



Liquor Store Replaces System that Drained Money with One that Ferments Profits

Overview

Country or Region: United States

Industry: Retail

Customer Profile

Mac's Liquor, in Hopkins, Minnesota, offers a wide selection of beers, wines, spirits, glassware, and party accessories through its family-owned store and Web site.

Business Situation

After unwarranted costs, aggravation, and lost income from QuickBooks Point of Sale, the owners realized that they had to start from scratch and find a new system.

Solution

A month of research showed that Microsoft® Business Solutions Retail Management System offered the best set of retail tools, fast customer and stock reports, reliability, and local support.

Benefits

- Customer database options enhance personal service
- External software compatibility
- Rapid, nonintrusive installation
- Fast and easy to operate
- Instant, accurate inventory reports
- On-the-spot tech support
- Uninterrupted reliability

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Sue McCarville, Owner, Mac's Liquor

Plagued by the glitches, crashes, and erratic behavior of their previous system, the owners of Mac's Liquor found they were spending enormous amounts of time and maintenance money. Income was being lost, and Sue McCarville's free time was increasingly consumed by keeping the system running. “We finally faced it,” she says. “We'd made a bad choice, and we should change sooner, rather than later, because every day was costing us money or hours, or both.” Microsoft® Business Solutions Retail Management System was the only solution on her list for a replacement. “I did a lot of research,” Sue says, “but Microsoft covered everything we needed and gave us ease of use, stellar tech support, and the Microsoft name.” Microsoft Retail Management System was an immediate success. “It gives us fast checkouts and really usable reports,” says Sue. “It's a big hit around here. And it's *dependable!*”

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Sue McCarville, Owner, Mac's Liquor

Situation

Christened in September 2002, Mac's Liquor Store, owned and operated by Sue, Dave, and Carrie McCarville, sells more than 3,700 stock-keeping units (SKUs) of beer, wine, spirits, glassware, and bar accessories.

Sue keeps a tab on sales, rapidly verifying that beer is approximately 55 percent of revenues, wine is 14 percent, and liquors and accessories are 31 percent. Wine sales are up 27 percent over last year.

The store holds product-specific wine tastings and the occasional cocktail or beer sampling. “Our wine club is very popular,” says Sue, “and our e-mails make joining easy with a live link to our Web site.”

In-store customers can use the Microsoft® Access database at a public computer kiosk to learn about wine, selecting wines by grape, color, region, country, or vintner. “That information is gradually going up on our Web site,” Sue says, “so our customers can get a real ‘on-wine’ education.”

Previous System Wasted Time, Money

Unfortunately for this family business, its first retail system, QuickBooks Point of Sale, was unsuccessful. “We had to uninstall it after a year of grief,” Sue says. “We built the hardware based on configuration data from the developer's Web site and box. The product comes as a system—cash drawer, printers, and barcode scanners. That seems like a good idea until you learn you have to buy replacements from them.”

Costs soared. “Before going with Microsoft, we spent U.S.\$1,800 in hardware upgrades trying to solve computer problems that were never solved,” she says. “Yet the software was constantly crashing—almost daily, it seemed. Some days, we couldn't go two hours without the system freezing and having to be rebooted. Their tech support blamed

our hardware. So we upgraded system memory or our hard drive four times—to way above program specifications. Then they had me replace a modem. We also spent \$800 in phone calls and service calls—with the service plan!” she says. “Add to that the \$400 to \$500 we paid tech-savvy friends who tried to help us with it.”

Problems Multiplied

“Our previous software just didn't work,” Sue says. “Throughout this time, we were doing uncountable virus scans, spyware checks, restarts, reboots, reformatting, and on and on. And it wasn't just us; I found similar reports on the Internet.

“Because QuickBooks POS froze cash registers so often, we did many credit card sales manually. Beyond their being slow, our merchant credit provider charged them at a higher rate,” says Sue. “And hand work lets errors sneak in. Totals were wrong. Tax wasn't included. I opened up the credit card log files and saw \$300 to \$500 in lost revenue—and that's just what I spotted!”

Throwing in the Towel

“One busy evening, I watched customers walk out while we were scrambling to get that earlier system rebooted,” Sue says.

“The rest of our system worked, and QuickBooks Pro worked great for accounting, and still does. All our other programs worked.

“QuickBooks Point of Sale didn't even work for us like a [Microsoft] Windows® product should: no right mouse-button functions, no click/highlight multiple items. You couldn't even cut and paste what you wanted to.”

The final straw came when Sue was using inventory functions. “Our stock data was virtually lost, since the program was completely proprietary and information couldn't be exported. You couldn't even cut

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and paste it anywhere. When we finally switched, I had to print out the entire inventory and scan it as OCR to recover any of it—and I still wound up redoing everything.

“It was hard for us to admit that the program and everything we had done to fix it were a total loss,” she says.

Solution

It was vital that the replacement solution be the right one. “I spent a month doing POS system research online,” Sue says, “and read a ton of product descriptions. No one but Microsoft bridged the gaps we needed. I wanted to be able to see my products and see what I was doing on-screen. Some were too adding-machine-like; others were too accounting-heavy and didn't have enough real-world features for retail. Some—instead of calling a file a file and an item an item—had their own little terminologies you'd have to learn. Worse, you'd have to teach these odd terms to every new employee.”

Ultimately, the business decided on Microsoft® Business Solutions Retail Management System. “It was the only system I really considered installing,” she says. “I wanted something that worked the way you expect software to work. And I really liked that it had the Microsoft name. Another huge factor was local access to a trained Microsoft Partner who I immediately trusted.”

