



Halcyon Case Study

Customer: Retail Variations

“Halcyon gave us the best overall value for money and service”

Halcyon Products

All parts of Halcyon Operations Center

Objectives

To improve service and system availability while reducing costs

Business Benefits

Increased efficiency and reliability in the scheduling process. Halcyon is now managing by exception as far as operations are concerned. Improvements in reporting.

Application Software

Island Pacific

Servers

IBM iSeries 520

Mobile Services

Paging out of problems
Paging out sales information

“We use all elements of Operations Center,” says Simon Watson, Senior Business Analyst at Retail Variations. “That includes job scheduling, paging, monitoring spool files, TCP/IP monitoring, device filters, user profile filters, service level reporting tasks and restricted tasks management.”

How Halcyon Operations Center is used

Based in Witney, Oxfordshire, Retail Variations (www.retailvariations.com) owns High Street, catalogue mail order and internet outlet retailer Past Times and Manners (a division of Past Times) and runs services for furniture company Ocean and outdoor clothing specialist Hawkshead. These services cover all warehousing, IT and financials, distribution and replenishment.

The management and monitoring of the Retail Variations operational schedule and technical support on the iSeries was originally outsourced and, says Simon Watson, Senior Business Analyst, “There was always a delay between a problem occurring and our Helpdesk being aware of it. We were getting good service but not the best value for money. We therefore brought the management and monitoring of the schedule and iSeries support back in-house.”

“We have a very small number of in-house iSeries specialists, so in order to make sure the software we selected was the best option for Retail Variations, we spent three months on a full evaluation of Halcyon Operations Center and one other leading market product.”

“The key objectives were to simplify, automate and improve the operational schedule, improve the productivity of the operations support team, increase the ability of the team to respond faster to failures, and automate the monitoring and reporting of the key performance parameters on the iSeries,” says Rashpal Gill, the Group IT Director.

“As we are a Business Focused IT team, we had to demonstrate real business benefits to do this and not just the IT benefits. The business benefits were less business disruption due to faster reaction to failures, increased system availability, reliable automated operations and reduced overhead. Halcyon gave the best overall value for money and service.”

Halcyon’s software has helped **to increase productivity** i.e. using the Job Scheduling component has increased reporting and visibility of what’s going on for the organisation’s 98 Past Times stores through automated scheduling of the jobs.

In the 15-strong team in IT at Retail Variations, the operations staff have limited knowledge of iSeries, with Watson offering support for this group with assistance from Halcyon. **Management of the schedule is by exception** – for example, a job in Halcyon runs to see if the correct tape has been loaded. If the wrong tape is on the system, a message is passed to the Enterprise Console saying so. If no action has been taken within 30 minutes, a text message is sent to the on-call support team’s mobile phone.

Between 8am and 6pm Monday-Friday, management messages are sent to the Enterprise Console, which is the “hub” of the Operations Center; a GUI for overall centralized management of all alerts. At a pre-set time, this can be escalated to a text message sent to the first on call number. If this number does not respond, the message is automatically routed to the second on call number. This ensures the IT team is alerted in a failsafe manner and can respond.

“We have three versions of the Enterprise Console (one at each of our sites), here at Witney, in our London office (Ocean and Hawkshead Offices) and at the warehouse in Cumbria,” says Watson. All communications are TCP/IP, with Retail Variations utilizing an Energis VPN.

“All WAN links are monitored every five minutes to check lines are up. This allows the IT Team to respond quickly to any failure as we don’t have to wait for the business to report the problem in key business operational areas.”

Halcyon Operations Center measures system performance parameters automatically (these jobs were checked manually previously), for example, how many jobs in a queue, If disk space goes over 75% usage, if a job takes longer than a certain amount of time. If these parameters are exceeded then the support team receives a text message describing the parameter exceeded; for example, the system is running at 75%.

“We’ve done a lot with Halcyon Operations Center,” says Watson. ***“We couldn’t do the clever stuff without Halcyon being able to automate it.*** Halcyon has helped us to reduce our Sunday schedule by 2.5 hours by automating our manual housekeeping tasks that could not be scheduled through our vendor application. Our operators are now alerted automatically when the system has restarted following the full system save and IPL. This has helped streamline our operations. We have also implemented checks to our end of week schedule to ensure our operators reset the end of week and when appropriate the end of month. If neither of these has been done by 6pm on the Sunday then the senior support team are notified”.

“With text messaging, we page our MD early every Sunday to say all the reports are ready, so he can plan Monday’s briefing meetings. Next we’re planning to text out sales figures to area managers.”

“We have used all elements of Halcyon Operations Center to enhance what we do in the Island Pacific ERP system,” says Watson. Island Pacific Retail Pro software is used at some 10,000 retail customers, making it the global leader in integrated retail software solutions. Customers include Armani, ASDA/Wal-Mart, Estee Lauder, Timberland and Toys “R” Us.

The business benefits now accruing to Retail Variations are that there’s increased efficiency and reliability in scheduling, it is now managing by exception as far as operations are concerned, and there has been an improvement in reporting.

“Thanks to Halcyon, our Merchandising System now notifies us when there is a problem. In the majority of occasions we are able to fix the problem and inform the users before they have even realized.”

“During the evaluation period and since implementation support has been very good – and on the rare occasion there has been an issue, Halcyon has been very quick to respond and rectify. Halcyon has also responded well to our suggested enhancements to the Operations Center software.”

About Retail Variations plc

Retail Variations plc was founded in May 2001, when the Past Times chain was also acquired. This acquisition was followed by others Manners, Ocean and Hawkshead. The company’s aim is to build a successful, well-respected multi-channel multi-brand retail business by developing clearly differentiating brands – from one another and from the market in general. This intention is being serviced by using all available retail channels, which provide better shopping experiences and services to customers and superior returns to shareholders. Retail Variations’ sales revenues at peak (prior to disposals of some brands) exceeded £98m per annum through 116 stores, millions of catalogues and websites.

www.retailvariations.com

About Halcyon Software

Halcyon Software Limited is an established software company with over 17 years experience in systems management. Halcyon writes software for the IBM iSeries, as well as Windows®, Linux, Unix®, AIX and NetWare® platforms.

Corporate datacenters, multinational organizations, managed services and outsourcing companies, as well as small to medium size businesses, use Halcyon Software products to manage IT operations.

Halcyon has built a strong reputation for developing software with an emphasis on three principles: “Easy to use”, “Making the IT Manager’s job easier” and “Empowering IT to deliver value back to the business”. The Head Office is based in Peterborough, Cambridgeshire, and the company’s software is used throughout the world with distributors in Europe, Australia and the US.

The company has recently added Security Risk & Compliance software to its portfolio, through an established business partnership with SkyView Partners, the leading iSeries security specialist based in Seattle, US.
www.halcyonsoftware.com

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