



Specialty Gift Store Saves Its State's Tax Money by Shortening Tasks and Store Lines

Overview

Country or Region: United States

Industry: Retail

Customer Profile

Jasmine's in Wilmington, Illinois, sells one-of-a-kind gifts and popular salsas. Eight developmentally disabled adults, learning personal and financial self-sufficiency, make many of the store's gifts.

Business Situation

Entering and reporting on daily sales using an aging electronic cash register added two hours to each day. Accuracy wasn't what it should be, and reporting wouldn't flex to the store's changing needs.

Solution

Microsoft® Point of Sale and a Pioneer POS bundle were installed, and staff was trained by Merchants Solutions, a Microsoft Certified Business Solutions Partner.

Benefits

- "We went from the Flintstones to the Jetsons"
- Two-hour closing tasks now two minutes
- Periodic reports take only minutes
- Corporate buyer likes new stock reports
- Greater accuracy storewide
- Faster lines, shorter waits

"We see the new savings in less overtime, lower staff costs, faster customer service, and smarter management."

Shirley Lewis, Program Coordinator, Jasmine's

Jasmine's is a unique gift store, both for the revenues it forwards to Trinity Services, a nonsectarian, nonprofit organization that serves and supports the developmentally disabled, and for its Day Program where those assisted learn skills and self-esteem. Each dollar to Jasmine's bottom line reduces reliance on state programs.

But the store's electronic cash register added two hours to closing tasks on busy days. Lines were often slow, purchasing was tedious, and adding new inventory was a chore. Then Merchants Solutions, a Microsoft® Certified Business Solutions Partner, installed Microsoft Point of Sale and a robust Pioneer POS bundle.

Now staff costs are down because hours-long chores are done in minutes. Reports make corporate's buying choices clearer. And the trusty accounting program is seldom used, thanks to the standard and highly customizable reports in Microsoft Point of Sale.

“Our handmade gifts are charming, but doing books and store records by hand isn’t. Every task took several steps, and it was far too easy for errors to creep in.”

Shirley Lewis, Program Coordinator, Jasmine’s

Situation

Jasmine’s is one of seven businesses and specialty stores supporting Trinity Services Inc., a nonsectarian, nonprofit organization whose motto is “Helping people with disabilities live full and abundant lives.” Eight Jasmine’s staff are developmentally disabled adults learning self-sufficiency and the self-esteem of personal productivity. Jasmine’s positive cash flow helps Trinity expand programs and rely less on state dollars.

Jasmine’s opened in Wilmington, Illinois, just outside of Joliet as a confectionary in 1998. Today, three store employees use its new register to sell approximately 1,200 items, primarily one-of-a-kind gifts, seasonal merchandise, and handmade wood, bead, and fabric items. Eight developmentally disabled adults work in Jasmine’s Day Program, learning skills and work habits making gifts, doing housekeeping, and assisting customers.

This staff segment makes Critter Throws (blankets) and Fritters for Critters, Jasmine’s all-natural line of gourmet pet treats, which come in five flavors, three sizes, and several seasonal shapes. Currently, items made in the Day Program comprise about 25 percent of the inventory, but Jasmine’s is working to increase that amount.

Staff also assemble standard and made-to-order gift baskets, usually including the store’s popular gourmet dips and salsas. Tasty samples are always available on counters to entice a taste and encourage a purchase.

Although most business is walk-in clientele, phone sales—usually gift baskets—are paid by credit card and shipped directly. Because Jasmine’s is located in a vintage section of downtown Wilmington, one challenge has been to get the word out of its presence and recent expansion from

confectionary to a wide-ranging specialty gift store. Well-scrubbed antique metal meat hooks still hang in the ceiling from the early 1900s when the space housed a butcher.

“Our handmade gifts are charming, but doing books and store records by hand isn’t. Every task took several steps, and it was far too easy for errors to creep in. We had to manually enter sales data every day and that could take up to two hours after a busy day. Over a week, these tasks added up and took hours of productive staff time,” says Shirley Lewis, Program Coordinator at Jasmine’s.

Solution

Things changed in March 2005. Jasmine’s acquired an impressive collection of new Microsoft® software and retail hardware to manage its retail store operations.

“We knew Merchants Solutions had installed a Microsoft retail system at sister stores—Petals and Twigs in New Lenox [Illinois], and All Area Custom Design in Joliet—and they’re giving it reviews. Microsoft Point of Sale is a better fit for Jasmine’s needs. We’re a little smaller and have fewer items to track, but we’re just as busy,” says Trudy Curtis, Program Director for Trinity Services.

Merchants Solutions is a Microsoft Certified Business Solutions Partner headquartered in Hillside, Illinois, west of Chicago.

