



## **Managed Information Technology Services Ramp up Retailer; Shoes on a Shoestring**

Learn how Managed Information Technology (IT) services from Custom Information Services (CIS) helped Shoes on a Shoe String (SOAS) the largest independent retailer shoe store in the Southwest, expand to three stores and run a high volume eCommerce website with no internal personnel for the support of the critical IT infrastructure.

### **Quick Facts**

- SOAS is the largest independent retailer shoe store in the Southwest
- Turns inventory 3.5 times with the national average at 2.4 times
- Receives 2,500 visits to the website daily
- Outsources 100% of its information technology infrastructure and support to CIS

### **About Shoes on a Shoestring**

Albuquerque, New Mexico based SOAS, is the largest independent retailer shoe store in the Southwest. SOAS offers the lowest prices on women's, men's, and kid's shoes, accessories including apparel, and delivers high quality products to an international customer base. SOAS currently sells merchandise through two storefronts and through SOAS website ([www.shoesonashoestring.com](http://www.shoesonashoestring.com)). The CIS managed website, point of sale system, and back office systems are responsible for the day-to-day sales and operations for this retailer. Having the SOAS website and registers running at all times is crucial to the company's sales success.

### **Business Situation**

Early in the company's history, SOAS started with in-house servers and had to manage their IT infrastructure with the help of an on-call consultant, which delayed repairs and cost SOAS a significant amount in lost productivity and lost sales through the company's storefronts and website. As with any business, having computer and system outages costs money with lost sales and reduced productivity.

SOAS was using antiquated server systems that were located within one of the retail stores. "We had all our servers and IT infrastructure in one store and as the business grew, the servers got old and started to break down often," says Dave Riddle, President of Shoes on a Shoestring. "As we began to grow into the ecommerce part of Shoes on a Shoestring, we also ran into some problems with having enough bandwidth to accommodate the traffic to the SOAS website."

SOAS management spent valuable business time negotiating T1 lines with several vendors that after a few months in the contract did not deliver. SOAS began experiencing reliability and performance problems causing the stores and website to lose the critical systems needed to make sales. Subsequently SOAS spent more time and effort negotiating multi-meg data services with additional vendors, which worked well until the next business problem; the servers were just too out-of-date to handle the job. SOAS realized that too much management and staff time was being utilized to keep up with the technology and knowledge for a reliable network infrastructure. It was time to find a company they could rely on to acquire bandwidth, replace workstations, hardware, and servers before they broke down, and update software as new versions became available.

Riddle adds, "Our big thing is we have a website that has people on it 24/7. I need to have the website and our business in an environment that if there is a problem, someone can be there to handle it quickly. We could no longer afford to wait for someone to come out and work on our in-house IT infrastructure – it became too costly. We needed a solution quick."

When the SOAS servers had an outage, it took anywhere from 6-8 hours to get someone in the store to look at the issue. Any amount of downtime equals a loss in sales and revenue for SOAS.

"The server technician had to look at the server first and then order a part, wait for the part, and return later to resolve the issue," says Riddle. "That made me a lot more nervous than having just a computer down. When the website is down, our customers cannot reach us. Or even from a cash register standpoint, as our servers manage our cash register software as well. So if our IT infrastructure goes down in the middle of the day, that's costing me sales."

Shopper traffic increases dramatically when SOAS runs promotions or during peak seasons such as back to school and the holidays. These peaks caused service disruptions in the old IT infrastructure which resulted in not only lost sales, but the loss of customers. "We run big sales and get hit really hard in terms of traffic to our stores and our website," adds Riddle. "Everything needs to be up and running so our customers can purchase their items and come back to visit us later. We just cannot have our systems down at all, at anytime, day or night."

## **Business Solution**

CIS presented its all-inclusive Managed IT Services program based on the business needs of SOAS. CIS now functions as SOAS' IT department. CIS hosts and manages SOAS' entire IT infrastructure including firewall equipment and services, servers, workstations, registers, software, licensing, bandwidth, and ongoing support. CIS also sets up new stores for SOAS including the cabling, phone installation and of course the access to the back office system.

SOAS does not have any IT staff to manage or hire in-house and they do not have to tie up management and staff time to search for T1 or any other IT vendors. SOAS did not want to be in the IT business, their focus is shoe retail so having CIS available to keep their IT infrastructure up and running 24/7 is a must-have for the shoe retailer.

