

## *COLD System Boosts Furniture Sales by Improving Access to Customer and Inventory Records*

A computer output to laser disk (COLD) system has helped increase sales at the furniture company, Gabberts, by improving access to customer purchase histories and inventory records. The system has also decreased the volume of paper reports by 75 percent while eliminating the time previously spent tracking down data. In the past Gabberts' daily and monthly reports were purged from the database after a short time and stored permanently in binders. Because it could take several days to look up information in binders, sales were jeopardized when an item was needed quickly. The COLD system captures reports generated by the IBM server and downloads them to a Windows server, replacing paper with digital reports accessible from users' PCs. Reports are permanently stored in a central database, making them easily accessible long after they used to be bound and shelved. Now furniture is located quickly and records of past purchases are instantly accessible. "When someone calls and wants to buy an item to match a purchase made years ago, we have the information to order what we need," says Bob Yttreness, Director of Information Technology at Gabberts. "And when someone wants something quickly, we know instantly if we have it."

Established more than 50 years ago, Gabberts Furniture and Design Studio offers an assortment of quality home furnishings as well as professional decorating advice for homes and offices. The company has been honored by House Beautiful magazine as Best Home Furnishings Retailer in America. Gabberts has four stores-in Edina, Minnesota, Dallas and Fort Worth, Texas-and a distribution center in Dallas. Three stores include a full-service design studio staffed by professional and award-winning designers who develop an overall scheme, then search out all the required furnishings and accessories. At the client's request, their service may also include finding the right wall coverings, window treatments, custom rugs, fine art, and more.

### Keeping customer records

Gabberts uses the point of sale program, Storis, to keep track of purchases. This system is also used to manage inventory, generate orders, and handle accounting functions such as general ledger, accounts payable, and accounts receivable. The software runs on an IBM RS/6000 M80 server. In the past, Gabberts was able to keep customer histories in the Sporis database for only three years because too much data slowed the performance of the system. After the three-year limit, purchase information was printed and stored in binders. Although the information was still available this way, it was difficult to access in a timely manner. "Some of our customers purchase 10-year warranties and we may need to look up that information long after the three-year limit has passed," explains Yttreness. "Also, the furniture buying cycle is longer than just three years. People buy furniture over a lifetime. We need fast access to purchase information over that same length of time to make it easy for people to buy additional pieces."



**Gabberts**  
FURNITURE & DESIGN STUDIO

## Document Management Application Overview

"A customer may call five years after a purchase wanting to replace the knob on a dresser... with instant access to their records, we make it easy for them to get what they want."

Bob Yttreness  
Director of Information Technology  
Gabberts Furniture & Design Studios

Industry:  
Retail



### Metafile Solution:

Accounting  
Order Processing  
Inventory  
Customer Service  
IBM RS/6000 Server Integration

### Gabberts Corporate Profile:

Award-winning quality home and professional furnishings retailer  
Established over 50 years ago  
Over \$100 million annual sales  
Employs over 500 people

**METAFILE**  
Capture Organize  
Index Deliver™

<http://www.sbsusa.com>

Gabberts produces at least 20 end-of-day reports covering issues such as sales figures by store, inventory transactions, credit card reports, promises to customers, and so on. There are many end-of-month reports as well. In the past, these were printed on standard computer paper and distributed to those who needed to see them. After only a month, the reports were purged from the database. There was some delay while the information was being bound when it wasn't accessible at all. Once the information was filed in the binders, it was even more difficult to access than when it was in the Sporis database. This could affect sales when a customer needed an item quickly. For example, if the salesperson needed to know if the item was in the Dallas warehouse and the inventory transaction for that item had taken place more than a month earlier, he had to track down the paper copy of that inventory report. In the few days required to do that, the sale could be lost.

There were other drawbacks to paper reports as well. One was the waste of staff time as people hunted through binders to find what they needed. Another was the printing cost, which was substantial. To save money, some reports weren't printed at all. "We had one general ledger account detail report that was over 8,000 pages," says Yttreness. "We needed that information for sales tax reporting, but it was too expensive to print." Another drawback was the effort involved in distributing the information. Reports for the Texas stores were sent electronically from the RS/6000 to printers at those locations. But managers might not always see the information right away. "If the person who was responsible for distributing them was sick or on vacation, the reports might sit around for some time or get lost," says Yttreness.