The new system included Microsoft Windows® XP Professional operating system and Microsoft Point of Sale, the retail solution for small and independent retailers that gives them automation tools that helped large-box retailers become large. The new Pioneer POS computer is retail-hardened and specifically designed for growing stores with heavy transaction loads. An Elo TouchSystems 15" LCD touch-screen, Cherry keyboard, Symbol LS 2208 handheld scanner, and Epson TM-

Jasmine’s charming exterior welcomes visitors in downtown Wilmington, Illinois.



“We went from the Flintstones to the Jetsons! What was once two hours’ work entering sales and receipts and making a report is now about two minutes.”

Shirley Lewis, Program Coordinator, Jasmine’s

Jasmine’s manager Shirley Lewis sells Fritters for Critters at her new Pioneer/Microsoft Point of Sale front register.



T88III thermal receipt printer speed every sale.

“We all had some initial butterflies about the new system,” admits Lewis, “but they were unwarranted. Installation was wonderful. Merchants Solutions set up the software, then hooked up and tested our new hardware. They took care of everything, training us how to make sales, how to enter new merchandise, track stock levels—even customizing our own reports. They answered all our questions, and followed up to ensure we were satisfied and getting good results.”

Staff found the system easy to learn because the sales screen resembles a retail sales receipt, clearly showing quantity, item description, and extended price. Part of the new touch screen is devoted to point-of-sale (POS) buttons to expedite retail tasks such as finding previous transactions and looking up items, which once ate up minutes at the register,

Benefits

What was once two hours’ work entering sales and receipts and making a report,” Lewis says, “is now about two minutes. We get all the same information—organized the way we want it—in about 2 percent of the time. That same time advantage holds true with our weekly and monthly reports.

“Now we enter new items in one step at the computer, not several manual steps. That principle shows up in nearly every retail task. We see it most clearly in labor saved. Our jobs get done faster and are more accurate. Long tasks breed fatigue and boredom, but these are more interesting. And automation means you don’t manually reenter today what you wrote down twice last week. The system remembers everything correctly.

“We see the new savings in less overtime, lower staff costs, faster customer service, and smarter management.”

Curtis, who performs much of the buying for Jasmine’s, says, “The new reports from Jasmine’s are more clearly categorized and easier to work with. I can immediately find what I need to know.”

Back-office and after-closing tasks such as purchase orders and receiving and pricing new inventory are faster, so management also benefits from the new speed. “We use many of the standard reports,” says Lewis, “and we customize others for our unique environment. Though many of our items are one-of-a-kind, once the standard items are in the system, reordering and receiving them takes only a few keystrokes compared to the time it used to take to type and fax or mail a purchase order.”

Customers remark on faster lines and shorter waits because the new Symbol scanner instantly writes their purchases to the computer system. If an item isn’t visible on a shelf, staff can verify if it’s out of stock, or just out of sight. Sales can be voided mid-cycle, and staff frequently use Transactions on Hold to ring up items while shoppers buy more. Even returns without a sales slip surrender to Microsoft Point of Sale because the system easily finds previous transactions using any of several look-up factors.

Using Microsoft Point of Sale to do reports usually reserved for accounting software was an unexpected benefit. Lewis says, “QuickBooks Pro is installed, but I don’t need it as much. I track and report sales in the Microsoft system, then send its reports to Trinity’s corporate accountant... This way, a new person learns one system instead of two. I know it’s easy to move data from Microsoft Point of Sale into QuickBooks, but we don’t need to. For what this single retail store

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For more information about Merchants Solutions products and services, call (800) 486-3214 or visit the Web site at: www.merchants-solutions.com

For more information about Jasmine's products and services, call (815) 476-5352 or visit the Web site at: www.trinity-services.org

needs, Microsoft Point of Sale is doing our bookkeeping.”

Jasmine's is planning on additional benefits soon from entering all its customers into the customer database. “We plan to send our customers mailings about new lines and products, sales, and special events,” says Lewis. Management is considering a Web site, particularly to boost sales of the Critters product lines. New, well-organized sales and stock reports will help it succeed.

Microsoft Point of Sale

Microsoft Point of Sale helps small, independent retailers level the playing field in today's competitive retail environment. Microsoft Point of Sale provides a comprehensive, easy-to-use retail system to track sales, inventory, and customer information. Designed to overcome the limitations of Electronic Cash Registers (ECRs), the software helps retailers save time and money, automating stores at an affordable price. Microsoft Point of Sale works with the Microsoft Office System and other financial software to streamline store operations and record keeping. Retailers can use Microsoft Point of Sale out of the box with existing PCs and peripherals, or they can acquire complete hardware/software solutions from leading Microsoft technology providers.

For more information about Microsoft Point of Sale, go to: www.microsoft.com/pos

Software and Services

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

Hardware

- Pioneer POS retail-specific computer
- Elo TouchSystems 15" LCD touch-screen
- Cherry keyboard
- Epson DM-D110 pole display
- APG MultiPRO 320 cash drawer
- Symbol LS 2208 handheld scanner
- Epson TM-T88III thermal receipt printer

Partner

- Merchants Solutions

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