



by Becca Anderson

Software Steps Into The Future

Textile Management System, from Computer Systems International, is the first we know of to utilize the Microsoft.net in the dry cleaning field. According to guidelines being promoted by good programmer resources like W3schools (online tutorials for web designers), this platform may become the standard among software designers in the future. Let's look at what it is and what it can do for you.

EXAMPLE #1

Factory Outlet Cleaners in Toronto, owned by Jim and Gus Karagiannis, is Canada's largest retail dry cleaning operation. At present they own 49 franchised Cadet Cleaners stores and 20 franchised Factory Outlet stores including 6 inside Wal-Marts. Turnaround time on orders is one day for Cadet and two days for Factory Outlet.

Any experienced dry cleaner can visualize the difficulties in controlling the production and delivery of hundreds of orders, to say nothing of the systems required for keeping tight control of both income and inventory. That's where .net comes in.

Using this new technology, the Karagiannis brothers can be in constant contact with their outlets. They can know hourly the number of pants, shirts, jackets, dresses and other items that will be arriving at their central processing facility each evening, and they can be prepared with the right amount of staff for handling it.

The franchisees provide a full accounting of their stores on a continual basis through broadband Internet. In turn, the plant provides continuous backup for them. A unique Lost and Found Library is being planned to aid franchisees. Any garment that loses its tag will be photographed, described and entered in the Library via the Internet to locate garments or to have a customer review the items to identify their garments.

JUST WHAT IS A .net?

The simplest way to understand this innovation is software creation is to think of it as a series of small programs that each do a specific task, and are linked together by an overarching program. This differs from past programming because you can customize, update or change one of the small programs without having to rewrite the entire interconnected suite of programs. Using older software, it was necessary to change all segments, not just the one being altered. This means that a company purchasing the new .net software will be able to get exactly the customization it needs for point of sale and other systems in a few days, instead of waiting for months.

The most sparkling aspect of .net programming is that it enables the user to obtain company data from

anywhere, using any tool that is capable of accessing the Internet. This can be a computer at home, a hand-held device like a Blackberry, or even one of the new cell phones with Internet capability. You can do this with any operating system and any web browser. Waiting your turn at the ninth tee? You can check current income, or project tomorrow's production needs.

The CSI program, now called Textile Management System, has been evolving over the past 10 years. It began as a typical DOS-based product. However, it has kept up with technology changes and now is poised to take advantage of the latest revolution in software design as the Microsoft.net standards are adopted. It's what everybody will be writing programs to mesh with in the future, and CSI is the first on the market with software specific for the dry cleaning industry, according to Al Anjavi.

MORE DRY CLEANERS COMPUTERIZING

"Companies that are serious in the business are becoming computerized. Those that are just surviving will go on as they always have, but if they want to grow, this kind of control of information is vital. The initial resistance of dry cleaners to computerization is finally melting away as computers prove their worth in the workplace. We used to knock on doors to get dry cleaners to think about computerizing. Now, they come to us and there is a waiting list to process the orders," Anjavi commented.



Jim, on left, and Gus Karagiannis of Factory Outlet. Screen between them is for communicating with the stores; screen on left is company website. Top: Factory Outlet's automated distribution system places garments on proper line for shipping to the stores. In the future, radio-frequency chips will be used on garments in this system.



Opening Screen OF software

CHOOSING YOUR SOFTWARE

All software packages have an array of options and capabilities; you should study them carefully. Ask questions if you don't understand the technical language. Any software you purchase should include the option to have it customized to your particular operation. It should be easy to use and understand, for all the people in your company who will use it. And your purchase should include adequate training. It's also vital that the software be expandable and adaptable into the future. The CSI system offers the following:

- Real-time order tracking by the main office over a DSL Internet connection
- Centralized accounting, pricing, promotions, marketing, time clock and reporting functions.
- Upfront customization to your needs.
- Built-in videos for training staff.
- Conversion of data from any prior software you have used.
- Multilingual capabilities (currently English, French, and Spanish with Korean and other languages on the way).
- User-friendly features such as touch screens and large icons.
- Marketing tools to track customer spending, initiate reward programs, and print coupons or other messages automatically.
- E-mail interface with customers for order tracking and notification.

- Reporting function that mesh with your current software, such as Excel, Word, or PDF files.
- Lock-outs on sensitive information, to limit it to management or those employees who need to know it.
- Integrated WebCam for quality control and security.
- Integrated Credit Card Authorization System.
- Integrated website allowing customer to track orders from pickup to delivery. Customers can view the status of their orders, change delivery locations and times, and include special requests to their orders at any point in the process.

EXAMPLE #2

The following is not a look into the future, but is happening today with dry cleaners who are utilizing .net technology.

"Don't forget the dry cleaning," the husband says as he heads out the door. His wife quickly logs onto her dry cleaner's website and requests a pickup for that day. Then she indicates when she would like her order back and prints out a pickup slip for her bag, before putting it in the designated spot as she heads out to work.

Across town the plant manager is stuck in traffic. He takes this opportunity to dial his hand-held Internet-linked organizer to check on business. Seeing that incoming orders are heavy, he then uses his cell phone to call in a part-time finisher.

When the customer arrives home on Friday, she is not surprised to see the dry cleaning hanging on the porch in her VIP garment bag, because she received an e-mail at work telling her it would be there. But there is a surprise; coupons rewarding her for her fifth order are attached to the shipping copy of the paid-by-credit-card invoice.

SEE THE FUTURE

This future is available now to you. At Clean '05 you can try out software from different suppliers, including Canada's Computer Systems International.

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INFORMATION ON CSI

1. Between 2,200 and 2,500 locations are now using CSI software.

2. A total of 700 locations use the latest technology described here.



Al Anjavi

3. These users include Factory Outlet, Cadet, Stitch-it alterations, Dove Cleaners, Gibson Cleaners, Top Hat Cleaners and Danier Leather.

4. Outside the industry, CSI provided for Quantas Airlines in Australia.

5. CSI's dry cleaning program costs C\$1,700 plus \$390 for each additional station.

Editor's note: This article is not an endorsement of CSI, but a salute to its forward-looking team. Canada has other suppliers of software and we welcome information about their systems.