



CERAMIC TILE RETAILER MOVES UP TO ONEIR, CUTS LOSSES AND EXPANDS BUSINESS

Retailer and construction industry supplier, Tilemaster, upgrades its accounting system to Oneir Solutions, enabling it to stem persistent losses from a growing inventory and to manage a second new outlet.

by Andy Shaw

Ton Holten has never been afraid to make a move. He began his long sojourn in the ceramic tile industry by driving tile-laden tractor-trailers for a Dutch forwarding company from the far reaches of two continents back to his native Holland. In the 1980s, the Holten family packed up, moved to Canada, and successfully began Tilemaster in Aurora, Ontario. There it serves both retail and construction industry customers with what's become a vast array of metal, stone, slate and marble tiles as well as countertops plus related products.

Early on at Tilemaster, Holten moved company accounting from paper ledgers to the computer where Vigilant's package of Point of Sale and Inventory Control Software has helped Holten keep control of his business for more than 20 years. But in the new century and faced with a growing demand for tile fuelled by a boom in local house building and a healthy economy, Holten knew it was time to make a few more strate-

gic moves. He moved Tilemaster from its original location to another in Aurora and opened a second store in Barrie, some 40 kilometres away.

And in 2005, he also upgraded Tilemaster's accounting from Vigilant to Oneir Solutions, which has much the same look and feel as Vigilant on the computer screen but, deep in its dedicated server, Oneir runs on a modern-day Linux operating system making it much more able to meet the needs of an expanding business. Yet on the Windows workstations where Tilemaster staff make entries at the sales counter, in the warehouse, and in the back office, there was not little need for re-training.

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"For me it (Oneir) is still Vigilant - only better," says Holten frankly.

Jane Giggall, Oneir's president, says there's good reason for Holten to think that way. "We derived Oneir from Vigilant. And we did that in response to our Vigilant customers who grew beyond the independent business stage and needed a more

capable Accounting and Inventory Control Software product -- one that could be made more specific to their individual industries. Particularly, many of our customers needed a system that could better control multiple stores or outlets. The result was Oneir, which really does give them a tool for realizing their dreams of growth."

Just what Tilemaster and Holten had.

"By moving to Oneir we were able to open and manage our new store in Barrie. Once in the past we did try a second store but we had to re-enter the invoices from it by hand every night. Now with Oneir we're always online with the the new store in Barrie and can check stock, sales, and generally know what is going on in our business in both locations up to the minute. We couldn't have done that before."

One of the reasons Holten and company 'stayed' with Oneir was to accommodate new storage for a rapidly growing inventory back in Aurora.

"Now we have a new 40,000 square foot warehouse. And in order to efficiently manage the 3,000 different kinds of tiles we have in there, we need to be very specific about what gets printed on our invoices," explains Holten. "We have to show

on the invoices how many tiles the warehouse has to pick, so that the order taker in the warehouse knows how many boxes and how many loose pieces he has to pick."

To make that work, Holten needed additional controls over his inventory. So Oneir developed a "Tile Calculation" option available to clerks and other users right at Tilemaster's Point of Sale.

"What that means quite simply, is that when a Tilemaster customer orders so many square feet of tile, the clerk can access Oneir and have it calculate the number of pallets, boxes and individual tiles required and round that up to the nearest unit," explains Jane Giggal. "That ensures that all tiles get paid for and that the correct quantity has been calculated - rather than leaving it up to a warehouse person to do the mathematics."

Also, Oneir shows on each invoice the weight of the order - so that the pallets of tiles shipped out are not too heavy for the vehicles carrying them.

"This weight feature also provides a double check that the amount ordered is the same as amount shipped," says Giggal. "That means the shipping department can never make the mistake of sending out an order of 100 boxes when it only should have been 100 pieces. It gives our customers much tighter control over the highly valuable yet vulnerable assets they have in their inventories."

Giggal, given her background as a financial controller, has made sure such controls have become a major part of the Oneir solution.

Those Oneir controls have stemmed losses that were bleeding Tilemaster.

"Because the people in the warehouse had to make their own individual calculations before on how much tile exactly a customer needs, I estimate we were losing \$2-3 on every order. And we fill 20,000 to 25,000 orders a year," says Holten. "So just by moving to Oneir we've avoided the mis-shipments of too many or too few tiles going out to a contractor and also we've recovered more than a year's wages."

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Similarly, Holten uses Oneir's Order Taking and Invoicing capabilities to help control costs and run Holten Impex International, the wholesale side of his business.

That's not to say that the always practical Holten didn't think about moving away from Vigilant/Oneir when making his expansion plans for his businesses.

"We did look at other suppliers of accounting systems," admits Holten, "But their costs were way out of reach. Not just the initial costs but the maintenance contracts were far higher than

Oneir's. Even if one of those other companies had given us their software for free, the fees we would have paid them over the year would have exceeded the total cost of Oneir. So not only is Oneir easy to use but it is also very affordable."

There was one other important reason for moving on with Oneir, says Holten: "Those other companies when you call them, you've always got to start out with giving your name and identifying yourself. At Oneir, they dedicate someone to your company. When you call they know who you are right away. So we stuck with them."

Yet another smart move.

Andy Shaw is a freelance writer, broadcaster and international journalist with articles in many business and technical publications.