



VIKING SOFTWARE SOLUTIONS™

A Division of Phoenix Software International®

Systems for data capture and document management

J.C. PENNEY

CREDIT DIVISION

J.C. Penney introduced their first catalog in 1963, just in time to contribute to a major period of growth for the company. Today, J.C. Penney has a nearly \$4 billion catalog business. Seventy different catalogs are offered, with over 400 million individual catalogs sent out each year.

The Credit Division of J.C. Penney is responsible for keeping current the names and addresses of all the people on the J.C. Penney catalog mailing list. In addition, they handle adjustments and corrections to monthly billing statements. On average, 8000 customer records are updated each day.

“If you have ever moved and submitted a change of address, only to have your bills go to the old address for a couple of months, you know what kind of havoc can be wreaked by outdated customer records,” said Sherrill Lindsay, account representative at Viking Software Solutions. “The resulting billing problems can take a long time to sort out. By keeping customer records up to date, the Credit Division plays a crucial role in helping J.C. Penney maintain customer satisfaction.”

The Problem

An Outdated Siemens Nixdorf System

Data entry for the Credit Division takes place at two processing centers: one in Albuquerque, New Mexico, one in Orlando, Florida. As batches of data are entered, they are transferred to a mainframe in a data center. Data entered in Albuquerque is transferred to a data center in Reno, Nevada. Data entered in Orlando is transferred to a data center in Columbus, Ohio. A developer at the home office in Dallas, Texas, is responsible for managing the systems—building screens, maintaining the database, creating links and setting up file transfers.

The Credit Division was using outdated 20-year old Entrex systems from Siemens Nixdorf: two at each processing center.

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“We had no support anymore,” said Monchai Panak, Senior Project Manager for the Credit Division. “When a disk crashed in Albuquerque and a data-to-tape transfer unit broke in Orlando we couldn't get replacement parts or technicians to provide service. We were down to one system per site.”

Maintaining an up-to-date address database is essential for the catalog operation. With only one data entry system working at each processing center, they knew they had to find a solution fast.

The Solution

Viking's VDE®

“We wanted more of an open system, one that would allow us to get ongoing support,” said Panak. “We didn't want to be tied to proprietary hardware or software anymore.”

The Credit Division looked at several vendors and devoted a month to evaluating three products. They built prototypes for all three, then had end users come in and use the prototypes.

They judged the systems on the following criteria:

- They wanted an open system—one that could use any PCs and any type of client/server software.
- They wanted it to be easy for developers to build data entry screens.
- They insisted on an acceptable level of performance, measured in keystrokes.
- They were looking for a vendor with a broad range of customers so they could have confidence that future upgrades and enhancements would be provided.

“VDE seemed to satisfy all of our criteria,” said Panak. “It fit with our Windows operating system, the performance was good, and it was easy to use.” The Credit Division ordered 42 VDE systems.

The Conversion

Just Six Weeks

“We handled the conversion ourselves because we wanted it completed as quickly as possible,” said Panak.

Panak put three coders to work converting jobs. They produced program listings from the old Entrex system, looked at the listings and interpreted them. Then they created specs for the screens, and translated those specs into VDE data entry screens.

Viking provided the tools to build custom code where they needed it. For example, some of the functions needed to do checking weren’t available, so they designed and built them in-house.

“They were able to complete the conversion in just six weeks,” said Lindsay. “We were thrilled that they could get up and moving so quickly.”

The Training

Easier Than Expected

The Credit Division did two types of training. “First, we needed our developers trained so they could learn how to code and build screens for the conversion,” said Panak. “After they looked at the product we realized they wouldn’t need formal training. They were able to learn what they needed from the user manuals.”

Once the conversion was complete, they held one day of training for the end users. Viking sent a consultant who worked with an in-house trainer to teach the operations side.

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They anticipated that the operators would take a while to get used to the new system. “We were pleasantly surprised to find that we had no performance degradation at all,” said Panak. “One thing that helped is that VDE allowed us to use key mapping of function keys. We mapped to a 029 layout, which helped the key entry staff who were familiar with the old keyboard layout.”

Summary

Processing More Information Faster

“We are very pleased with VDE,” said Panak. “It is easier for operators to use than our old system. It’s easier to move type around and more convenient for the office. In fact, we have seen easily a 10% increase in the amount of information we can process.

“Data is available faster,” he added. “We used to wait two days to process customer inquiries, but now are able to complete them within one day.”