



Overview

Country or Region: United States
Industry: Retail

Customer Profile

Besides a fine selection of Mediterranean-style wines, Twisted Oak Winery has a wide range of wine accessories in gift shops and tasting rooms in Vallecito and nearby Murphys, California.

Business Situation

In spring 2003, Twisted Oak began retail operations while looking for an IT solution to manage sales in its tasting rooms and wine club. The ideal blend would combine ease, efficiency, and economy.

Solution

After polling other wineries, reviewing “countless” solutions on the Web, and trying out systems at trade shows, this vintner discovered Microsoft® Business Solutions Retail Management System.

Benefits

- Instant reports enable on-the-spot decisions.
- Unimpeachable system stability.
- System provides knowledge pool so staff can cover each other’s jobs.
- Easy-to-sort customer database updates instantly.

Young Winery Speeds Customer Flow with Clear, Smooth Point-of-Sale System

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Craig MacDonald, Sales and Marketing Director, Twisted Oak Winery

Starting a new winery was not an easy task for owner, Jeff Stai and his small team at Twisted Oak Winery. “We wanted to make sure we didn’t pour our seed money into an expensive and overly complicated system,” says Craig MacDonald, the vineyard’s Sales and Marketing Director. “Yet, there was no way we could manage these work flows with just a bunch of cash registers.”

After spending months searching for the perfect system that delivered the combination of simplicity, functionality, and affordability needed, Twisted Oak discovered Microsoft® Certified Partner Digital Retail Solutions and Microsoft Business Solutions Retail Management System.

“It was worth the time and effort,” MacDonald says. “Now we save tons of time on generating reports, tracking customers, and utilizing our employee management tools. And we haven’t tapped into this product’s full potential!”

“Twenty times a day, you save steps, minutes, or hours—because all the information is right there”

Craig MacDonald, Sales and Marketing Director, Twisted Oak Winery

Situation

In July of 2003, Twisted Oak Winery opened its doors in Murphys, California, with grapes obtained from local growers of premium, microclimate fruit. As with many startup ventures, there were growing pains and question marks.

“We’d never had a retail operation before,” says MacDonald, “so we weren’t absolutely sure what kind of system we needed. When we were researching the many POS [point-of-sale] systems available—all at once and for our first time—we were bombarded with a lot of information.”

Getting What You Need

Twisted Oak sells some 150 stock keeping units (SKUs) of wines, wine accessories, and a puzzling array of rubber chickens and gifts that MacDonald calls “chickenalia.” The team also sells winery tours and caters luncheons and dinners where local businesses impress clients.

There were certain things that MacDonald and the team at Twisted Oak knew they had to have. “Number one, it had to be user-friendly. Business isn’t about computers. Secondly, there was a list of report functions such as sales, inventory, and customer history we had to have. And third, it had to be affordable. We spent more time looking for this than I expected we would.

“In other companies where I’ve worked, they’d send totals to external accountants who would create reports they thought we needed. But if they’re not on site with your business problems, they miss the bull’s-eye. And it can take three weeks to get information from a vendor’s business queue. Sometimes I need to see a relationship or a comparison during a specific period, but I need it *now*.”

On top of everything else, Twisted Oak had planned to open a second tasting room the following year in the nearby town of Vallecito. So any solution had to enable communication and the integration of records from several new locations.

“To keep bookkeeping and operations simple, we would need an identical system in Vallecito that could connect to our Murphys office via high-speed Internet once that access became available,” says Jim Smith, Operations Manager, Twisted Oak Winery. “We knew a variety of staff here would be taking orders via phone, fax, Web, and direct e-mail. So we specified a system that would tie it all together in a way that anyone could understand.”

External Software Compatibility a Key

In looking ahead to future demands, MacDonald was fully aware of the potential problems of conflicting software. “Other retailers told me about nightmares trying to integrate mismatched databases and software. I had to be sure my system could intercommunicate with no slowdown of our prime business missions.”

One plan was to eventually convert Twisted Oak’s wholesale business to eWinery, a product by Elypsis, Inc. of Napa, California.

“We were looking for a series of smooth transitions as we grew because, frankly, with everything else that we had to think about, no one had the time for intricate software,” MacDonald says.

Customer Service a Priority

The most important requisite, however, was quick, accurate, and trouble-free performance at the POS. “The customer is number one,” says MacDonald, “If you can’t take care of your customers in a busy wine-tasting and sales room, the word gets out, and people stop coming. We get regulars and

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Craig MacDonald, Sales and Marketing
Director, Twisted Oak Winery

we get tourists, and very few want to lag around once they've made their selection. At that minute, something changes and they want to hit the road.

“Old-time electronic cash register dinosaurs were never an option,” he says. “Anybody who buys those is saying, ‘Let’s stay small forever.’ Yet we couldn’t justify spending [U.S.]\$30,000 on a retail management system. The solution had to fit all our needs and be affordable, too. Impossible, right?”

Solution

“We looked everywhere,” says MacDonald. “We searched the Web, attended trade events, and visited other wineries. We reviewed countless other systems, but no other developer gave us simplicity, functionality, and affordability.”

Finally, Twisted Oak found John Chang of Microsoft® Certified Partner Digital Retail Solutions (DRS), who recommended Microsoft Business Solutions Retail Management System. “Yes, it was user-friendly; yes, it had the functions we needed; and yes, it was within our budget,” MacDonald says.

