

Phase eight

Business



Company: NSB Customer: Phase Eight Submitted by: MCC International Date: April 2000

With the Internet, e-commerce and the EURO threatening to change the nature of shopping, retailers are facing up to an increasingly demanding and uncertain trading environment. In these changing times, a vision of what to do and where to go is vitally important.

Mark Dawson, Head of IT at women's-wear retail chain, Phase Eight, is well aware of the need for a clear, defined strategy for retail in the new Millennium; for him the implementation of a new IT system is the catalyst that will enable Phase Eight to fulfil its ambitious strategic vision. The installation of retail hardware and software from leading application software and EPoS systems developer NSB, will allow Phase Eight to increase its number of retail outlets without increasing the workload on its staff. " We aim to expand the number of 55 retail outlets, continuing to build and strengthen our position including our Internet presence," explained Mark. " The new system will revolutionise our point of sale operations while giving us the ability to capture sales data on a daily basis – a modernisation of Phase Eight's systems was long overdue." It was this acknowledgement of the importance of having a suitable system in place that led to Mark, last September, initiating the overhaul of the company's IT systems which he believed were holding the group back.

" I devised a strategy with the main focus of improving IT, as it was 20 years out of date and I wanted a common platform to share information between stores," he explained. What was in place at Phase Eight was the very opposite of what Mark, and the business, required; stand-alone tills operating in each store and no EPoS system to capture even the most basic of sales

data. This was severely holding back the group's forward planning of stock levels and impacted heavily on its ability to move quickly to changing sales and fashion trends. " At only one point in the week could we see our true stock position. Preparing budgets and forecasts was very difficult without knowing your actual position," he said. Mark sought to implement the best system available to bring the company from ' the dinosaur age' into the 21st century.

After setting up a project team that identified the requirements he chose to implement a system from NSB who won the battle for the contract against a large number of competitors. Explaining this decision, Mark said, " NSB's software is excellent. It has a very good front-end which we found easy to use and interactive. NSB's pedigree, along with its impressive customer base in the fashion industry was also a key factor in the decision making process. I can only say good things about NSB!" NSB's client list read like a who's who of retail, with names like, Selfridges, Harvey Nichols, C&A and New look. However, Mark explained that NSB had proved itself to be ' business specific', with its Phase Eight solution which addressed the individual requirements of the company.

Following the rigorous selection process Mark and his team began configuring, piloting and testing the system between end-January and early-September. As with any implementation, many changes to Phase Eight's original requirements were made but, according to Mark, the flexibility of NSB and its systems made this process much easier. " If a change was required then it could be done quickly. NSB has remained pro-active and managed customer expectations," he said. Following a successful testing

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period, roll-out had been completed across stores, well in time for Christmas, allowing Phase Eight to take advantage of its benefits during the peak holiday period. Mark believes that the company is already beginning to benefit from its introduction, and already the company has the ability to see an up-to-date stock position on demand.

Tracking sales per hour, average sales per customer and identifying how new lines are selling and using this information to re-stock are among the early advantages that NSB has brought to Phase Eight – a re-stock previously took three to four days, now it takes just one day. However, it is the capabilities of NSB's front-end software that is integral to the delivery of these benefits according to Mark. "The benefits are very much at the front-end collecting data at the tills. It is all about customer service, how to improve this, how to respond better and how to get closer to the customer to maximise our sales." The platform that the new system has provided will also allow Phase Eight to get closer to its customers through a variety of promotions through the tills, bringing in new levels of marketing which would have previously been impossible. Cross-promotions across various product lines are also future possibilities.

"The infrastructure is being put in place and we want to integrate this with some of my ideas. We now have the flexibility to move forward in the future," he said. This flexibility will enable Mark to build a true Internet business and bring the company into the digital TV age. He believes these new opportunities, with the NSB system in place, can now be dovetailed into the existing Phase Eight business. In achieving his aims, Mark recognises that technology will play a major role and underpin the levels of success the

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group enjoys, “ We are very much a business that is expanding and it is technology and IT that is the key enabler in our achieving our business plan.

Any business without a presence on the Internet or without an e-commerce strategy will find it difficult. There is an ever-growing number of people that want to shop on-line and with NSB’s new technology in place, we can offer our customer’s the best of both worlds.”