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CSRs Toast Merchandise Management

The customer service representatives (CSRs) at the Liquor Control Board of Ontario struggled with an outdated customer information control system — until it partnered with Magstar.

Integrated Solutions for Retailers, May 2000 by Stacy Gray

You've been going to the same restaurant and pub for years. And, your favorite drink is always at the table before you are. Now let's imagine it gets better. Your favorite waitress meets you at the door. "We have a new premium in stock," she might say. Then imagine, just as you take your seat, she introduces a fresh new favorite. The 1,265 restaurants and pubs that are customers of the Toronto Distribution Centre (Toronto Depot) don't have to imagine. They're seeing it firsthand, thanks to the Depot's new merchandise management system from Magstar (Toronto).

Out With The Old, Cheers To The New

Several years ago, the Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO) began migrating all applications out of a DOS mainframe environment to a UNIX-based server. The system at the LCBO's Toronto Distribution Centre was an old customer information control system (CICS) assembly language-based suite of applications.

Pat Lumsden, manager of retail systems at the LCBO explained, "We were down to only one resource who knew our system – and we were without a vendor to partner with." The LCBO did not want to redevelop the system, or migrate it. But at the same time, it was October. The Toronto Distribution Centre was quickly approaching its busiest season and did not want any major changes just before Christmas. So the LCBO turned to its long-standing relationship with Magstar.

The LCBO's relationship with Magstar was such a positive one, it did not investigate many other solutions. Lumsden noted, "It was much more advantageous for us to go to Magstar, as it was already a partner." The installation process took only a couple of months and required virtually no learning curve. Magstar designed the system so that it looked and operated very similar to the old one.

The company only made changes in organization. The Depot made a leap into a mouse-based architecture, as opposed to using keystrokes. Now employees point and click while moving within the system. "That took a little getting used to because some things were grouped slightly different," explained Shayne Fleming, LCBO Toronto Depot manager. "But, when you got to the end window, it looked familiar and was comfortable." Magstar provided the Toronto Distribution Centre with a sign-on procedure and a practice session. There, employees printed the

screens to see how each step would look. The Magstar system included order entry, invoicing, inventory management, and accounts payable functions that proved to be user-friendly to employees.

Customer Service With A Twist

The Toronto Distribution Centre had no idea how this system would change “business as usual.” The system looked similar to the old one, but had a myriad of additional options. “With the old system, no records were kept,” said Fleming. With the Magstar system, records continually build until the user decides to purge information. The Toronto Depot now has access to invoices dating as far back as it needs, provided the hard drive is large enough. With the old system, simple customer queries suffered delays. Depot employees would have to look up the product in the product book, figure out the product code, and then enter the code into the system before finding out the product’s availability.

Now, the system allows a number of searches, and the customer profile extends far beyond just a customer number and address. The Depot can put a “block” on customers that are considered high risk. The company can also add customer notes and enter credit card information. And, that’s just the beginning. The Toronto Distribution Centre can now track a customer’s purchasing history, as well. Let’s say that the restaurant and pub you’ve been going to suddenly wants to change its stock. “Based on what and how much the customer has purchased previously, we can start to decrease one thing, and increase something similar. Hopefully, it’s something our customers’ customers might want to switch to,” explains Fleming. And that’s when your favorite waitress meets you at the door and offers you that new premium. As a customer, I’ll drink to that.

Questions about this article? E-mail the author at StacyG@corrypub.com.

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