SIGNAL PRODUCTS, INC

Microsoft and CGS Deliver Integrated Vertical-Market Solution to Global Fashion Vendor

Overview

Country or Region: United States
Industry: Manufacturing

Customer Profile
Signal Products, founded in 1992 and headquartered in Los Angeles, California, manufactures and distributes handbags and leather goods worldwide.

Business Situation
As a small manufacturer competing in a global marketplace, Signal Products was hindered by its outmoded AS/400-based business management software that failed to provide easy access to critical data.

Solution
Computer Generated Solutions (CGS) provided Signal Products with a solution developed for the fashion industry, integrating BlueCherry software from CGS with Microsoft® Business Solutions–Solomon, now a part of Microsoft Dynamics™.

Benefits
- Gained accurate, detailed data
- Provided ease of use
- Worked with existing software
- Enabled simplified reporting
- Created an extensible solution

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>
> Jason Rimokh, Executive Vice President, Signal Products

Signal Products, a handbag manufacturer and distributor headquartered in Los Angeles, California, needed to improve its business management systems to compete in a global marketplace. Among other difficulties, the company's aging AS/400-based system made it difficult to get detailed information about critical business data, and it did not work with the company's Microsoft® Windows Server™–based infrastructure or the Microsoft Office products that Signal Products uses on a daily basis. With the help of Computer Generated Solutions (CGS), Signal Products deployed Microsoft Business Solutions–Solomon (now part of Microsoft Dynamics™), along with BlueCherry software, developed by CGS, to provide an integrated solution. Although still in the early stages of use, Signal Products now enjoys easy access to accurate business data, simplified reporting, and a solution it can extend as it expands its business worldwide.

CGS
Computer Generated Solutions®

Microsoft Dynamics

Situation

Signal Products, a small but growing handbag manufacturer and distributor, faced increasing challenges as competition intensified in the global marketplace. The company ran software on an AS/400-based computer. The software provided import tracking, business financials, electronic data interchange (EDI), and sales-force automation. But the aging AS/400-based system failed to provide easy access to critical business data. The company especially struggled with its reporting process, which was not easy to modify. The system also was not integrated with the company's Microsoft® Windows Server™– based infrastructure or with its Microsoft Office System programs.

As a manufacturer competing for business worldwide, Signal Products needs to keep tight control over its financial and inventory tracking—a challenging prospect when dealing with international trade functions such as calculating tariffs and taxes from multiple countries. In addition, retailers often impose their own requirements for packaging, labeling, shipping, and inventory, and do not hesitate to fine vendors that fail to comply. Some retailers also charge their vendors for late, mislabeled, or misrouted products. Thus, having ready access to current data is critical for the manufacturer.

"We sell to major department stores and specialty stores," says Jason Rimokh, Executive Vice President for Signal Products. "We also sell to international distributors, so we need to be able to meet the needs of all of these customers, and that means having the systems to support that reach."

Because it is a smaller manufacturer, Signal Products does not have the resources to maintain a large IT staff. So when it began to look at upgrading from its AS/400-based system, Signal Products looked for a system that was easy to use and could be modified without requiring extensive training or support.

Solution

To meet the challenges of replacing its existing system, Signal Products turned to Computer Generated Solutions (CGS), a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner and a leading provider of software, training, and managed services in 29 locations worldwide. CGS developed BlueCherry, an integrated suite of products for specific vertical industries— fashion, footwear, and accessories. The CGS research and development team worked closely with Microsoft to integrate and extend the functionality of BlueCherry software. To provide customers with a robust and complete business management solution, BlueCherry integrates with Microsoft Business Solutions–Solomon, now part of Microsoft Dynamics™. With its BlueCherry software, CGS extends the capabilities of Microsoft Solomon to provide a specialized solution for the fashion industry vertical market. The solution, which runs on Microsoft Windows® 2000 Server and Windows Server 2003 operating systems and uses Microsoft SQL Server™ for database storage, includes the following software:

- Microsoft components—These include financial modules available through Microsoft Solomon, such as accounts payable, general ledger, cash manager— which provides instant access to current cash balances and automated bank statement reconciliation—and customization software to adapt Microsoft Solomon to specific customer needs.

- BlueCherry components— BlueCherry software includes modules for enterprise resource planning, supply chain management, sales catalog automation, warehouse management, product lifecycle management, merchandise planning and

forecasting, and shop floor control. BlueCherry also provides features for EDI. CGS also developed integration bridge software to integrate the BlueCherry components with Microsoft Solomon.

In July 2005, CGS deployed BlueCherry and Microsoft Solomon applications as the integrated business management solution for Signal Products. "Microsoft Solomon has the same flexibility and configurability that our customers get with BlueCherry," says Paul Magel, Senior Vice President, Application Solution Division, for Computer Generated Solutions.

Together, the components provide an integrated solution that can be customized without touching the source code. And integrated tools enable the creation of made-to-order reports and data queries. The solution also integrates tightly with the Microsoft Office System.

