

Direct Marketing

Case Study 01

Direct Marketing

This company is a leading direct marketer of moderately priced women's fashions and home décor through catalogues and an e-commerce site. During the calendar year ending December 31, 2000, annual revenues for this company was in excess of \$300 million.

PROBE System

The system was developed using Microsoft Visual FoxPro 5.0. The database being used is DBF's. "Probe" is an inhouse developed system that tracks the following process.

Probing is the act of selecting a vendor who will create a garment, tailored to specifications, on the most advantageous terms. This process usually starts by finding a garment that is close to their needs and sending it to several agents overseas with instructions on how Merchandising would like it altered along with the target price range they are seeking.

The PROBE process is where a probe is initially entered, and assigned to an agent. Reports/Specs will be printed and sent to the agents to get back quotes. Any changes made to a Probe once it has been assigned to an agent will not reflect on that particular agent.

The system captures the information of the Item reference that has been confirmed by the Buyers on their buying trip. These Items are put in the catalogue along with the cost associated with it. Every Garment is associated with a Unique Garment Type and Size Range along with the respective measurements. Each garment is sent for approval so as to arrive at the final Gradation values. Once the Samples are approved and Gradation values are assigned, the same are sent back to the Agents for production. On arrival of the Final Shipment, the Measurements specified in the "Graded Specs" are used by the Quality Control Department to verify the shipment.

The Problem:

They faced certain limitations in their system:

- After approval of the samples, the Graded Sizes sheets generated were Size Specific, leading to having redundant Grade Rules for same Garment type but in various sizes. Any changes done to the Grade Rules did not cascade to the related Size ranges.
- Inability to associate the sketch of the Garment into the system, thus leading to Merchandisers having to involve themselves in time consuming jobs such as the printing of documents, scanning / pasting images and manually sending faxes to the Agents / Buyers.
- PROBE Item Reference Information along with the Specifications was not easily accessible to the Agents / Buyers. Auto Faxing utilities were needed to send the required information directly to the Agents/ Buyers.
- There was no possibility of tracking the changes done to the Specifications. Therefore an AUDIT feature was required.

The objective of the re-development of the system was to address the above limitations and to develop add-on modules in the existing system.

The Solution:

Direction Software Solutions addressed the previously listed limitations by enhancing their Probe legacy system with certain new features such as those listed below:

- Ability to print the Specification documents to Acrobat PDF formats / fax.
- The ability to automatically send the documents needed directly to the Buyers / Agents via fax/e-mail.
- Ability to generate early warning management queries with preset conditions and the facility to filter the data and export to a Disk file in various formats.
- Recovery Process - Providing the flexibility to reverse all entries that had been passed by the Analyst and return back to the original.
- Visual Interface - Provided visual interfaces to associate garment components to a specific PROBE. It also enabled the printing of pictures on the component sheet.
- Audit Trail - Automatic tracking of changes made by individual users with a complete Audit trail.
- Automatic generation of Tall / Petite entries upon approval of Average entry based on the variations defined.

Complete lifecycle of the development was divided in 3 phases:

Phase I:

We had started with system study of the Probe System and documented the necessary changes that were discussed with the users.

All the changes that were requested were put down in paper and a sign off on the Initial System study was taken.

We documented the requirements in the following manner.

- Overview Flow Chart of the requested Changes.
- Individual Process Flow charts.
- Specimen Program structure that would be followed for the Project.
- Described the Complete Entity Relation Diagram .
- Program List of New / Modifications.
- Once we got the confirmation on the above points we started with the development of the Project.

Phase 2:

- During the development of the Project there were a lot of Questions and Answers that were sent and we documented the complete set of Communication with status on each of them.
- After the necessary changes were done, we installed the same in this company as a Prototype system . We demonstrated the complete system to the users and we got their inputs on the system .
- The system was checked for integrity with other systems, which uses this system as the base.
- Critical system review was done by users as well as by management. The users requested for some more enhancements, which were missed out during the prototype. All these were estimated for time and Cost and it was conveyed to them
- Incorporation of changes informed by them after phase -I.
- Planning of Final implementation.

Phase 3:

- Scheduled the Implementation plan with them in terms of responsibilities assigned to different individuals.
- Created the User Manual for the Complete System
- Created a User Training Document as Handbook for them to refer.
- Conversion Programs necessary for the system were run on the Test System.
- Gave an overview of the Changes to the users and the System was put on test for a week on the Test System before shifting onto the Live System
- Once the users were satisfied with the test results, the system was moved onto the live environment.
- Handover of source code to the clients technical support team.
- Handover of technical as well as user documentation's to client.

Support of the System is being done from Bombay where in the user sends any error reports which is corrected and sent back.



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