

## COTSWOLD OUTDOOR REALISES STORES POTENTIAL WITH RETAILMART FROM TAHOLA

Cotswold Outdoor is a fast growing outdoor clothing and equipment retailer, already with 14 stores across Britain and a planned programme of store openings under way. Each of Cotswold Outdoor's outlets aims to meet the different leisure needs of some of Britain's most beautiful areas, such as the Cotswolds, the Lake District and North Wales. The company has taken a decisive step towards meeting this goal with the help of the RetailMart Business Intelligence (BI) solution from Tahola.

Despite successfully using the stock management capability of Prism from Alphameric, the company's management team needed access to better information more quickly for its general reporting and ultimately to evolve its merchandising strategy. Cotswold Outdoor's buying and merchandising director Ken Reeve explained: "Prism works very well as a stock management tool and we were looking beyond its capabilities. For example, though it has a report writing capability, it delivers fixed and generally paper-based reports. We needed something much more flexible."



He underlined the need for rapid, accurate information analysis to assist planning: "As a business we know that there are widely differing requirements for our outlets, for instance climbing equipment at our stores in the national parks and travel equipment for our new store serving the City of London, and so on. We need to realise the potential of each store. This requires fast decision-making and the ability to change product lines or promotions on a weekly, or daily basis."

Ken Reeve acknowledged that an analytical rather than a stock management tool was needed. "We knew, and accepted, the existing system's limits, but the upshot was that the buying and merchandising team might take two or three days to deliver a report, with the tactical response having to be made in only half a day. We needed to reverse that situation."

To find the necessary business intelligence functionality and flexibility, Cotswold Outdoor's merchandising team evaluated a range of products over three months early last year, including Tahola's RetailMart. Aware of the demands made on them by different parts of the business, Cotswold Outdoor's merchandisers carefully defined the scope of the project taking care to factor in both analytical and practical requirements.

While some of Cotswold's personnel already knew of RetailMart's capabilities, modules include sales and margins, stock, audit, ATV and basket analysis, they were impressed by its flexibility; its modular construction enables users to develop levels of analysis and reporting to suit their own needs or roll-out timetable.

Given Cotswold's clear need for sophisticated, flexible analytics, Tahola's expert Geoff McClure spent time with each department demonstrating its potential. Drawing on his own retail background, he identified which type of information was needed and the use of multi-dimensional (OLAP) cubes to deliver them. As Ken Reeve explains: "Geoff provided thought-provoking suggestions or new perspectives on reporting. He also worked with merchandising and the IT team, proposing and then validating different approaches to analytics and reporting."

Geoff McClure explains that RetailMart transforms data analysis and reporting while minimising the risk associated with investing in business intelligence: "RetailMart enables Cotswold to search its EPoS information to identify better practice and opportunities. It runs on established platforms such as Windows 2000 and SQL Server 2000 and links

automatically with different databases, reducing implementation time significantly. Moreover, the application is modular which allows users to grow at their own pace and not invest heavily up-front in functionality.”

The product’s speed and flexibility was clear. Not only did it make reporting for sales or marketing simpler, the software easily handled ‘one off’ or specialised individual reports that would have convulsed the department before. The process also overcame the generally observed tendency in many companies for vital information to be ‘locked up’ because through lack of user training or knowledge, sales personnel could not communicate their requirements to the IT department or data warehouse manager.



As Ken Reeve of Cotswold explained: “Stock systems might be good for sales information, but they are comparatively poor on historical data such as stock levels. Prior to using RetailMart, we might struggle to get definitive information on the relationship of sales to stock as weather conditions change.”

The new RetailMart platform was rolled out in September 2003. Because it operates automatically, it requires little IT support or administration. RetailMart sits on top of the Alphameric Prism software and other databases,

extracting the data required for the creation of OLAP cubes for analysis every night, or more often, if required. Its user interface enables the merchandising department to provide reports far more quickly, dealing with enquiries ‘on the ‘hoof’. Best of all, management has a rapid picture of successful promotions or stock lines or outlets across the business, enabling it to be more flexible in its retailing and more profitable.

Cotswold Outdoor’s Ken Reeve is understandably reluctant to discuss cost savings but commented: “There’s no doubt that RetailMart has delivered on what it promised. We have been able to exploit the differences between individual stores because we have better information faster. It has become an essential tool for running the business and it’s been an extremely good investment for us.”

## About Tahola

Tahola are dedicated to providing retailers with excellence in information to assist management and better decision making. If you would like further information regarding Tahola’s products and services, then please contact us.

Tahola Ltd

Business Centre West, Avenue One, Letchworth Garden City, Hertfordshire, SG6 2HB

tel. 0870 112 4998

fax. 01462 483492

email: [enquiries@tahola.com](mailto:enquiries@tahola.com)

web site: [www.tahola.com](http://www.tahola.com)

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