Microsoft® Windows® Small Business Server 2003
Customer Solution Case Study

Knit–Set Dresses for Success with Microsoft Windows Small Business Server 2003

Overview

Canada
Retail

Knit-Set Canada Ltd. imports ladies sweaters made in Korea and distributes them to retailers across the country. Knit Set creates sweaters inspired by looks seen on international runways

Knit-Set needed an integrated IT system that would improve productivity, provide timely and accurate information, and eliminate paper-based processes, all within a secure environment

With the help of Blue Link Associates Limited, Knit-Set implemented a solution based on Microsoft® Windows® Small Business Server 2003. Blue Link also integrated the solution through a single point of entry for all business data

- Saved 10-15 working days a year
- Improved inventory management
- Reduced travel costs
- Improved security
- Eliminate manual processes

"The product is incredible value for small businesses because they benefit from the kind of top-of-the-line networking and e-mail services used by big firms to boost productivity and improve customer

Mark Canes, president, Blue Link Associates Ltd.

Based in Montréal, Knit-Set Canada Ltd. is an importer of ladies' sweaters. Knit-Set works with a number of designers to create sweaters inspired by looks seen on international fashion runways. The sweaters are manufactured in Korea and then shipped to Montréal for distribution to a variety of retail locations across Canada. Knit-Set imports a large number of sweaters each year, in a variety of colours and designs. Sweater styles change year to year, so Knit-Set needed an integrated IT system to provide management with real-time, accurate information about product SKU's. As well, the company wanted to improve employee productivity within a secure environment, to prepare for anticipated growth. With the help of Microsoft® Certified Partner Blue Link Associates Limited, Knit-Set implemented a solution based on Microsoft Windows® Small Business Server 2003.

Microsoft Windows Small Business Server 2003

Situation

Knit-Set was looking for an integrated IT system that would help improve employee productivity, provide management with timely and accurate information, and combine faxing and e-mail functions, all within a secure environment.

The company was running a number of disconnected software programs and paper-based processes to manage inventory, sales orders, purchasing, tracking of shipments, accounting information and financial statements. Outdated DOS-based software was used for order entry and accounting applications, which was minimally supported and could no longer be upgraded. The system in place was not accessible by reporting and analysis tools. Inventory management and shipment tracking was performed using manually updated Lotus 1-2-3 spreadsheets. Purchase orders were manually produced using Microsoft Word.

Knit-Set experienced a number of business challenges because of its manual, paper-based system. Re-typing of data created a significant drain on staff productivity and expanded error margins, resulting in reports that frequently did not agree with source data. During the busy season, manual production of shipping manifests became a full-time job for one person. Knit-Set needed to reduce the amount of paper it was generating, particularly tracking letters of credit, which was a difficult and time-consuming process.

Since Knit-Set imports most of its products, it is essential to track letters of credit accurately, so necessary documentation is immediately accessible when requested by border authorities.

"We buy our goods in U.S. dollars, therefore, letters of credit must be checked and double-checked to ensure accuracy," says Manfred Sandler, V.P. Finance, Knit-Set Canada Ltd. "We needed to track and manage data pertaining to letters of credit and provide real-time reports, to allow our employees to focus on key tasks that impact the business, instead of tedious manual exercises."

Security was also an issue for Knit-Set. The company's existing technology infrastructure was not secure – it did not include a firewall, and relied on an external ISP for e-mail for some employees. Concerns about security had resulted in some workstations being isolated from the Internet as a preventive measure, hampering productivity because users could not access the Web or e-mail.

As well, Knit-Set needed to extend management capabilities to executives working outside the Montréal headquarters and to its mobile sales staff. It could take over three days to get sales or inventory information. Knit-Set needed a solution that not only tracked the entire flow of inventory, but the entire process of tracking and sales in a timely and accurate manner.

"Most of our key business information – inventory quantities, financial information, and cash flow data – was updated over several days or several weeks, so our sales team did not have access to timely and accurate information to help complete a sale," says Sandler. "In addition, generation of purchase orders and tracking of shipments and inventory could take up to 40 per cent of the operations manager's time."

Solution

With the help of Blue Link Associates Limited, a Microsoft® Certified Partner, Knit-Set implemented a solution based on Microsoft Windows® Small Business Server 2003.

"The product offers incredible value for small businesses because they benefit from the kind of top-of-the-line networking and e-mail

services used by big firms to boost productivity and improve customer service at an affordable price," says, Mark Canes, president, Blue Link Associates Limited.

