

SOFTWARE FOR THE SHOWROOM

Efficiencies come to Valley Electric Supply. **BY LEN ABBAZIA**

Over the course of its 31-year history, Valley Electric Supply, Ansonia, Conn., has always taken great pride in its lighting showroom. Between 1992 and 1996, it expanded and remodeled its showroom twice—making it one of the largest and most comprehensive lighting and home decor showplaces in the state of Connecticut. However, the company has found that running the customer experience in a showroom environment is a far cry from how orders are processed in a typical electrical distribution setting.

"We have two stores with two totally different businesses, yet both operations need to run off the same distribution software solution," said Frank Capasso,

president of Valley Electric Supply. He explained that while the electric supply side of the business could easily be adapted to any distribution technology solution, the challenge was finding the right software to handle the special orders taken in the lighting showroom.

"We needed a product that would work for both businesses, could be integrated seamlessly into our operations, and could identify detailed information we were lacking in the showroom," said Capasso.

After trying a proprietary solution Capasso created himself, as well as two major distribution packages—all of which came up lacking—Valley Electric's lighting showroom software solution came via a

direct mailer from DDI Systems, also located in Ansonia. DDI, known primarily for its HVAC and plumbing expertise, appeared the ideal fit.

"DDI was our David to the distribution Goliaths," noted Capasso. "They took the time to truly understand our business needs and technology challenges in the showroom. The bigger companies were trying to force us to fit to their systems while DDI adapted its solution for us."

"We fully understood the frustration that Frank and his team had experienced with previous attempts to automate showroom operations," said DDI Founder and President Adam Waller. "We deployed a development team onsite that



Special order tracking displays purchase stage and delivery status on one screen.

Customer	ORDER NUMBER	ORDER DATE	ORDER TYPE	ORDER STATUS	ORDER TOTAL	ORDER BALANCE
001164	Beth Waller	03/10/04	Special Order	Shipped	167,9500	0.00
77798074	Order 84C-2 PD 4-LIGHT BILLING	03/10/04	Special Order	Shipped	27,0000	0.00
77798074	Order 84C-2 PD 4-LIGHT BILLING	03/10/04	Special Order	Shipped	27,0000	0.00

Availability:

Qty	Order	Order	Order	Order	Special P/O	Special P/O	Special P/O	Special P/O
1	1	1	1	1	00000000	00000000	00000000	00000000

Special P/O: 00000000
 Promised Date: 03/10/04
 Expected P/O Delivery Date: 03/12/04

DDI built a series of screens into its software that provides all information related to a special order—all on one screen.

was prepared to tear open our distribution software package on the fly in order to address Frank's showroom special orders including the handling of deposits and customer history." The Valley Electric project transformed the DDI System solution into a showroom-specific application.

Prior to the DDI implementation, a special order could take from a week to two months to come together because each order required being built, accumulated, and staged. For example, if a builder ordered a series of special-order lights for a custom home and wanted only the outdoor lanterns shipped, it was virtually impossible to track only that portion of the order history.

By building a series of screens into its software that could easily provide all of the information related to a special order, all on one screen, Valley Electric's showroom became empowered: They could instantly access the information from the floor.

Additionally, Waller and his team were able to integrate the showroom system with Valley Electric's current solution—combining it into a full-strength distribution management system that handled accounting as well. The new system also allowed the distributor to distinguish between the showroom pricing and supply store pricing—contract pricing, rebates, special pricing for groups of customers, special pricing for one customer, and pricing schemes that are agreeable to selling artwork and giftware.

Evaluating the experience

Valley Electric has been live with the showroom system since August 2003. "The solution has been better than I could have ever expected," said Capasso. "We are amazed at the amount of detailed

information the system can extract and succinctly organize onto one screen. Ordering is simple and keeping track of those special orders is easier than ever. A complicated purchase order that used to take five hours to complete can now be done in one."

Capasso even jokes that his staff previ-

ously covered a special order with 15 Post-It notes to track all the changes. "Now, at the push of a button, we have eliminated unnecessary paperwork and automated the special ordering process," he said. ■■■

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