



Client **SUCCESS**

Past Times selects retail solutions from Cegid to aid future growth



PAST TIMES

UK high street retailer, Past Times, specialises in developing and selling quality products inspired by important design periods throughout history. The speciality retailer sells a variety of exclusive products, ranging from household accessories and jewellery to gifts, toys, clothes, books, DVDs and other memorabilia to conjure up past decades. Past Times, founded in 1986 as a mail order company, opened its first store in Oxford in June 1987. Since then it has opened over 100 high street and outlet stores throughout the UK and Ireland. Past Times also sells its merchandise online, giving a combined annual turnover of £40 million.

System to support store expansion

In order to support its growing UK store network, Past Times needed a robust point-of-sale and head office solution, with proven ability to manage the specific requirements of speciality retailing. It also wanted a reliable software partner able to supply the latest technologies, today and in the future.

Past Times selected Cegid's Columbus Enterprise head office and Columbus Retail store management solutions to help run its entire retail store network and manage the interface between the stores and its existing head office applications. "One of the main drivers for needing a new point of sale solution was because the old system didn't support Chip & PIN and was proving too costly and unreliable to run," says Simon Watson, Senior Business Analyst at Past Times.

"Also key to the decision for implementing Columbus was comprehensive and powerful reporting for rapid and informed decision-making and effective pricing and promotions management," continues Watson.





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Past Times is reliant on the accuracy of the store sales data to avoid carrying too much stock – an important consideration in retailing, particularly when selling a lot of memorabilia items, and especially important in the current economic climate, when handling too much unnecessary stock can prove a costly business. It was aware that margins were being eroded by occasionally selling products with the wrong label, or at the wrong price.

Rapid Implementation

Following a rapid implementation of Columbus at the Past Times head-office at Witney in Oxfordshire, 102 stores were then each, one after the other, fully installed with touch-screens and new PC base units. Store staff were trained to use the software all on the same day. This was only possible outside of peak trading times (so avoiding Friday's and weekends altogether), with no possible downtime to the system allowed. This avoided any disruption to sales and store operations.

"Normally, training takes place at a later phase," says Mario Belgiorno, Project Manager at Cegid, "but the Past Times management felt that Columbus Retail was so easy to use, that 'on-the-job' training would be relatively simple."

Long-term costs of the technology itself were a concern. According to Watson, "we like the licensing costs of using Cegid, because it provides more flexibility and freedom as we plan to open a further 40 stores in the next year."

"We open a large number of temporary stores for seasonal periods, so we don't want to have to renew a software license every time

our store estate changes," continues Watson. "With many other software providers, it's per month, per store, whether temporary or not; with Cegid, you buy the license, and that's it. Also, given the flexibility of the system and the ease of configuration, we are able to hanger any new stores ourselves, only using Cegid for the in-store installation and training. This has enabled us to dramatically reduce the cost of new store openings."

Benefits

All stores are now directly connected, via a secure internet connection, and information on sales is updated in real time. With the old system, any problems sent by email would only be picked-up a couple of hours later, but now, everything can be dealt with immediately. For head office, the real-time data exchange is important for stock considerations and especially useful for internal reporting. Improved data accuracy is making sure that Past Times is selling the right products and replenishing only the exact quantities required. Improved analytical tools also make it possible to identify which stores are converting more customer-visits into sales, or which promotions work best.

Customer service has improved with Columbus and it's been well received by staff. The touch screens, which are quick and easy to use, mean that staff can maintain eye-level contact, rather than keying in entries on a chunky keyboard below. It's also proven successful in complimenting the online sales channel, so that people who view a product can ask about it in-store.

A major cost saving has come directly from moving to Chip & PIN itself, with the entire cost of the implementation paying for itself in less than five years, Watson concludes, "With bank charges for some card types at around 10 pence per transaction without Chip & PIN, or 2 pence with, it's no surprise that with up to a million transactions a year, there's big savings to be made".

Cegid's retail management software solutions and services are proven to improve the productivity, performance and profitability of speciality retailers. Over 1,000 retailers and 20,000 stores in more than 64 countries are currently using Cegid's retail management solutions to optimise their retail operation and aid decision-making at the head office and in-store.