



Specialty Retailer Jo-Ann Stores Enhances Employee Productivity and Efficiency to Enable Focus on Customer Service



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Company overview: Jo-Ann Stores, Inc

Providing crafting, decorating, sewing and seasonal merchandise, Jo-Ann Stores, Inc. is a leading specialty retailer founded more than 60 years ago in Cleveland, Ohio. Jo-Ann Stores has nearly 20,000 employees in more than 850 stores and multiple distribution centers. With locations in 47 states, Jo-Ann Stores offer fashion and decorator fabrics, related notions, patterns and other materials for creative projects. The Jo-Ann “superstore” format provides a vast array of items to inspire creative crafts of all kinds. The company aims to meet its customers’ creative needs not only with products but also with the ideas, inspiration and advice to help with their projects. Thus, customer service is an essential element of Jo-Ann Stores’ successful retail model.

The challenge: Choosing technology to support superior customer service

The management of Jo-Ann Stores has long been aware of the value of advanced technology to help employees focus more on assisting customers and less on transactional tasks. Handheld devices have been used for over a dozen years to simplify such activities as product ordering, receiving, price checking and inventory, and to automate the creation of cutting slips in the fabric department. When that hardware was discontinued and sourcing parts became a problem, Jo-Ann Stores sought a more reliable, more advanced technology that could support existing applications.

“A key goal was to take advantage of the state-of-the art 802.11 wireless network for future technology innovations here,” said John O’Donnell, Director of Systems Development, Jo-Ann Stores.

Over a three-week period, handheld products from several vendors were evaluated in a lab environment. “We brought in key users and people from the field to try various units and grade them based on ease of use and the ability to run our existing applications efficiently,” said O’Donnell.

Customer profile

JO-ANN

Company

Jo-Ann Stores
Hudson, Ohio

Industry


Specialty retailer of crafting, decorating and sewing products

Motorola Solution

- Motorola MC3000 Mobile Computer
- Motorola AP300 Access Port
- Motorola WS2000 Wireless Switch
- Motorola Mobility Services Platform (MSP)

Benefits

- Enhances employee productivity and efficiency
- Supports customer service focus by reducing transaction time
- Speeds the automated fabric cutting-stand application
- Reduces lines at registers during peak shopping times



This resulted in Jo-Ann Stores selecting the Motorola MC3000 mobile computer. The Motorola MC3000 mobile computer is a small, lightweight and rugged handheld that can be used for bar code scanning and wireless mobile computing, and is designed to help employees complete their work faster and with better results.

The result: Speeding tasks to enhance the customer experience

The Motorola mobile computers have made many tasks much faster, and that ties both to customer satisfaction and employee productivity. “When advanced technology or any other new approach helps us eliminate tasks or make them faster, that gives our staff even more time for customer service. Spending time talking to our guests, providing advice and helping them find exactly the right products — these service activities are some of the key reasons that Jo-Ann Stores’ customer loyalty rating is so high,” said Barry de Julius, Director of Store Operations, Jo-Ann Stores.

The speed of the processor and amount of memory in the Motorola MC3000 mobile computer are major advantages, according to O’Donnell. He continues, “We have about a dozen applications, and with memory restrictions on our old units, we could load only one or two applications at a time. Now there is no need for a customer or another team member to wait while an application loads — with Motorola, our staff has the flexibility to move quickly and seamlessly between applications.”

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“For example, if we advertise a certain fabric, quilters might buy an eighth of a yard of 50 or 100 different fabrics. The Jo-Ann Stores team member at the cutting stand can move more rapidly now with the Motorola devices, and as each step is faster, we also reduce the lines at the registers. The holiday season is where we really felt the benefit of increased efficiency with the Motorola mobile computers,” said de Julius.

The future: Crafting a technology footprint for the future

The implementation of the Motorola mobile computers is a key element of a major technology upgrade across Jo-Ann Stores. The company is standardizing from the store floor to the back room on advanced technologies from the controllers and switches to new registers, scanners, checkout keypads and more.