Microsoft SQL Server 2000, together with the stored procedures and views created by Blue Link, helped the company improve processes and retrieve large amounts of business data quickly. The Blue Link consultants educated users on how to easily link Excel spreadsheets to the SQL database for live-linked analysis using tools such as Pivot Tables. Blue Link helped Knit-Set replace its old system with a single server running Windows Small Business Server 2003 Premium Edition. Blue Link also integrated the needed functionality through a single point of entry for all business data, to help reduce the duplication of information. Blue Link then helped Knit-Set implement a suitable security model based on Microsoft SQL Server 2000 database server, in conjunction with the rich and secure model provided by Active Directory® directory server.

"Knit-Set was completely bogged down by manual processes," says Canes. "The company needed a solution that not only tracked the flow of inventory, but its entire business process, in a timely and accurate manner."

Windows Small Business Server 2003, includes tools that will provide Knit-Set with a solution that helps improve security, both externally and internally. For example, Internet Security and Acceleration ISA Server 2004 is an integrated firewall that helps protect the company's network from outside attacks. The line of business application that accomplishes this is SQL Server 2000 secured by the security module which was implemented at Knit-Set, in conjunction with Active Directory to help prevent unauthorized external access to key business data, and restrict employee access to only the appropriate systems and data.

Knit-Set added an additional server to enable Terminal Server providing Knit-Set with access remotely and the BlueLink application was implemented to allow remote access from any Internet connection. The remote capabilities reduced the need for frequent visits to Montréal by distant management, and allowed salespeople to remain out of office on road trips. Since most employees are at customer locations or traveling to manufacturers the remote functionality provides each employee with the flexibility and accessibility required for the job.

Benefits

An integrated IT solution has helped Knit-Set improve productivity across the organization. Access to comprehensive, accurate and up-to-date information is enabling employees to focus on key tasks instead of tedious manual work. Duplicated data-entry has been eliminated, saving staff 10-15 days per month in time. Better visibility into product status is also helping to improve customer service.

"Our sales staff can now sell immediately on the phone instead of having to ask someone else about product availability before accepting an order," says Sandler.

Streamlined productivity is also having a positive impact on Knit-Set's busy season. After the annual international fashion shows wrap up, the company goes into overdrive to create new products for its Fall/Spring clothing lines. During this time everyone in the organization is busy with shipping products across the border, placing customer orders and keeping track of inventory.

"Normally during the busy season we have to hire a full-time person to create shipping manifests," says Sandler. "Now we have been able to significantly reduce the amount of paper generation and handling, including replacing paper faxes with a combination of e-mail and electronic faxing. Because of these increased efficiencies we have been able to eliminate a costly temporary full-time position."

[illegible]

Windows Small Business Server 2003 is also helping Knit-Set improve its bottom line by providing management with access to timely and accurate information needed to make sound business decisions. The result is better visibility into inventory status, which helps ensure that sales obligations are fulfilled, while also maximizing inventory turnover and reducing the costs associated with warehousing excess product.

"Ensuring we don't have overstock is important to our business because leftovers mean reduced revenue – typically we have surplus inventory at the end of the season," says Sandler. "Having access to inventory information helps us identify and sell any surplus, and enables us to plan for the following season because we can clearly see what colours and styles sold well."

As well, Microsoft Terminal Services is reducing the need for frequent visits to Montréal by providing off-site workers, and IT service contractors employed by Blue Link, with remote access to information.

"I can make any necessary changes or updates to the system right from my office," says Canes. "I don't have to travel to the Montréal office to access the system which reduces Blue Link's annual service rates for Knit-Set by around $15,000."

With remote management, Knit-Set salespeople can work from customer locations with full access to sales records, inventory and financial records. Sales have increased, and costs have decreased, as a result.

"I am based in Toronto and because of the remote functionalities of Windows Small Business Server 2003, I have reduced my travel time to Montréal in half," says Sandler. "I now feel like I have my finger on the pulse of the organization, and I don't have to contact the Montreal office to get any business information. I have all the information I need when I want it."

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Windows Small Business Server 2003 provides a robust solution that will be able to grow with the company. The solution helped to create a secure network, kept it up-and-running, and automatically protected business information.

"We are confident that we are working in a business environment that Knit-Set can depend on," says Canes. "Microsoft SQL Server 2000 provides a robust, reliable and scalable database. It helps protect business information and prevents lost productivity with a secure infrastructure that includes built-in firewall protection and secure remote access."

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For more information about Blue Link Associates Limited, call (905) 660-0599 or visit the Web site at: www.bluelink.ca

For more information about Knit-Set Canada Ltd., call (416) 401-7402

Windows Small Business Server 2003

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