“We were at a point where our home grown systems simply could no longer run our business. We were growing quickly and we needed a solution that was scalable; one that did not have to be reinvented every couple of years as our business requirements changed. We had to make a decision whether we wanted to put a major investment in servers, staffing and infrastructure to support our growing business or to outsource to CIS. Managing IT is very important to our growth and we simply were not willing to gamble our business on our own ability to manage IT systems,” says Riddle. “At that point we decided to make arrangements with CIS. We were looking at getting into the Cloud environment so it was a natural move to do it all at once. CIS gave us new servers and they bill us based on a custom solution they designed specifically for our business requirements. Everything is online now. It’s a nice thing to have now because we don’t have to worry about backing up our servers and wonder who’s got the tapes when they take them home. CIS handles everything for us including bandwidth.”

“Our stores are in Albuquerque, but our servers are in Dallas close to the CIS offices, so I would say CIS and SOAS have been in the cloud environment for a few years already.” says Riddle.

Now SOAS has their servers, hardware, and software in a scalable network environment. CIS currently manages five servers for SOAS including multiple database servers running Microsoft SQL and Oracle. SOAS no longer has to deal with warranties, hardware, and software management. Instead, CIS buys bandwidth, infrastructure, and hardware so SOAS can focus on developing their shoe retail storefronts and website, while providing customers with the best prices in shoes and accessories.

## **Results**

“We have opened three different stores with CIS involved,” says Riddle. “CIS knows how everything is setup and they know what we do. They know what it requires. We can basically contact CIS and they handle everything for us while we focus on our retail stores and website. I wouldn’t want to start over training somebody again like we did in the beginning. I’m very happy with CIS’s commitment to helping us succeed with our IT infrastructure.”

CIS employs a highly trained staff of knowledgeable people in all areas of the networking environment to ensure the IT infrastructure is working properly including web servers, mail servers, database servers, and backup servers are running optimally at all times.

“CIS has put together a program that gives you specialists in all areas. Whether it’s hardware, software, or the entire environment,” adds Riddle. “That makes a lot of sense to us because we no longer need to worry about who’s working on our IT infrastructure.”

“With CIS, you get the IT staff with expertise and certifications, the purchase of the servers, the warranty of the servers, and all the support you need rolled into the fee so there are no surprises.”

Having SOAS’ infrastructure located in Dallas, hundreds of miles away from Albuquerque, has never been a problem for SOAS. Their servers and network are always up and running, which keeps the shoe retailer’s storefronts running smoothly and the website available 24/7/365 to customers around the world.

## **The Future**

According to Richard Ayars, Vice President of CIS, managed IT services is the direction of the future. Since 1999, CIS has been a pioneer in providing IT managed services to our customer base. CIS provided these types of services before it became a mainstream option for companies today. “Our ability to provide a very cost effective service increases dramatically if we can completely manage the entire infrastructure. Our customers do not need to spend their valuable time making decisions on what type of server or even the bandwidth and provider that they need. CIS does the legwork and knows the best Internet providers and server technology. We provide the best options available on the infrastructure needed to run business including hardware, software, and licensing. Our customers want the processing capability to be there and available at anytime without the problems or the headache to make the right decisions. That’s exactly what we provide to Shoes on a Shoestring and our other customers.”

SOAS plans on keep CIS as their IT vendor for a long time. CIS is a company that is set up to handle SOAS’ growth, now and well into the future.

“We are confident in CIS’ ability to handle our current needs and maintain our IT infrastructure as we continue to grow and expand with our retail storefronts and our website,” concludes Dave Riddle. “It just makes sense to outsource all our IT needs to a company that specializes in all aspects of managed IT services.”

## **About Custom Information Services**

CIS’ primary objective is to provide business with technology solutions to forward thinking companies. The CIS IT Services Group offers managed IT solutions that include cloud, virtualization, on-premise support, and long term IT planning. The Professional Services Group offering includes Microsoft Dynamics GP for accounting, distribution and manufacturing. The CIS staff of certified professionals has been helping business implement and maintain technology since 1989. CIS also writes for several blogs and maintains certifications and partnership with Microsoft.

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