



SKI STORE RETAILER TURNS CHALLENGE INTO SUCCESS

Oneir Solutions' complete turnkey package safeguards inventory and reports performance for all Squire John's locations
by Andy Shaw

In days of old knights were bold -- but they weren't born that way. As a youth, a future knight usually started out as a squire, a kind of medieval trainee with much to learn before he knelt before perhaps the king and rose once touched by the imperial sword, duly knighted, and called henceforth, "Sir".

More recently, John Will, like his Robin Hood namesake, was also known as Squire John. This squire, however, lived in the 1960s not in Sherwood Forest but in Collingwood, Ontario where he had been touched not by a sword but by a ski. In 1969, he opened Squire John's ski shop to service the growing hordes of skiers skimming down the slopes of the nearby Blue Mountain escarpment that rises up from the shores of Georgian Bay.

By 1997, Squire John's had expanded from its main Collingwood store to five satellite ski shops tucked in at the feet of a string of private ski clubs in the region. Then new owners took Squire John's over - and faced an immediate challenge.

"We couldn't really communicate financially with our satellite stores. We had no way of knowing day to day how their sales were going or what their inventory levels were," says Mark Andersen, now a Squire John's partner. "And even at our main store our Point of Sale POS Software was simply horrible."

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So in the spring of 1998, Andersen and company went hunting for a new Point of Sale POS System - and found more, much more, in Oneir Solutions Point of Sale POS Software, Inventory Management System and Business Accounting Software.

"We started out just by going to the phone book, found a local computer systems supplier called Running Tide and called them," recalls Andersen.

Running Tide recommended Oneir Solutions and today Squire John's not only has a POS Software they are very happy with but a complete Ac-

counting Package and communications set-up that keeps them in constant touch with the state of their business even in their satellite stores.

"We have a Point of Sale point at the check out in each of our satellites as well as three POS check outs in our main store," says Andersen, "and at the height of the winter season as many as 12 of our staff could be using it."

From the beginning, Oneir Solutions enabled Squire John's to get Point of Sale and Inventory data from its stores at the private ski clubs. But more recently, Running Tide helped the ski store switch over from a DOS-based version that used multi-site polling to Oneir Solutions' new 32-bit native Linux version.

"The new system is running very well and it is very stable," says Geoff Hogan, president of Running Tide. "With Linux, the speed of Squire John's financial reporting is enormously faster, even though they are on a dial-up system and do not have any special high speed lines between their main store and their satellites."

Rather it is the speed of the Oneir Solution that has been developed for the Linux server back at the main store which

makes the difference, says Hogan. "With that kind of server, the speed is blazing."

The remote computers all use the Windows operating system yet are linked to the Linux server. It is an ideal linkage that allows staff in the stores to use their normal Windows programs while transparently gaining all the benefits from Linux that's built into the multi-location solution.

Technically, what was a "polling" system that took in batches of sales and inventory data at the end of the day from remote locations, is now, thanks to the nimbleness of Linux, a financial system that can report financial figures at any time.

Whenever Squire John's has its network dialed up with its remote shops, each one's Point of Sale and Inventory data are available immediately to, and backed up at, the Collingwood main store - providing an instant snapshot of how the business is doing.

At the remote private ski club shops, simple, low-cost Windows-based computer hardware suffices since all those local machines need only enable keyboard entries and reading of bar code product labels. The real computer-intensive work is all being done, handily at that, by the Linux server back in Collingwood. So not much computing power is needed at the remote locations.

"I can highly endorse the product," says Andersen. "To be honest, we were going to look at another product. But we went with the Linux version from Oneir Solutions and we are so

glad we did. Shortly after installing it, we hit our very busiest season, Christmas, and that really put the Oneir Solutions through its paces. We processed hundreds of transactions in a very short space of time and it came through with flying colors."

That's partly because Squire John's new Oneir Solutions can even address the question of colors as well as sizes with its Size and Color Matrix module. That's an important consideration in choosing an Inventory Control and Accounting Package for a retail clothing operation.

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"We have the full-blown package for retail, so the Size and Color Matrix really allows us to stay on top of our inventory for everything from skis to women's sweaters," says Andersen.

Among the other features that Andersen treasures about Oneir Solutions is its ability to handle Purchase Orders and especially its Canadian Payroll module.

"We use it for all our staff, which in the winter can be as many as 40 people," says Andersen.

"Our accountant uses it to make

all the deductions needed and everything else to do with Payroll."

Concludes Andersen about his Oneir Solutions multi-site, fast as lightning Accounting and Inventory Control System: "It's a complete turnkey package that's ready for just about anything and it is very stable."

Given that maturity and readiness to defend and extend its domain financially, perhaps Squire John's should now rise too and be re-named "Sir John's".

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