

Upgrade for Outback store



Out amongst the coolibah trees, sandflies and spinifex some 300 kilometers north-east of Alice Springs a sophisticated software system is bringing new efficiency and profitability to an aboriginal community's general store.

Designed, specified and installed by Melbourne-based software specialists, Decisive Solutions Pty. Ltd., the new system has been set up at the Aherrenge community at Ampilatwatja in the Northern Territory.

The community is subject to the recent federal intervention legislation which required the community store to upgrade its management systems and comply with new reporting and income management regulations.

The project called for a complete point-of-sale system to record and report on the trading operations of the store, as well as controlling and reporting on how government payments to community members were being spent. The system allowed local community members to keep track of their account status via a wireless network.

The challenge . . .

The installation was required to 'go-live' in a very short time-frame — three weeks rather than the normal lead time of up to two months. Decisive Solutions selected a very robust and scalable software package using a MSSQL database for easily accessible customer reporting.

The internet was used initially to define the scope and requirements of the project, replacing the normal site visits to look at current business practices and requirements.

Hardware included two POS lane computers with scanners, receipt printers, customer display poles with integrated scales coupled to a back-office laptop computer.

Installation and software setup was conducted at Decisive's Melbourne headquarters prior to shipment north to the Aherrenge community store.

The new system administers the income management requirement through a touch-screen kiosk with an omni scanner for customer ID cards, along with a signature capture device against transactions at time of purchase.

Decisive goes bush . . .

The completed hardware/software package was delivered direct to the store. Then, complete with Akubra and plenty of insect repellent, Decisive Solutions consultant Chris Maloney journeyed north to meet the 'go-live' deadline.

With only three days to go, the package was installed and tested, and the laborious task of inputting manually more than 2500 stock lines completed.

The next vital component of the project was the installation of the Federal government's new Income Management compliance system. This solution was internet-based to allow download of payment details from a government site and upload of the details into the POS system to adjust the available funds for each of the store's customers.

Decisive Solutions developed the specification for funds management and customer identification to meet the Australian government's basic requirements, particularly the signature capture capability.

"We provided a complete POS solution which satisfied all our customer's needs, as well as bringing the project in on-time and on-budget," Chris Maloney explained. "Time-saving estimates show that payback will occur within 12 months and return-on investment (ROI) is around 9.4, assuming a software life of five years."

He added that it was an outstanding result, particularly considering the extremely short timeframe and the remote Outback location.

"The tyranny of distance caused some support problems when the customer's satellite internet connection failed, but Decisive was able to restore full use of the system through telephone contact. Desktop technical support is available instantly now that the satellite communication system is fully operational," Chris said.

The store is operated by Colin and Vicki Baker who declare themselves 'totally satisfied and delighted with the system'.

"The hardware was ready to go when it arrived, and all that remained was operational testing and loading up the stock and compliance data," Colin said. "Decisive Solutions are great people to do business with — they are always on hand to help troubleshoot problems."



Top — The point-of-sale and service area of the new ERP merchandising, management and reporting system at the Aherrenge Community store in the Northern Territory.

Above — a piece of local 'bush tucker'. However, there's no product code for this item on the new ERP system.



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