



Microsoft Business Solutions Retail Management System Customer Solution Case Study



Retail System Helps Garden Center Nurture Growth, Harvest Profits

Overview

Country or Region: United States

Industry: Retail

Customer Profile

Perricone Garden Center serves consumers and trades in communities around Volo, Illinois with 3,000 SKUs of gardening and landscaping services, supplies, tools, and plants of all sizes.

Business Situation

After a hard disk crash, Manager Richard Peterson needed an immediate solution with more flexible back-up options, strong security, and time-saving features.

Solution

Microsoft® Business Solutions Retail Management System delivers accurate, on-the-spot customer and inventory reports, reliable tech support and fast point-of-sale transactions.

Benefits

- Physical inventory time pruned by 75 percent
- Customer tracking enhances service, saves money
- Instant sales reports enable goal-setting and motivation
- Easy backup for growing database
- Rapid, easy transactions at POS

“I needed a solution that was reliable even when hardware wasn’t. With Microsoft Retail Management System, I received a fast, flexible product that met all the needs. If you liked QuickSell, you’ll love this.”

Richard Peterson, Manager, Perricone Garden Center

When his hard disk crashed on a Memorial Day morning, Richard Peterson, Manager of Perricone Garden Center saw that his next retail management solution would require far greater backup capability for a growing database. “I liked QuickSell, my previous system,” he says, “but our data was voluminous and we lost a lot of crucial files in that system crash.” After diligent research, Peterson decided on Microsoft® Business Solutions Retail Management System because of its customized reports, smooth performance at the point of sale (POS), and time-saving inventory functions. And it was more secure to back up. “It was a great decision,” says Peterson. “I’m constantly saving time because it does things so fast and easily. We retain more money thanks to accurate and timely reports. And we get peace of mind just knowing we have system security and a responsive Microsoft partner.”



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Situation

Located on the edge of Lake and McHenry counties in northeastern Illinois, Perricone Garden Center has specialized in gardening and landscaping supplies, service, and tools since 1996. Landscapers and consumers choose among a full array of plants, from seeds to potted plants to 30-foot trees with six-inch trunks. “We have a complete holiday department whatever the season, real and artificial Christmas trees, Easter plants, Thanksgiving decorations, you name it,” says manager Richard Peterson.

Innovative Merchandising

Through its informational and promotional Web site, Perricone also offers landscaping design, delivery and installation services by phone or in person. Customers can even get “instant landscaping,” by virtue of the fully grown plants available from the company’s 39-acre nursery. The cost of design services is partially refunded through discounts on later purchases. With 30 percent of revenue from landscaping and wholesale accounts, Perricone offers a multi-tiered markdown structure to professionals, clients, and volume buyers alike.

Careful management and highly concerned personal service have helped the store grow 15 percent yearly over the last three years to its current gross of about U.S.\$2.5 million per year.

Unreliable Hardware Stalled Growth

In 2003, Perricone’s computer hard disk crashed. “It was a disaster,” says Peterson. “And on top of everything, my previous system, QuickSell, didn’t have the system backup security I needed. Due to the amount of information we had accumulated, backup was always tricky. Though it was designed to be loaded on one disk, we needed three. And when we pulled the data into the new machine, large parts were lost.”

Peterson needed an immediate replacement that was just as good as QuickSell, but better in specific ways. “I wasn’t willing to make a rush decision,” he says. “You have to make sure you’re getting exactly what you need or the past can repeat itself.”

He left nothing to chance in terms of data retention. “When you’re as busy as I am,” Peterson says, “you need a quick, easy, and reliable backup so you don’t lose sleep.” Peterson will be particularly busy next year developing the firm’s new 30-acre garden center and nursery in Woodstock, Illinois.

Solution

“I needed a solution that was reliable even when hardware wasn’t,” says Peterson. “With Microsoft® [Business Solutions] Retail Management System, I received a fast, flexible product that met all the needs. If you liked QuickSell, you’ll love this.”

Culling the Crop

Peterson reviewed several options in retail management systems. “We considered CounterPoint by Synchronics,” says Peterson, “but ultimately passed on it and similar products because they had odd features that raised their prices, but which we couldn’t use!”

Then he turned to Microsoft. “We knew Microsoft had recently bought QuickSell and were doing a terrific job of upgrading it,” Peterson says. Bob Gabella, of Microsoft partner Plantware, Inc. designed a solution to meet Perricone’s needs of selling wholesale and retail hard goods, plants, and professional services.