These limitations led Gabberts to look for another way of maintaining the information generated by the Sporis system. They were also looking ahead to the future when they would eventually like to manage their invoices digitally as well. After researching the technology, the company learned that two different types of systems could be combined to meet these requirements. One was a COLD system, which would read the reports created by the RS/6000, make them available over the company's network, and then store them digitally. The second system was an imaging system that would capture images of the invoices and add them to the central document database, eliminating the need to file and store the paper copies.

When Gabberts began evaluating COLD and imaging systems, they learned that while it was easy to find an economical solution to address one of these needs in isolation, the higher-end systems capable of handling both operations in a single solution generally ran into millions of dollars and years of implementation time. Then they heard about Metafile, a Rochester, Minnesota-based company that offers COLD, imaging, and workflow in a single integrated solution at a very reasonable price. Metafile provides print capture and imaging products that feed a single print output and imaging warehouse. Documents can be easily written to CD-ROM or hard drives for storage. The information stored in the document warehouse can be accessed with a viewer client or over the web.

Gabberts visited another company that was using Metafile for both COLD and imaging and learned that they were very pleased with the software. "We chose the Metafile products because their price was very reasonable compared to other systems and because of the full text search capability on the COLD documents," says Yttreness. "With some systems we looked at, you can only search for certain fields within the reports. We have many fields in our customer reports. While we probably could have guessed which ones people would want to search on, somewhere down the line someone would have wanted to search on something else. Then we would have had to index that field as well. With Metafile, everything in the reports is accessible by the search engine."

#### Better service

Metafile came to Gabberts' headquarters and installed the COLD

system and interfaced it with the Sporis software on the RS/6000. The COLD system was set up so that each day at 11 p.m., its software checks the output queue on RS/6000. It reads the report files it finds there and converts them to compact, searchable files that reside on a Windows NT server. The software automatically scans a specified location for the files and, if they are found, automatically downloads them to the server and indexes them. This way, reports are no longer printed but accessed directly from the server over the company's network of T1 lines. People view the reports on their desktop PCs using the MetaViewer Windows-based retrieval client.

The COLD system is helping Gabberts increase sales in two ways. One is by making customer purchase histories available electronically no matter how old they are. The Gabberts report that archives purchases includes information such as customer name, number, item purchased, purchase order or invoice number, invoice date, how much the customer paid, how much Gabberts paid, the fabric grade and color, the finish, leg types, and so on. The COLD system's full text search capability makes it possible to search for any of this information. "A customer may call five years after a purchase wanting to replace the knob on a dresser," explains Yttreness. "At that point, he probably doesn't have the receipt. With the COLD system, we can quickly determine the style and model of the dresser and order a replacement. Or someone may have purchased a bed several years ago and now wants the nightstand that matches it. With instant access to their records, we make it easy for them to get what they want."

The second way the COLD system boosts sales is by enabling Gabberts to track inventory more accurately. "When someone on the corporate inventory staff needs the details of a particular inventory transaction, they simply double click on the report," says Yttreness. "If they don't know which report they need, they can select a range of days to search and find it easily." This way, when a customer needs a particular piece of furniture quickly, the Gabberts staff can check the inventory records for the warehouse and each of the three stores to find out immediately if the piece is in stock.

Since the COLD system was installed, the volume of printed reports has decreased by 75 percent, eliminating most of the cost of printing reports. The time that was previously spent distributing paper documents is now put to better use. And because reports are always available in digital format, the staff no longer wastes time looking up information in binders, freeing up more time for activities that more directly influence customer service and sales. Gabberts will eventually implement the Metafile imaging system to capture images of accounts payable invoices. They expect this to improve the flow of this information between headquarters and the Texas stores. Currently invoices are received in Minnesota and then mailed to the store managers for their signatures. Sometimes the time lag causes Gabberts to miss the discount they might have gotten for paying early. "With the imaging system, we will send the image of the invoice to them digitally and use digital signatures to get their approval," says Yttreness. "That should speed the invoice approval process significantly."

For Gabberts, installation of a COLD system is helping increase sales by providing instant access to current reports and archived documents. With information such as customer purchase histories and inventory records electronically available, the company ensures excellent response to customer requests while saving itself the administrative problems of dealing with paper documents.

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