easy, and it’s full of suggestions. Our sales associates actually get excited about the new features they find!

“Later on, Computer Analytics, my new Microsoft partner, showed me we could fine-tune the system. In my business, when a customer loses twenty pounds, she needs a refitting. We knew we’d need new tools as we grew. With Microsoft Retail Management System, what I need is built in—no add-on modules.

“When I want new or special features, we can usually adapt the system to our needs. It’s like having software custom built for you. Computer Analytics never tells me ‘I don’t know’ or ‘I can’t figure it out.’ I just hear ‘No problem.’ If the system doesn’t do what you want right out of the box, there’s probably a way to do it if you read the manual and look in the software.”

“It was a great decision,” says Karakourtis. “Stephen Tyler of Computer Analytics is always there when I need him. Because I’m a stickler for customer satisfaction, I loved his business philosophy!”

Benefits

The first benefit of Microsoft Retail Management System showed up at the POS. “Transactions go much faster,” she says. “How could we, after we worked so hard to make our customers feel special, make them wait five minutes in a line to pay for intimate apparel? Now it’s 1-2-3-boom, and they’re waving goodbye!”

Fast, accurate receiving of intricately described clothing was vital. “With the matrix feature,” says Karakourtis, “I can enter a shipment of bras, including back sizes, cup sizes, and all their colors in minutes. It used to take me literally hours. I use the bar code on the package and restock 120 styles in 30 seconds. We entered the store’s entire item file—over 22,000 items—in just a few days. It’s a dream.”

Layers of Reporting

Karakourtis knows she can run any report at any time of day to see current sales and merchandise levels. “But our Z-report closes the day and summarizes it,” she says, “all in neat categories by cash, credit cards, and redeemed gift certificates. If someone miscounted, you can track it down fast.”

She runs daily sales reports to see what percent each manufacturer contributed to sales. “Logically, that tells me whose goods to order that night,” Karakourtis says. Because Microsoft Retail Management System stores suppliers’ contact information, everything she needs is at her fingertips.

“Then you can run ZZ-reports for weekly or monthly totals, or any period you choose,” she adds. “I run a monthly report for our

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accountant,” says Karakourtis, “and he finds it very complete.”

Karakourtis says one surprise benefit has probably saved thousands in possible lost business. “When we converted our old customer database to the new system,” she says, “we recovered 12,000 customer records the old system had hidden. We thought they were lost! I’d have had to do a lot of explaining to customers.”

Time, Money, and Peace of Mind

“This system saves time and money, and has helped bring in new money. More important, the aggravation I used to have is gone,” Karakourtis says. “This software makes my life so much easier. I’m so much calmer. Wouldn’t you rather do a chore once in three minutes than poke at it for hours in an old system? My employees, my family, and even my customers notice it.”

One formerly tedious area was revenue analysis. “Every month I evaluate sales from 250 manufacturers,” she says. “I see what’s moving and what isn’t. I can break it down lots of different ways—by style, manufacturer, and type of item. Any information I want, I can get.”

The result is better data for expanded management knowledge, wiser executive decision making, and, as Karakourtis is proving, time to expand her store and write a book. “The software is so smooth, I can now find time for our Web site,” Karakourtis says. “That was unthinkable before, with my time tied up in chores and fixes. This gives me back time for expansion projects.”

A Bright Future

From her vantage point as a self-taught computer user, Karakourtis advises those considering a POS upgrade to be sure about their tech support. “Be sure it’s excellent and that they call you back fast,” she says.

“Computer Analytics has excellent phone support—they call back immediately. Sometimes I can tell they’re still out of the office. It’s even possible to handle tougher problems by dialing into my system remotely and tweaking the system or showing us what to do. “

“They’re coming back after the holidays because we need a customer club and a gift card system with running totals.”

“Every retail store has its own needs,” says Karakourtis. “I thought ours were so unique that we’d make do with a halfway solution. Microsoft Retail Management System keeps up with our growth, and keeps meeting new needs. Between customers, my staff, and myself, there are a lot more smiles around here than before.”

For More Information

For more information about Microsoft products and services, call the Microsoft Sales Information Center at (800) 426-9400. In Canada, call the Microsoft Canada Information Centre at (877) 568-2495. Customers who are deaf or hard-of-hearing can reach Microsoft text telephone (TTY/TDD) services at (800) 892-5234 in the United States or (905) 568-9641 in Canada. Outside the 50 United States and Canada, please contact your local Microsoft subsidiary. To access information using the World Wide Web, go to: www.microsoft.com

For more information about Computer Analytics products and services, call (847) 297-5290 or visit the Web site at: www.cacorp.com

For more information about Tina's Closet products and services, call (630) 810-0046.

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

- Products
 - Microsoft Windows XP Professional
- Solutions
 - Microsoft Business Solutions Retail Management System

Hardware

- Three Power Spec Pentium-4 PCs
- Dell OptiPlex PC
- Single-page printer

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