



## A Not so Simple Solution for SIMPLY COMPUTERS

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# **A Not so Simple Solution for “SIMPLY COMPUTERS”**

## **Introduction**

The benefits of computerization in today’s world have forced organizations to automate their processes. It has been proved that automation is essential to maintain a company’s market position and profitability. This paper examines the problems that were being faced by “Simply Computers” in handling their manual mail ordering system, and how these problems were overcome by making investment in the automation of their labour intensive ordering procedures. The work was outsourced to Title Developments (formerly Arc Solutions Ltd), who played an integral part in increasing Simply Computers’ efficiency by automating other areas of the business such as stock control, in addition to the basic mail ordering system.

## **Background**

Simply Computers was founded as a computer mail ordering company in 1991 when the demand for computers was starting to grow rapidly.

Simply started with a staff of just four people and all the work associated with orders was carried out manually. This included taking sales orders via the phone or fax, taking payments by credit card, and keeping records of stock, packing, dispatch, and returns.

Simply’s sales increased rapidly and within 6 months another 15 employees had to be recruited to handle all the operations. At this point they realised that the business had a great potential but margins were low in a highly competitive marketplace. The cost of staff was also to be reduced, to maintain a satisfactory level of profitability.

Simply looked for an “off the shelf” sales order processing system but could not find one. They needed a system that would fully meet their needs and allow a high level future expansion, without major changes disrupting the business. It was realised that a bespoke solution was required and at that stage Title Developments was approached.

## **What Title did**

Originally, Title Developments was given the task of creating a simple sales order system that would just perform the basic mail ordering tasks. But having examined the business in detail and realised likely future requirements, Title suggested a much more comprehensive and imaginative system, which was to be implemented in stages. This was accepted as the way forward and the new system incorporated the following features:

- A customer places an order on phone, fax, post, or via email, the salesperson inputs the items into the computer system. The system allows the salesperson to instantly check stock availability.
- Credit card authorization is performed automatically while the customer is on the line.
- The system then automatically generates a ‘pick’ list for the order and sends it to the stores dept., all other necessary paperwork i.e. despatch notes and invoices is produced at the appropriate stage in the operation.

- The system allows returns from customers to be entered and records the appropriate actions to satisfy the customer and return items to stock or to the supplier.
- Proper stock control with automatic flagging to the purchasing department when the stock level of a particular item is low.
- The system can generate a wide variety of management information with up-to-date reports of orders, cash flow, bank balance, etc, and consolidated reports for any chosen periods. In addition to allowing management to monitor day-to-day activity these reports are invaluable in assessing future trends and requirements.

All of these functions were created with a very user friendly, efficient interface which aided speed of operation and significantly reduced the time needed for staff training.

## **Key deliverables from Title and their benefits**

- A Sales Order processing module designed to handle customized PC system sales. This allowed Simply to offer PCs according to the customer's specification. That is, when ordering, the customer could choose components (graphics card, memory, etc) from a list of options. At that time this was a very valuable sales aid because all of Simply's competitors could not offer this service. It was only possible with a computer system which supported this type of sales.
- On-Line credit card authorization. Though common nowadays, this was implemented in 1994 when the technology was just emerging. The benefit is that payments are processed while the customer is on the phone and any problems can be dealt with there and then.
- Just-in-time stock ordering. The benefits of this system of stock control are immense, particularly in a high volume, low margin business such as PCs' sales. This system enhancement meant that stock turn around was maximized and this lowered the cash requirements of the business.
- Returns Module (RMA). An efficient way of dealing with returns is very important, not least in terms of customer satisfaction. But RMA processing is enormously time consuming and labour intensive, and very difficult to computerize due to the variety of items/part items returned, the reason for the return and the appropriate action(s) to be taken. The RMA module used a work flow technique to allow management to control this area of the business and to properly deal with customers' complaints at minimum cost.

## Conclusion

Title provided a comprehensive automated solution to Simply Computers which reduced labour costs and was capable of supporting the growth of the company. This was vital as Simply Computers was a high volume, low margin operation in which profitability came from reducing costs as much as increasing revenue. Simply became the second largest provider of IT equipment in the UK with sales of £90m per annum in its 7<sup>th</sup> year of operation. It also won many industry awards including the most prestigious "Service Excellence Award". This was in large measure due to Title's software. As quoted by Simply's CEO:

***"Title very quickly became Simply's IT partner. As our relationship grew, Title produced more and more innovative solutions which were way beyond our initial expectations. The effect of having a strong IT solution provider as a partner is incalculable and I can honestly say that without the help of Title and their vision we would not have achieved the growth and success we have had."*** Maria Samat, CEO of Simply Computers Ltd 1991 - 1997.

For our part, the relationship Title had with Simply exemplifies our aim of helping our clients grow their businesses by establishing a long term sustainable relationship with them.