The upgraded stores have a Motorola WS2000 wireless switch and two to four Motorola AP300 access ports. The WS2000 Wireless Switch offers support for wireless and wired networking, a firewall and a virtual private network (VPN) for secure communications. The AP300 access port delivers 802.11 wireless connectivity and provides the point of connection between the mobile devices and the wireless LAN (WLAN). Jo-Ann Stores has also installed Motorola MSP client software, which provides end-to-end visibility and control of all mobile devices, mobile applications and wireless network infrastructure.

Creative Concepts created the software application for Jo-Ann Stores’ Motorola MC3000 mobile computer. The integrated application significantly contributed to the ease and speed of the wireless mobile computer upgrade for Jo-Ann Stores.

Jo-Ann Stores took advantage of Creative Concepts’ unique conversion technology and toolset that enables the rapid, risk-free conversion of DOS source code to a 32-bit Windows-compliant application. Creative Concepts’ integration services ensured the DOS to Microsoft Windows CE software conversion for applications and the transition to the new system was seamless.

The alternative to using Creative Concepts’ conversion technology would result in an additional year, incurring additional training costs and lengthening project time lines. Creative Concepts’ conversion technology helped Jo-Ann Stores maintain its investment in its original application as there was no tear-out-and-replace issue for the application.

This conversion process reduced the time required to run the new application (weeks compared to months), and maintains the same user interface, application logic and communication characteristics of the original application. Both the old (DOS) and new (CE) devices were installed and maintained in parallel to simplify deployment.

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Retraining employees to use the new application was not required. Initially, Jo-Ann Stores faced the possibility of retraining 20,000 employees on the new system. However, the application conversion did not significantly alter the appearance of the user interface, resulting in Jo-Ann Stores employees' ability to use the new system immediately.

The pairing of Motorola products and Creative Concepts' application integration provides Jo-Ann Stores with an end-to-end enterprise mobility solution. Now, users have the freedom to move where their work takes them, while being connected to the information and applications they need to be effective. The comprehensive and integrated capabilities of this solution represent the elements of a scalable enterprise mobility architecture. Ultimately, this Motorola solution will be deployed at all Jo-Ann Stores across the United States.

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Motorola's enterprise mobility architecture has also allowed Jo-Ann Stores to pilot the rapid deployment capability of MSP at select stores. This capability enables the creation of rapid deployment barcodes which can be scanned at the store destinations to guide software configuration. New units can be configured generically and shipped to stores “off the shelf” from the depot, thus speeding and simplifying the provisioning process.

“We are moving up to a new technology standard to support a system-wide software changeover in the future. For example, by upgrading to 802.11, we are prepared to take next steps with additional wireless products and applications that work easily alongside the Motorola handhelds. We want to make it possible for a district chain leader to come into a store with a laptop and just connect to our network. And the sky is the limit in terms of where we go with our next-generation point of sale (POS), which will involve a lot of handheld and wireless technology,” said O'Donnell.

Ease-of-use results in applause from field

The Motorola deployment has been completed in approximately 250 Jo-Ann Stores locations. The superstores and highest volume traditional Jo-Ann Stores were targeted first. Each superstore has 13 to 15 Motorola mobile computers in use, and the traditional stores average four to eight devices. Training was minimal and the response enthusiastic, according to de Julius. “We supplied keyboard overlays and one-page reference sheets to the field, but other than highlighting the few differences from the old units, implementing Motorola did not require training. The team members have embraced the new Motorola mobile computers very readily, and the speed has gotten huge applause from the field,” said de Julius.

As the user interface on the new mobile computers is identical to the old devices, on the day Jo-Ann Stores released the Motorola MC3000 mobile computers, employees were able to immediately get to work, with no down-time. The Creative Concepts' software application made this user interface possible.

To learn more about Motorola's enterprise mobility solutions, RFID, mobile computers, bar code scanners, wireless network infrastructure and management software, visit the Motorola Web site at www.motorola.com.



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CASE STUDY: JO-ANNS