



CASE STUDY

Rooms to Go

Personalizes the Furniture Buying Experience

Industry
Retail

Challenge

Responding to changing customer expectations in the retail furniture business

Results

- Accelerated sales growth by 30% as a result of helping customers visualize a complete range of products and complementary accessories
- Improved efficiency of SKU management by 20%
- Gained ability to launch real-time promotional campaigns in response to market demands

Products

Rocket® UniVerse

Application

Mobile furniture customization tool

Company

Headquartered in Seffner, Florida, Rooms to Go (RTG) is the largest independent furniture retailer in the United States, with more than 130 stores and 7,000 employees.

Rooms to Go pioneered the concept of displaying and packaging furniture in complete room settings so that customers can easily visualize how to transform their homes with the perfect furnishings. RTG designers create pre-packaged rooms with coordinated colors, fabrics, and accessories, providing a simplified and convenient shopping experience for their customers.

Challenge

The company deployed Rocket® UniVerse early in its history to help manage inventory as well as improve and enhance customer interaction. Partnering with Rocket has helped RTG grow from three showrooms in Florida in 1991 to a dominant furniture retailer in the Southeastern U.S. and Puerto Rico with annual revenues exceeding \$2 billion.

Rooms to Go has maintained its entrepreneurial culture with the IT team priding itself on being exceptionally responsive in rapidly delivering applications the business needs to maintain competitive advantage. In addition, the business continually tests new ideas to create the best customer experience, ranging from additional flexibility in selecting “rooms” to different loyalty and promotional programs.



In 2005, RTG implemented in-store kiosks running a Windows-based point-of-sale system, moving away from its older 3151 green-screen environment. These kiosks featured a GUI that supported mouse input, all of which was a big improvement over the former character-based screens. This solution was ahead of its time, but the sales team wanted to deliver an even more intimate, personalized shopping experience. In particular, the team felt it could better facilitate purchases by being able to quickly and easily check inventory, availability, and potential delivery dates while sitting with the customer on a desired piece of furniture, such as a sofa.

Solution

In 2012 RTG debuted a tablet-based retail application that sales associates can use anywhere in the showroom. Written in Microsoft Visual Studio, the new application can quickly access regional distribution systems through a web services layer; a process that's much faster than accessing each UniVerse instance separately.

The RTG Merchandising team uses its product data management system to load configurations and SKUs while UniVerse pulls the data and serves up targeted descriptions of each asset.

"We have architected our UniVerse system to separate the front and back ends, and the innate flexibility in the UniVerse application environment makes changing the business logic very easy. The IT team is very nimble, with many change requests accomplished in as few as five minutes," explains Clark Godwin, VP of Application Development.

Because data stored in UniVerse can be treated as a "string" it's easy to extend records and even double and triple the fields, allowing RTG to easily keep track of multiple SKUs as well as make changes easily without rebuilding the database.



Results

Deploying UniVerse has accelerated adoption of web services and provides improved management of back office processes. “Today’s UI environment is heavily dependent on web services. This application architecture allows us to utilize the latest web service technologies while keeping the majority of business logic, queries, and processing on the easily accessible UniVerse back end,” stated Andrew Smith, RTG Director of Windows and UniVerse.

UniVerse back end also allows RTG to implement a “custom Agile” methodology supporting the latest and most efficient “Dev-Ops” processes. As a result, SDLCs can be executed in as little as one day, explained Smith.

The combination of the UniVerse back-end with the new Windows interface has dramatically increased RTG’s ability to deliver a more intimate customer experience. Not only are sales associates freed from the kiosk, they’re now able to answer a range of questions by simply entering a customer’s zip code, as well as provide views and availability of different variations of sofa designs using their “iSofa” application. They’re also able to call up all inventory and offer items that are not physically in the showroom. The application showcases furniture designs and combinations of complementary accessories, such as rugs and pillows, that ultimately lead to increased sales and higher levels of customer satisfaction.

“UniVerse provides our development team with code that is easily managed to adjust and support demanding business rule changes quickly. Because of this, we can push client applications supported by UniVerse to production much quicker than competitors,” says Smith.

For example, at one point a competitor offered next-day delivery when RTG had a three-day guarantee. RTG ownership wanted to match this offer, and within two weeks, the team was able to make the necessary operational and coding changes while continuing to support existing business needs.

The impact on marketing efforts has been dramatic. “We can now run and test multiple sales promotions on a daily basis as well as handle ongoing seasonal sales, ‘welcome to the neighborhood’ coupons, and other follow-on promotions,” said Todd Daniell, Director of Database Technologies. “All of these promotions can be managed in UniVerse and delivered to downstream systems within seconds.”

Since each individual SKU is stored in the product data management system, products can be served up on-demand, with the different descriptions generated from UniVerse. This helps RTG compete more effectively and in some ways is the opposite of what many IBM® i shops do, trying to mask and never touch their back end. RTG can now take advantage of the fact that the UniVerse back end is easy to update and extend.

“ *The UniVerse platform is ideal for handling complex data with its ‘table-within-a-table’ structure and one of the key reasons why specific promotions can be created and executed quickly.* ”

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