Rocket software

Railway Furnishers

Moving from in-store to online in just one week

RAILWAY
• FURNISHERS •

Railway Furnishers, located in South Africa, is comprised of two main businesses: a furniture and appliance outlet with 30 stores and 450 employees, as well as a branded clothing business with 13 stores and 100 employees. Railway Furnishers is the only furniture and appliance retailer in all of South Africa to offer their customers the opportunity to make purchase payments over time without incurring additional charges.

At a Glance

Industry: Retail.

Location: South Africa.

Challenge: Accelerate online retail by rapidly modernizing their brick-and-mortar high street model to enable modern digital channels.

Challenge

To process their more than 550,000 monthly transactions, Railway Furnishers relied heavily on COBOL systems, with each transaction driven by in-store purchases. Annette Viljoen, Group Chief Technology Officer for Railway Furnishers, knew that future successes would lie in improving digital capabilities alongside the successful store model. However, when COVID-19 hit in March 2020, what had once only been an idea needed to be put into practice immediately. She explains: "All 43 Railway Furnishings stores closed, and our employees were on 'stay at home' orders. Our customers could not pay their accounts in any other way. We had to be smart, and we had to be fast."

In an accelerated fashion, the team identified the gaps between the new reality they were facing and the capabilities of their current systems. The software's real-time capabilities, processing speed, and the ability to support different platforms such as mobile, as well as application integration, were all factors to be considered.

Given that Railway Furnishers was founded over 60 years ago, systems that are introduced over such a long time span often create issues with lack of documentation, inconsistent coding, and applications depending on outdated frameworks, libraries, or technologies. It can be tempting to rebuild the system altogether, however, a rebuild requires a huge upfront investment and a major resource commitment. It is not an undertaking that can be done quickly.

The Challenge

The company had to shift from an entirely physical shopping and payment model to a modern digital retail channel at an accelerated pace.

Solution

Prior to 2020, Railway Furnishers customers did not pay their accounts via electronic funds transfer (EFT) or through payment gateways—everything was done in-store. Faced with the reality that their entire workforce and customer-base were now at home, Railway Furnishers knew they had to pivot quickly.
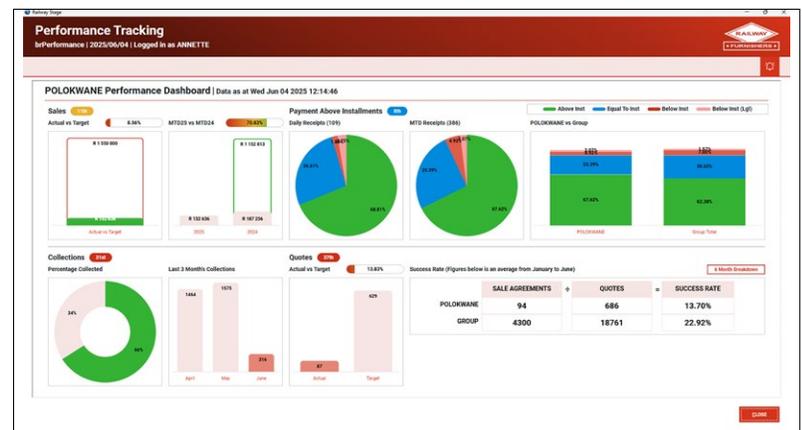
"We didn't want to start from scratch," says Viljoen.

"We have so much intellectual property built into our existing systems, and because we based it all on COBOL, we had the option to use the Rocket® extend® portfolio. This enables businesses to reuse their core application investments built on ACUCOBOL technology, exactly like ours are. We used Rocket AcuToWeb for an instant UI modernization of our ACUCOBOL applications, enabling web access with a modern HTML experience. Cascading style sheets paved the way to ensure consistency throughout the system. We were able to manage a single code base for Unix, Linux, Windows, web, and mobile platforms. This AcuToWeb functionality was a deciding factor for us."

Leveraging the Rocket® extend® portfolio and Rocket® AcuToWeb®, the team enjoyed a rapid upgrade path that required no code changes or most applications using standard controls. Even character-based applications could be accessed using a web browser, as AcuToWeb provides support for leading web server platforms and an out-of-the-box web server environment. While taking key business applications online always carries security concerns, the team was pleased with the AcuToWeb enhanced encryption for URL generation to ensure secure transactions.

The Solution

By choosing Rocket AcuToWeb, Railway Furnishers leveraged their existing COBOL code without needing to recode or rebuild from the ground up.

Results

Annette Viljoen and her team fully integrated an in-house ACUCOBOL stock system, the point of sale (POS) system to generate receipts and invoices at the backend, and the internal accounting module to ensure continuity of transactions while all stores were closed.

Remarking on the success of it all, Annette Viljoen says, "Incredibly, with AcuToWeb, we were up and running again within just a week, having introduced two payment gateways so that our customers could settle their accounts safely online in the comfort of their homes. We used Shopify to create a quick frontend that fully integrates with our backend solutions.

She concludes: "Despite the horrors of COVID-19, in terms of technology advancement, the pandemic actually did us a favor and pushed our modernization agenda forward. Having introduced AcuToWeb, we are now agile in our decision making and managed to move a mountain by carrying the smallest stone first. From minor things like generating electronic price tags, to major ones such as the introduction of online payment and a full online store, we are back to being the thriving business we want to be."

Impact

Accelerated Automation

With AcuToWeb, Railway Furnishers was able to successfully introduce online payment gateways in just one week, ensuring business continuity.

Instant Modernization

AcuToWeb instantly modernized application UI to HTML for easy web and mobile access.

Protected Investments

Rocket extend enabled Railway Furnishers to reuse their core application investments without requiring a rebuild.

Modernization. Without Disruption.™

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