

# News **Technology**

■ Edited by Ashley Anderson

## Briefs

### Achievements And Expansions ...

>> **NxTrend Technology** announced it earned Microsoft Gold Certified Partner status for software products. The program provides recognition to companies built on the Microsoft® platform.

>> **Aperum** added PDA Warehouse, a new mobile application, to its TakeStock software for distributors. The new addition enables distributors to use handheld PDAs to collect and access information throughout the warehouse in real time.

### Web Sites To Watch ...

>> **Plumbing-Heating-Cooling Contractors—National Association** now has an online version of the PHCC ToolBox catalog. It features safety programs, PHCC apprenticeship/HVAC training courses, a cross connection manual and the National Standard Plumbing Code among other items. Visit it at [www.phccweb.org/bookstore](http://www.phccweb.org/bookstore).

>> **The Build.com Building and Home Improvement Network** announced that Hansgrohe, Inc. has entered into an agreement to participate in the HomeBuilding.com and KBSource.com marketing and communication programs. <<

## CORRECTION

The Web site for **Management Information Systems Group Inc.**, [www.misg.com](http://www.misg.com), was incorrectly identified in the Cutting Edge: Warehouse Management feature published in the March 2004 issue of SUPPLY HOUSE TIMES (page 54). MISG offers e-commerce, electronic data interchange (EDI) and Internet solutions for the PHCP and HVACR trading communities.

## Small Supply House Grows With Custom Technology

Connecticut wholesaler Bender Plumbing Supplies has learned that a customized technology solution enables it to maintain the high levels of customer service instituted by company founder Jack Bender as it continues to grow.

The wholesaler, which has been serving the HVAC/plumbing industry in Connecticut for more than 40 years, has grown from one location with five employees to three branches — in New Haven, Waterbury and Bridgeport, Conn. — with 50 employees. Now run by Jack's sons, Norman and David, Bender Plumbing Supplies offers commercial, industrial and HVAC products and operates registered Kohler showrooms.

"We outgrew our first technology solution since it did not provide enough user seats and had limited functionality for a fledgling plumbing/HVAC supply house," said Mark Chirgwin, general manager for Bender Plumbing Supplies. "We evaluated several technology providers and selected DDi System for its easily customized solution for our dual showroom and inventory back-office integration needs."

Bender's three branches operate independently. The wholesaler's technology solution provides a "looking glass" into the inventory of each branch, all from one screen regardless of the location, according to Chirgwin. The company's employees are able to instantly access order information and customer history from any of the three branches. Each branch has its own inventory master file. Bender's employees can download the product master file for a single product or product line and then update all that information to the other branches.

"This custom feature has enabled us to reduce an arduous process that took hours into a matter of minutes," said Chirgwin. "The system will then print an exception report that identifies, by branch, if a copper fitting line is being sold at last year's pricing. The time and cost savings are invaluable."

The customized technology solution serves both sides of the supply house from the showroom to the warehouse, which is important to a business such as Bender's that has both retail and wholesale operations, Chirgwin said.

Bender went live with the DDi System in 1996 and has upgraded the system over the years. For the future, the wholesaler is exploring the creation of a Web-based service desk. "Dave Bender and other employees access the system remotely, especially during off hours," Chirgwin said. "Should



**Bender Plumbing Supplies, based in Connecticut, uses customized technology to operate its showroom.**

they run into any issues, it would be great to have an online repository of information that provides answers to common problems."

Bender is also looking to automate operations further by using bar coding, online ordering, and inventory checking by customers for available stock and prices.

## Scanners Replaced With Voice-Directed Distribution

Associated Wholesale Grocers (AWG), the second largest grocery cooperative in the nation, has implemented a voice-directed distribution system, an integrated software and hardware solution, in its 1,000,000-sq.-ft. Kansas City, Kan. facility, replacing both pick lists and handheld scanning terminals in its case-picking operations. AWG said that despite the precision of scanners, accuracy results with the voice are at least equivalent, and frequently better, with error rates dropping 25% following the installation.

"Previously, we went from paper to bar code scanners to increase accuracy rates, but lost productivity," said Rich Vastine, corporate director of industrial engineering at AWG. "Now, with voice, we get both benefits. A hands- and eyes-free operation is such a natural way for our associates to work."

Installed in February 2003, the voice-directed distribution application software, provided by Vo-collect, is configured specifically for AWG's warehouse operation and provides managers with real-time visibility into floor operations so they can react to changing conditions immediately. The system pairs industrial speech recognition technology with a wearable voice computer.

AWG intends to expand the use of the voice

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The **Service Roundtable** Web site, [www.serviceroundtable.com](http://www.serviceroundtable.com), received its millionth click on March 17. Pictured are Matt Michel (right), CEO of the Service Roundtable, and David Heimer, chief technology officer, at the time of the visit to the site, which is 18 months old. Michel predicts the site will receive another million clicks before the end of the summer. It offers air conditioning and plumbing contractors services such as downloads of business tools and a library of marketing tools including direct mail pieces.



distribution system to the whole warehouse. It can be used for cycle-counting, put-away, replenishment, transfers, receiving and loading applications.

## Prophet 21 Acquires DISC

**P**rophet 21 announced its acquisition of Distributor Information Systems Corp. (DISC), provider of enterprise software solutions and services for fluid power distributors. Chuck Boyle, president and CEO of Prophet 21, said in a statement, "Prophet 21 is constantly searching for ways to strengthen its expertise among durable goods distributors to help its customers continue to

increase sales, improve customer service and reduce operating costs."

Prophet 21 has more than 37 years experience in the distribution industry, including some of the largest fluid power distributors in North America. Among them: Brenner, Fiedler & Associates, Flowline Components, Inc., G.S. Hydraulic Inc., and many others.

For nearly 25 years, DISC has been a provider of enterprise software solutions and services for fluid power distributors in North America. More than 315 distributors utilize a DISC solution. These customers will join Prophet 21's customer base, as DISC and Prophet 21 will combine to form into a single entity called Prophet 21. DISC's products and services will be supported, marketed, and sold by Prophet 21. <<