Problems Resolved

The October 2003 installation was a snap, and the change was dramatic. “When we replaced QuickBooks Point of Sale and went to Microsoft Retail Management System, all our so-called ‘hardware’ problems disappeared,” Sue says.

“Installation was painless and flawless,” she continues. “We had no downtime; we kept right on doing business. Our Microsoft Partner, John Lynch at Copeland Buhl,

worked around our needs. When we had a small complication with credit card software, John fixed it immediately. I can't tell you how much I appreciate what Copeland Buhl did for us. They know this product inside and out, how it works, and with what. You're never reticent about asking them a question. And they do the job right the first time.”

Benefits

The McCarvilles' first benefit was peace of mind. “There was a huge sense of relief. Every time the phone rang at night, it *wasn't* the store calling to say something was wrong with the system,” she says. “Now I choose when I go in, instead of having to rush in to respond to emergency calls.”

Ease of Use

Inventory tracking is fast, easy, and reliable. “The old system used to show the same product in different quantities in different places in the program,” Sue says. “As a result, we would sometimes order too little and be caught short.

“Our daughter Carrie, the store manager, can enter new stock in less than half the time. Changing product properties is faster, too. Of course, everything is quicker because the software is actually *working!*”

The new ability to instantly generate customized reports saves money. “I love to manipulate data,” says Sue, “so for me, no program could have too many report functions. I use custom reports and exchange my data with Microsoft Excel. It's so easy to do exports!”

More Time to Serve Customers

Sue now finds she can redirect her energies to customer contact and other more interesting and productive tasks. “We wasted an incredible amount of work hours on the previous software,” she says. “This makes it so much easier for us to make extensive use

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of mailing, e-mailing, and Web site promotion. It’s frightening to think how many people didn’t come back because of long waits or because we didn’t look competent at getting our own registers working. Customers have actually commented to me, ‘You guys finally got those computers straightened out!’”

Sue also found that Microsoft Retail Management System was easy to learn and operate, which sped lines at point of sale. “This works just like you expect software to work,” she says. “I really like its function keys. You can stay basically in one screen, yet get to whatever you need to.”

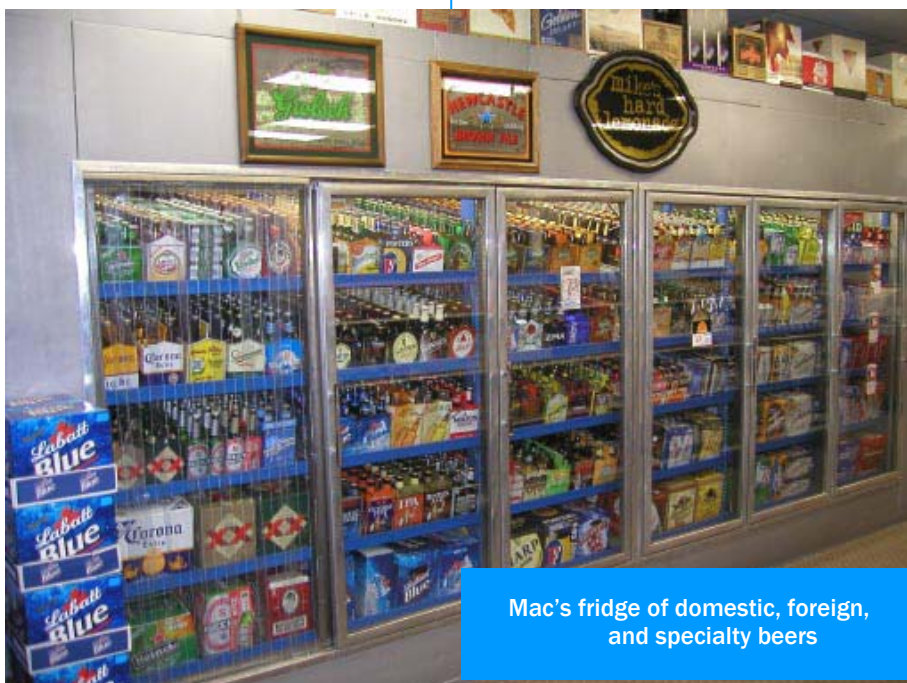
Tools for the Future

Sue plans to use more of the features built into her new Microsoft system. “Now we use the discount screen, and have begun using the customer information tab to track wine club members’ purchases, which is very helpful.”

Her advice to retailers researching retail management solutions is unequivocal. “Don’t buy an untested product,” she says. “We did, and it was a big mistake. A year later, a product review quoted users’ echoing the same disastrous experiences I’d had.

“Don’t keep trying to make a bad system work. You’ll tell yourself, ‘I’ve got so much into this, I have to stick with it.’ Well, don’t! Bad software has costs you don’t begin to foresee. Apply the proverb ‘Hire slow, fire fast’ to software. Take the energy you’re wasting on something you can’t fix and put it to better use.

“I should have taken my own advice nine months earlier,” says Sue. “Today, I couldn’t be more satisfied with Microsoft Retail Management System and with the service. I feel like we just popped the cork on a whole new beginning.”



Mac’s fridge of domestic, foreign, and specialty beers

For More Information

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For more information about Mac's Liquor products and services, call (952) 949-8530 or visit the Web site at: www.macsliquors.com

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 Word 2003
- Microsoft Windows XP Professional
- Solution
 - Microsoft Business Solutions Retail Management System

Hardware

- Dell and Gateway PCs
- Actiontec router
- Star Micronics printers
- Voyager scanners

Partner

- Copeland Buhl & Company, P.L.L.P.

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