



Business Is Blooming at Petals and Twigs

Overview

Country or Region: United States

Industry: Retail

Customer Profile

Petals and Twigs is a nonprofit gift store selling 40,000 SKUs. It offers hand-crafted candles, body products, candies, hand-painted window sashes, ornaments, plants, and decorative tableware.

Business Situation

The aging retail system crashed frequently. Data wouldn't export, updates didn't come, and technical support was a large budget item. Yet staff still created reports and price tags manually.

Solution

Microsoft® Certified Partner Merchants Solutions installed Microsoft Business Solutions Retail Management System and had the system up and running within a couple of hours.

Benefits

- Virtual elimination of pricing errors
- Lightning-fast data access
- Customized reports
- Daily closeouts finished in two minutes

“In Reality, We shouldn't have waited so long to upgrade to state-of-the-art retail technology.”

Arlene Purdy, Project Manager, Trinity Services

Petals and Twigs's aging Microsoft® MS-DOS®-based retail system crashed frequently, took too long to access information, and its data could not be backed up. The system had not been updated in years, serious problems were increasing, and support consistently called back as the store was closing.

After surveying available products on the market, Petals and Twigs selected Microsoft® Business Solutions Retail Management System for its advanced feature set and ease of use.

Installation was completed within a few hours and the store immediately began to reap the benefits. Pricing errors virtually disappeared, employees could do lightning-fast product lookups if a price tag fell off, and management can now run customized reports. Customers even get faster service at the register.

“I keep discovering new ways Microsoft Retail Management System can save us time and money. We have seen its Labels Wizard save us hours and hours by creating, designing, and printing price labels.”

Debi Hedge, Sales Associate, Petals and Twigs

Trinity Services rescued this 1860s Victorian house from being razed for a subdivision. The non-profit restored and converted the dwelling from a four-unit apartment house into Petals and Twigs's new home.



Situation

Petals and Twigs gift store operates out of a 140-year old Victorian farm house in a wooded area in New Lenox, Illinois, well south of Chicago. It makes many of its own products on site and buys from wholesalers.

The store is a vital fund-raising source for Trinity Services, a non-sectarian, nonprofit organization providing supports and services for children and adults with developmental disabilities and behavioral health needs. True to form, Trinity Services rescued the current Petals and Twigs house from destruction and patiently renovated it.

The 40,000 SKUs cover an eclectic range: Yankee Candles, homemade baked goods and candies, specialty soups, decorative painted window sashes and glass, collectible figurines, floral designs using silk and dried plants, Camille Beckman body care products, ornaments, and decorative tableware. Petals and Twigs also does a large holiday bazaar offsite and offers a large collection of gift baskets sold over the Web.

The Earlier System

Petals and Twigs's Microsoft® MS-DOS®-based CAM Commerce solution was fading fast. “The old system was constantly crashing and severely limited the efforts of staff and management,” says Arlene Purdy, Project Director, Trinity Services, who currently manages the store. “We had to pay for the previous system's technician to fly in and stay here during installation. We paid yearly fees but got only one update in five years. In reality, we shouldn't have waited so long to upgrade to state-of-the-art retail technology.”

Although the previous vendor managed to keep the system from failing completely, its erratic functionality meant extra work for staff. Data couldn't be transferred to other systems and reports were done by hand. “Bar codes were not accepted into the system and price tags had to be handwritten,” says Debi Hedge, Sales Associate at Petals and Twigs. “This caused me hours of extra work.”

With tech support costs rising and system functionality failing, management realized the season was ripe for a change.

Solution

Purdy searched the Web for solutions. After reviewing five systems, staff selected Microsoft® Business Solutions Retail Management System. Soon they were testing an evaluation CD.

“Everyone at the store liked [Microsoft] Windows® and Microsoft products, and we found Microsoft Retail Management System to be highly reliable,” says Purdy. “Since none of us is a computer whiz, it was great to find such a thorough system that took only a few minutes to learn.”