“DRS set up all our configurations and peripherals for us, then they provided a plug-in program that handles our discount rules,” MacDonald says. “And they can make system tweaks remotely. We just log onto their Web site. That gives them temporary but secure access to our network.

“DRS knows what works well and how to get things installed fast. The proof was they set it up in less than an hour and it’s been running ever since.”

Smooth System Operation

It didn’t take MacDonald long to learn the system and teach it to others. “We have 15 employees, and they all knew their parts of

the system by the second morning,” he says. “And they’re learning complex functions—not just how to make a sale. They need customer histories, stock levels, even purchasing data.”

Customized reports, so important to winery executives, were similarly easy to generate. “Just a few clicks and I get the report I need: inventory lists, sales figures, order lists,” says MacDonald. “With just one or two more commands, you filter out anything that isn’t exactly what you need to see. If a report I create on the fly looks useful in the long term, I name it, store it, and reuse it next month.”

He also found Microsoft Retail Management System interchanges data easily with other IT tools, such as the software used by Twisted Oak’s preexisting wholesale business. “Microsoft open standards let us shoot data around here wherever we need it. On top of that, Jim exports a lot of data into [Microsoft] Excel spreadsheets, where we both use it for our own needs. The interchange has been smooth as glass.”

Business Efficiency and Customer Satisfaction

Speed of access to Microsoft Retail Management System reporting capability helps Twisted Oak personnel, and by extension, their customers.

“Twenty times a day, you save steps, minutes, or hours—because all the information is right there,” says MacDonald. “And if it’s not on my computer, I can get to it. Anyone can handle a customer problem or walk-in sale and have immediate access to that customer’s buying history, status, and discount level right at the point of sale!

“This new solution is easy and affordable and has all the necessary functions I need. And the whole system only took a day to learn!”

“The more expensive systems would have cost us [U.S.]\$30,000, but even supposedly fancier ones didn’t offer that much extra for their high price tags. And their support costs were awful.”

Craig MacDonald, Sales and Marketing
Director, Twisted Oak Winery

Benefits

“Where do I start?” says MacDonald. “Microsoft Retail Management System is everything I hoped for. We save huge amounts of time generating reports, tracking customers, and seeing what to stock.”

The system also helps several ways at the checkout counter, primarily by speeding customer checkout of an often-complex sale. “I really like the preset functions,” MacDonald says. “Customers get through the line quickly and they remember that. And once a transaction is in the system, there are no downstream errors with it, no matter how many times it’s copied or wherever it’s needed—unlike systems where you enter the same information two or three times, and errors creep in.”

Twisted Oak parlays system connectivity into business convenience. “Because we are such a tightly knit organization,” says Smith, “we don’t need all the security controls our new system can really deliver, at least not today. All our staff have essentially equal access to reports and data. We cover each others’ jobs when Craig runs out to a customer emergency or I get stuck away from the office.”

Accurate Inventory

“One of the most thoroughly exercised aspects of our system is inventory control,” MacDonald says. “To those of us in the back office, knowing exactly what we have on hand at any time in any category is essential.”

Besides ensuring no shelves go bare, the system’s strong inventory control is central to purchasing. “Ordering is very tight,” he says, “because this helps me see what we have and how fast it sells during which months of the year.”

Rock Solid

“Dollar for dollar, Microsoft Retail Management [System] is the best return on our system dollar we found,” he says. “In the last year it hasn’t glitched on us once. It hasn’t even slowed down. It’s always done what we’ve asked.”

“Compared to pricier systems, it saved us thousand of dollars in initial software setup costs,” MacDonald says. “We had two system choices. The more expensive systems would have cost us [U.S.]\$30,000, but even supposedly fancier ones didn’t offer that much extra for their high price tags. And their support costs were awful. Those in the same price range as Microsoft Retail Management System weren’t as functional and were built on old technology. Once we saw the clarity of the comparisons, it was no contest.”

Expanding Use

Twisted Oak plans to dig in to more of the new system’s functions. “I feel we are just scratching the surface of what Microsoft Retail Management [System] has to offer,” MacDonald says. “We’d like to use it to create a vendor database, track employees’ time in and out, assess comparative sales performance, and even manage our direct marketing.”

The learning curve doesn’t daunt him. “This system is so clear, I have no doubts we can do these things,” MacDonald says, “just as soon as we get a few minutes away from customers.”

“I’ve been through no system, slow systems, and our current excellent system. If a fellow retailer asked me about criteria for a POS upgrade, I’d say to keep their conversion uncomplicated and don’t compromise on ease of use in day-to-day operations. And there’s only one system I know of that can do all that, and we bought it!

For More Information

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For more information about Digital Retail Solutions products and services, call (800) 322-9471 or visit the Web site at: www.digitalretailer.com

For more information about Twisted Oak Winery, LLC products and services, call (209) 736-9080 or visit the Web site at: www.twistedoak.com

“This Microsoft solution does everything but stomp the grapes.”

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 Office 2003 Professional
 - Microsoft Windows XP Professional
- Solutions
 - Microsoft Business Solutions Retail Management System

Third Party Software

- Retail Realm Custom Promotional Pricing Module

Hardware

- Dell Dimension PCs with flat panel LCD
- Symbol scanner
- Cherry keyboard
- Epson TM-88 printer
- MMF cash drawer

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