



A Second Chance At A Hardware Retailer's POS System

▲ Software Development Inc. lands a 68-store hardware chain POS (point of sale) project one year after the integrator lost the job to a competitor.

by Dan Schell

When retail POS (point of sale) integrator Software Development Inc. (SDI) (Pleasanton, CA) didn't win a hardware chain's POS project in October 2001, it never expected to be awarded the job a year later. Yet, that's exactly what happened when SDI got its second chance from ACO Hardware (Detroit). "The client tried unsuccessfully for a year to implement our competitor's solution," explains Alan Edwards, senior project manager at SDI. "In November 2002, the ACO management team called us back."

The original problem was that ACO was using older NCR 2126/2127 cash registers/terminals that were firmware driven. Parts were hard to come by for these devices and the company wanted to upgrade to a POS system with more reporting functionality and other features like automated inventory management and tracking.

A Quick POS Software Customization

ACO had done its homework and specified the types of hardware components for its new POS solution. For instance, the company wanted to upgrade to touch screen POS terminals. In addition, it wanted the ability to use wireless handheld computers/bar code scanners for applications such as shelf price audits, receiving, performing transfers of inventory between stores, and inventory cycle counts. (These types of applications were previously completed by hand.) The following components were chosen for each of the retailer's 68 stores (which each have from four to six checkout lanes):

- BlueStar MRT1000 cash register/cash drawer
- TPG (Axiohm) A758 POS transaction printer
- Preh 90324-019/0000 touch/flat screen
- PSC Duet POS bar code scanner
- Welch Allen 6920-3 MSR (magnetic stripe reader) wedge
- Welch Allen TT3100 signature capture device
- Celeron 700 FT-1631 book-size PC
- Symbol 8146 handheld radio frequency (RF) terminal

SDI customized its IRIS software for the ACO project. This software included modules for applications such as sales audit and cash office management, inventory management, time and attendance, POS processing, and automated item reordering. "We had never designed our software for a touch screen interface," Edwards says. "But, by May 1, 2003, we had completed all of the software cus-

tomizations for ACO." After a successful pilot test, the whole solution was rolled out June 1, 2003.

SDI provided 15 days of training including setup, support, and train-the-trainers courses. ACO then trained the store personnel.



Software Development Inc. used Georgia SoftWorks' Telnet Server software on Symbol 8146 handhelds for the data collection portion of a project at ACO Hardware.

Adapt To Wireless Integration Challenges

One of the challenges SDI had with this project concerned the handheld computers. First, because the applications for the RF terminals reside on a store's server instead of the handhelds, SDI needed a method to perform VT (virtual terminal) emulation on a Windows PC. "We used Georgia SoftWorks [Dawsonville, GA] Telnet Server software to provide the emulation to the handheld from the Windows PC," states Edwards. "We evaluated five different vendors of this type of software and chose Georgia SoftWorks because its product provided the stability and throughput we needed for this customer." (ACO bought two software licenses per store for this handheld solution.)

The other handheld-related challenge SDI overcame concerned the client's choice of a D-Link (Irvine, CA) 802.11b point-to-point wireless architecture. Instead of using wireless access points, the company chose to install wireless CardBus adapters in the POS terminals. SDI's technical staff had to determine how to program the Symbol handhelds to communicate with the D-Link CardBus adapters. After some conversations with Symbol technicians — and some long hours in SDI's testing lab — the problem was solved.

Plan For Add-On Sales

ACO successfully deployed SDI's solution to all of its locations throughout the summer of 2003. By doing so, the company has eliminated polling cash register tapes and all of the associated manual, error-prone systems that it wanted to update. Furthermore, the company now has real-time access to inventory data. SDI is currently working with ACO to add gift card, physical inventory interface, and customer loyalty programs to the in-store system. □

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