“Microsoft Retail Management System has made it faster and easier to balance the books. Recently, I’ve really been on the money.”

Arlene Purdy, Project Director, Trinity Services, Inc.

Local Presence, Personal Involvement

Petals and Twigs realized it needed a local partner to ensure technical support would be close and economical. In Merchants Solutions of Hillside, Illinois, the store found breadth of expertise, understanding of its diverse business problems, local presence, and a team willing to share in the store’s purpose.

Merchants Solutions was happy to come to Petals and Twigs for further demonstrations of the software and to answer questions. This personal visit brought home how easily the Microsoft solution would shave time off everyday tasks such as creating labels, checking real-time stock levels, entering new items or product descriptions, and ordering.

“After seeing the problems inherent in long-distance support, we demanded a local partner,” says Purdy. “Merchants Solutions took the time to understand our needs, and customize the solution specifically for our environment.”

Quick Installation

Merchants Solutions arrived on site on the morning of July 7, 2004, and the new system was installed and made its first sales within a few hours. Hedge calls it “effortless” because everything was up and running that same day. Merchants Solutions returned to donate training and software support to the nonprofit organization.

Further, the solution cost the store markedly less than its previous system. By boosting sales, heightening efficiency, and having a more reasonable cost, Microsoft Retail Management System generated a rapid return on investment.

Benefits

Petal and Twigs immediately began to harvest its benefits: fewer pricing errors, faster access to product information, and rapid daily closeouts.

Hedge notes that it takes just moments to calculate the exact amount in cash, checks, and credit card receipts each day.

“Daily closeouts used to take ages,” says Hedge. “Now I get it done in two minutes.”

The extensive reporting options have made life easier for management. For the first time, the inventory is always up to date and complete. Items no longer run out due to poor inventory control.

“We order more wisely because I can just run a report in seconds to see if we are getting low on any items,” says Purdy. “Using Microsoft Retail Management System I can monitor sales on an hourly basis. That helps me initiate any number of actions to improve store productivity.”

Accounting accuracy has also been enhanced. Purdy reports that she no longer has to spend time searching for errors when it comes time to balance the books.

“Microsoft Retail Management System has made it faster and easier to balance the books,” says Purdy. “Recently, I’ve really been on the money.”

Hedge also reports that it’s simple to deal with merchandise returns, or put transactions on hold if customers suddenly remember they forgot at the far end of the building.

“Some nearby schools have discount cards for our shop,” says Hedge. “Sometimes, after we ring them up, students remember their discount cards and we have to redo the sale. In the old system, that was painful, but now it’s a piece of cake.”

In terms of new functionality, Purdy is glad for the system’s ability to flex to business surprises. A couple of months ago, Yankee Candles began offering discount coupons. In previous coupon campaigns, the store was unable to accept

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For more information about Trinity Services products and services, call (815) 485-6197 or visit the Web site at: www.trinity-services.org

coupons, much to the disappointment of customers. This is no longer the case.

“We can now honor coupons because the system accommodates them in moments,” says Hedge. “When the first customer walked in with one, we honored it because we had to. Now coupons are an everyday tool we can use any time,” says Hedge.

“I keep discovering new ways Microsoft Retail Management System can save us time and money,” Purdy says. “We have seen its Labels Wizard save us hours and hours by creating, designing, and printing price labels.”

Due to these successes, Trinity Services is planning to implement Microsoft Retail Management System in more fund-raising stores, the first of which will be implemented by Merchants Solutions within a few months.

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 Windows XP Professional Edition
- Microsoft Business Solutions Retail Management System
- Microsoft Word
- Microsoft Excel
- Go Software—PCCharge
- Services
 - Microsoft Standard A Plan
 - Two years Merchants Solutions software support
 - One year Merchants Solutions on-site hardware support

Hardware

- Cognitive Barcode Blaster
- Posiflex JIVA All-In-One touch screen terminal
- MMF cash drawer
- Epson thermal receipt printer
- Symbol bar code scanner
- U.S. Robotics external modem
- Powervar UPS

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