

Retail Information Systems Helps Apparel Retailer Gear Up For Growth

City Gear, based in Memphis, TN, is a specialty retailer of footwear and lifestyle apparel. City Gear operates 124 stores in 15 states. The company is over 32 years old with a rich history of customer service throughout the Southern and Midwestern US. The City Gear brand was launched in 2000 as a reaction to the changing market place, and has flourished over the last 15 years. City Gear strives to be not only the destination store in regional malls, but the customers' neighborhood store. This familiarity helps establish a deep loyalty at an early age and has been key to the company's continued success. City Gear is once again poised to double in size over the next few years, reaching levels they were previously unprepared for, in part thanks to a more robust and sophisticated point of sale system.



Customer: City Gear

Industry: Specialty Retail and Lifestyle Footwear

Solution: Retail Pro Version 9 and HP RP5800 Retail Systems

In 2012, City Gear acquired a 14 store chain using Version 8 of Retail Pro retail management software from Retail Pro International. "At the time, 71 of our own stores had another company's retail software, and 14 stores had Retail Pro Version 8," explains Chris Flynn, City Gear's CIO. "We needed to have all of our stores on a single system, and to be on the latest version of the software so as to be 'future-proof' and ready to scale."

Flynn and his colleagues compared Retail Pro Version 8 to an entirely different retail software offering, deciding that the former was a better option despite the fact that it was not as feature-rich as the new Retail Pro Version 9. City Gear's management initially chose a small solutions partner to handle the project, but subsequently discovered that the company could not support an enterprise IT implementation. More importantly, the team found that the

solutions provider would be unable to handle an upgrade to Retail Pro Version 9, which had been deemed necessary in order to support future growth.

Enter Retail Information Systems (RIS), a Houston, Texas-based provider of point of sale software and hardware consulting/implementation; custom programming; project management; and e-commerce, design, and integration services to specialty retailers of all sizes and in all verticals. When City Gear approached RIS, its systems were not integrated. No connection to a home-grown warehouse management system (WMS) existed, and there was limited, if any, visibility of inventory and point of sale information across the enterprise. Moreover, Retail Pro Version 9 had only been implemented in about 20 stores.

“It was a mess,” Flynn says. “Inventory was off. Polling was off. Security hadn’t been set up. And most stores were still on the other system—not Retail Pro—when RIS took over.”

RIS began the engagement with a Primary Back Office (PBO) project that included eliminating impediments to the functionality of Retail Pro Version 9 in those stores in which it had already been installed. A replacement of the original UNIX retail management solution with Retail Pro Version 9 with an embedded Oracle database was then undertaken, along with a replacement of all existing hardware with HP RP5800 Retail System hardware. This process was “quick and successful,” Flynn states, taking six to eight months from start to finish (including a transition of inventory data from the old system to the new one). With the transition now

complete, all inventory management can be handled via the retail management software, which offers such benefits as real-time views of inventory levels, stock balancing, support for inter-store merchandise transfers, in-transit inventory monitoring, automatic inventory transfer recommendation (to jibe with in-store merchandise levels), efficient physical inventory counting, lot/serial number tracking, and item/style performance tracking.

“Everything is now fully integrated,” Flynn observes.

RIS has since been instrumental in enabling City Gear to add other components to its technology toolbox, thereby sharpening its competitive edge, streamlining operations, and affording management a tighter rein over business as a whole. For example, a custom integration enables daily store operations metrics to “flow” into Retail Pro Version 9, in turn generating actionable automated reports each day. A “Vendor Connect” connection with Nike creates “endless aisles,” yielding customers access to five million SKUs available from that vendor, even if they are not on the shelves. This connection also supports an extensive product offering in-store and online.

From services, to support, to training, our experience with RIS has been a highly positive one,” concludes Michael Longo, City Gear’s owner and CEO. “With this partner and everything they bring to the table, we’re poised to grow with few or no obstacles.