Benefits

Within just a few months, Signal Products began to see many benefits from its integrated business management solution based on Microsoft Solomon and BlueCherry. It expects to gain even more over time. Signal Products now has easy access to essential business data with a system that is not only easy to use, but also integrates with the other Microsoft software that the company relies on. Reporting has been simplified, and Signal Products has a solution that can be extended over time as new needs arise. With these advantages, Signal Products expects it will be a more effective global competitor.

Gained Easy Access to Detailed Business Data

Signal Products now enjoys easy access to critical business data. "It all comes down to getting fast, accurate information," says Jason Rimokh, Executive Vice President for Signal Products. "This solution helps us get

information at our fingertips much faster than before. The inquiry screens are very powerful. You can do multiparameter selections filtering on a single inquiry screen. It's fantastic!"

With this information, Signal Products gets detailed views into its business processes. The integrated solution also provides multicurrency support, which is vital for international operations. Accounts receivable are handled by BlueCherry, and Microsoft Solomon handles the accounts payable and general ledger needs—all working harmoniously together. "We can dissect our business any way we want to show the results we need," says Steve Horsman, Vice President of Operations at Signal Products.

Provided Ease of Use

Because its integrated solution has interfaces similar to the Microsoft products that Signal Products uses each day—and works so smoothly with them—people find the solution easy to use. "We like the friendliness of the Microsoft Windows environment," says Horsman. With a few clicks, the company's 30 users can also download screens and validated data into the Microsoft Office Excel® 2003 spreadsheet software files for further analysis.

For Signal Products, the whole operation is seamless. The company uses the EDI capabilities in its business management solution to exchange purchase orders, shipping notices, and invoices with customers around the world. "More than 90 percent of our business with customers is done through EDI," Horsman says.

The EDI runs in the background with only simple maintenance. EDI processing helps the company reduce chargebacks, manage orders, and track imports. Users can log on remotely from anywhere with virtually any type of Windows-based PC by using Terminal

Services. Signal Products plans to bring its suppliers in China and India into the system soon, so it will then have instant visibility into its entire supply chain.

Integrated with Existing Microsoft Infrastructure

Because the solution is based on Microsoft Windows Server System™, Signal Products can use the same IT support that it uses for the rest of its Microsoft infrastructure. It no longer has to rely on separate programmers and technicians for its business management software.

Enabled Simplified Reporting

With the integrated solution, Signal products gained easier reporting with the new system's report builder tool. The report builder file can be produced in several formats, including XML and Excel 2003. "We can use exception reporting to track invoices and monitor warehouse picks by the day or by the minute. I can run my numbers straight out of the stock reports in the product, or in reports that we create ourselves without a lot of help," says Horsman. For a company that previously required programmers to set up special reports, that feature is especially valuable.

Created a Solution That Can Grow

Signal Products appreciates the fact that with an integrated solution based on Microsoft software and the additional capabilities provided by CGS, it can extend its solution as its needs change. Signal Products plans to add to the solution in the near future.

For example, Signal Products expects to add an Executive Dashboard, a Web-based interface to the solution, to provide visibility into key performance indicators (KPIs). The addition will include alerts—which can be sent by the Microsoft Office Outlook® 2003 messaging and collaboration client—to notify authorized personnel when certain KPIs, such as sales volume and orders shipped, fall

below targets. The company will also deploy a virtual showroom, another CGS development, to give customers secure access to seasonal displays of its product lines, order-entry, and more. Plus, Signal Products will implement an advanced warehouse system, which includes sophisticated tracking mechanisms—including tracking with radio frequency technology.

"Our old system couldn't do any of this," says Rimokh. "I'm just thankful we're not stuck with an aging system that we would have to retrofit with these new applications. With Microsoft and CGS we have a solution that can grow and help us become more competitive."

For More Information

For more information about Microsoft products and services, call the Microsoft Sales Information Center at (800) 426-9400. In Canada, call the Microsoft Canada Information Centre at (877) 568-2495. Customers who are deaf or hard-of-hearing can reach Microsoft text telephone (TTY/TDD) services at (800) 892-5234 in the United States or (905) 568-9641 in Canada. Outside the 50 United States and Canada, please contact your local Microsoft subsidiary. To access information using the World Wide Web, go to:
www.microsoft.com

For more information about Computer Generated Solutions products and services, call (212) 408-3800 or visit the Web site at:
www.cgsinc.com

For more information about Signal Products products and services, call (213) 748-0990.

Microsoft Dynamics

Microsoft Dynamics is a line of integrated, adaptable business management solutions that enables you and your people to make business decisions with greater confidence. Microsoft Dynamics works like familiar Microsoft software such as Microsoft Office, which means less of a learning curve for your people, so they can get up and running quickly and focus on what's most important. And because it is from Microsoft, it easily works with the systems your company already has implemented. By automating and streamlining financial, customer relationship and supply chain processes, Microsoft Dynamics brings together people, processes and technologies, increasing the productivity and effectiveness of your business, and helping you drive business success.

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