

On the Fast Track with Crazy Mountain Imports

You know things are going well when your competitors tell you they don't know how you're able to do what you do. Crazy Mountain Imports in Imlay City, Michigan, does all kinds of things right, and just ten years after its founding has grown into a very prosperous company. The company sells gift items such as candle warmers, baskets, chimes, etc. to retail outlets through two different windows of opportunity: a Christmas line from January to April, and an "Everday" line from June to September. TRAVERSE Mobile Order, a handheld solution from Open Systems, Inc., is one component of the business software used by Crazy Mountain Imports and is an important piece of the company's overall success.

Crazy Mountain licenses artists and offers exclusively designed merchandise of the same high quality offered by the high-end collectible companies. However, because the company manufactures from pre-booked orders, they are able to sharply reduce costs and pass those savings along to their customers in the form of extremely competitive pricing with exceptional value. They are also able to completely change their product lines each year because they are not saddled with unwieldy inventory. This allows them to stay on top of shifting trends and fashions. Ultimately, because the guesswork has been taken out of forecasting the sales of each item, they can better assure on-time delivery of accurate and complete orders.

Crazy Mountain reps sell product to hundreds of retail stores throughout the U.S., at thirteen showrooms in major U.S. cities, and to an even greater degree, at more than 30 major gift and home furnishing trade shows across the nation per year. In all instances, the ability to take orders from retailers remotely is critical to Crazy Mountain's success.

Norm Wine at Alternative Business Systems (ABS) in Columbus, Ohio, and the consulting team from Open Systems, Inc. delivered a solution that has helped facilitate reduced overhead and costs as well as increased efficiency and productivity. Crazy Mountain had

been using an older version of OSAS on a UNIX platform, but Wine suggested a move to Microsoft's Small Business Server to open up external and internal email and scheduling and to enhance customer and vendor communication. This laid the foundation for a more robust SQL solution in their back office as well as remote connectivity. The resulting solution consists of eight TRAVERSE accounting and distribution applications with 30 users, TRAVERSE eSales Rep, TRAVERSE Info-Alert, and a customized version of TRAVERSE Mobile Order.

The handhelds, Symbol MC50 Enterprise Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs), were implemented in a wireless environment utilizing Symbol WS2000 switches and a Symbol AP300 access port. At a typical trade show, approximately 40 Crazy Mountain sales reps converge on a 1500-square-foot showroom, selling to buyers from all over the world right on the floor. They scan the barcoded gift items with the handheld and enter the quantity ordered, which often needs to be split and shipped to multiple retail locations. The order is stored to a notebook computer in a back room. In the evening, a T1 line connects to the Internet and the orders are uploaded to the corporate headquarters back in Michigan.

With Brandwise, a previous handheld system used briefly by Crazy Mountain,



*Alternative Business Systems'
Senior Partner Norm Wine.*

it took anywhere from two weeks to three months for the orders to reach the accounting applications. With TRAVERSE Mobile Order, the orders enter the system instantaneously; there is no import/export routine to wait for. As soon as an order is synchronized, a sales rep can see it in TRAVERSE eSales Rep and has peace of mind knowing that the order is safely in the system. Once they're in the system, orders can be pulled up in TRAVERSE eSales Rep at any time and can be printed and/or emailed to customers. TRAVERSE eSales Rep also allows the sales rep to access vital account information from any location: home, office, hotel, customer site, etc.

The sales reps use the same handhelds when they're on the road. The PDAs store the company's inventory and customer information, and the reps and customers go through the Crazy Mountain catalog together to build the orders. The PDAs are later set in a cradle and the orders are uploaded to the head office.

Crazy Mountain Executive Director of Sales, Marty Nimerfroh, further explains how he and his sales staff are using eSales Rep. "It allows us access to customer information prior to or during a sales call without having to pick up the phone and call customer

service in Michigan. And we're able to give *them* the tools to prepare for their weeks and months ahead without having to pick up the phone 20 times."

Since many customers place orders six months in advance of their shipping date, a special Shipping Order Inquiry screen was created. It looks at each day's orders and inventory levels and allows the Crazy Mountain warehouse manager to determine the fulfillment ratio of all orders due to ship that day. In addition, it also looks at the *size* of an order, which also comes into play when deciding which orders to ship. For example, a ten thousand dollar order with an 80% fulfillment probability would be shipped before a five thousand dollar order with a 90% fulfillment probability. The warehouse manager can also use the screen to see what the remaining inventory would look like if certain orders are selected. He may then choose *not* to ship an order based on those levels.

This screen has made it possible to eliminate enormous stacks of pick slips that the company had been printing 14 days in advance and using to determine which orders they could ship. It also meant that one particular employee no longer had to spend 80% of her day tracking the whereabouts of those printed pick slips with a colossal spreadsheet. And, instead of the three-part dot matrix forms they had been using, they are now able to use just one plain paper pick slip, printed on a laser printer.

Since orders are placed six months in advance, credit checks performed at the time an order is placed are meaningless. Hence, ABS also implemented TRAVERSE Info-Alert, which is a monitoring tool that—in the case of Crazy Mountain—looks at all orders due to ship within 14 days and alerts the credit department to customers who are on credit hold or who are flagged

for other reasons. Those orders are moved to a separate batch and then back again to the batch being shipped once the order gets approved. Additionally, three days before an order is due to be shipped (and if it has passed all credit checks), it is sent to the credit department so they can issue a credit authorization to the bank; the order is then posted to the customer's account.

Nimerfroh sums up the impact of the system. "The forms are concise, and everything is tied together. With our previous system, we had to go through a second party website. It's a lot easier now because eSales Rep is tied right into our own information in TRAVERSE - it's already there. We believe this product will have a tremendous impact on our efficiencies and our ability to get and receive information in a timely fashion."

Like many industries, Crazy Mountain Imports has unique requirements and specific challenges that needed to be addressed by their business software. Combined with other TRAVERSE applications, TRAVERSE Mobile Order is part of a total package that has resulted in dramatically less time spent on administrative tasks and a whole lot more on what they are really all about: selling.



For additional information on TRAVERSE and TRAVERSE Mobile Order, call Open Systems, Inc. at **(800) 328-2276** or visit www.osas.com.