The choice was also financially motivated. “I won’t kid you,” Peterson says. “Cost was a factor. With Microsoft Retail Management System, we paid about \$14,000 for our new hardware and software, which was half to one-third the cost of others.”

“It used to take eight hours a month to do physical inventory, but now it takes only two. That’s a savings of 75 percent.”

Richard Peterson, Manager, Perricone Garden Center

“Bob was great,” Peterson says. “Obviously Plantware knows the garden and nursery business. And since the look and feel of Microsoft Retail Management System was so similar to QuickSell, I knew crossover would be easy. Importing new information into the database was a snap. QuickSell ran on a Microsoft Access database, and this runs on [Microsoft] SQL Server™. Because of the two systems’ similarities, retraining was quick.”

Custom Design, Easy Installation

Plantware configured Microsoft Retail Management System specifically to Perricone’s operations. “Part of the install was prepped in their office,” Peterson recalls, “and we had to rewrite our invoice forms to get the characters just right on our four-part, dot-matrix printers. It was a breeze.”

Once Microsoft Retail Management System was installed in March 2003, benefits began. “We got a brand new server and far better backup capabilities,” says Peterson.

According to Peterson, the success of Microsoft Retail Management System, lies in its extreme flexibility. “Our Microsoft partner found out exactly what our needs were, designed a system around them, and provided us with the solution. Then they stayed in touch, have given us useful pointers whenever we needed them, and are the people we call on when we need enhancements. I feel safe knowing I have experts in my corner.”

Benefits

Improving on a Good System

“Whereas QuickSell made us print a report when we wanted information, Microsoft Retail Management System gives us instant lookups and reports on the screen. And we weren’t expecting such good graphs,” he says. “QuickSell had good reports, but these are better. The pie charts and line or bar graphs in these reports really let you see

what is happening. It’s a management tool you can use to make instant evaluations.”

“Our old system wouldn’t let the customer pay to a specific invoice. Instead, it would apply any payment to their entire amount owing. Landscapers like this new feature because it lets them pay off the Smiths’ invoice when they get the Smiths’ check. It’s much cleaner.”

Custom reports help Peterson keep a close watch on operations. “We can see sales numbers during the day and check it against our daily sales goals,” Peterson says. “If we’re lagging behind, I can use that knowledge to motivate our sales staff, or maybe discount a large item a customer is wavering on. Close monitoring helps get our numbers up. It’s part of running a tight and successful ship.”

Customers Win

For the customer, the most obvious change at Perricone Garden Center has been at the point of sale. “Fast transactions really help our bottom line,” says Peterson. “In fact, Microsoft Retail Management System has sped up every task we’ve given it, especially in the back office. The only problem we’ve experienced is having to re-learn that it takes fewer clicks or keystrokes to do processes like item lookup.”

Reviewing old invoices has improved customer service. “We see what customers wanted in the past, so we serve them better in the future,” says Peterson. “As a result, we find what they are looking for, they’re happy customers, and above all, they come back.”

Saving Time and Money

Inventory, previously a time-consuming task, has been a positive surprise. “Physical inventory hours are at a minimum now,” says Peterson. “We use a barcode scanner and our accuracy has increased 15 to 20 percent. It used to take eight hours a month to do

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physical inventory, but now it takes only two. That's a savings of 75 percent! We simply don't need to do inventory nearly as often because the system gives us such a huge level of certainty."

Reordering errors have been virtually eliminated, leaving no shelf empty. "We can see items that are down to five or ten in stock," Peterson says, "and immediately reorder without wondering if our numbers are really true."

Peterson offers some counsel to retailers still using QuickSell. "If you're happy with it," he says, "be sure you have fully tested your backup procedures and your files. Hard disks do crash. Then check out Microsoft Retail Management System and see what configuration fits the size your business is now. Get a Microsoft partner who understands the ins and outs of your particular business to show you the upgrades, bug-fixes and new doors this software opens.

"The garden and landscaping niche isn't always a bed of roses," Peterson says, "but if you do things right, this Microsoft system can help you rake in the profits!"

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 Small Business Server 2000
- Microsoft Windows 2000 Server
- Microsoft Windows® XP Professional
- Solutions
 - Microsoft Business Solutions Retail Management System

Hardware

- Hewlett-Packard server
- IBM PC workstation
- Dell Dimension PC
- Pioneer-Standard PCs
- Epson T-288 printers
- Epson tractor pull printers

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