

Weather Shop®

forecasts a bright future with
Sage 200

Weather Shop® offers more weather instruments, barometers and weather stations than any other outlet in the UK, stocking most leading traditional and electronic brands, as well as a wide selection of modern and traditional clocks. Its customers include those with a professional interest, such as sports stadiums, public utilities, farmers and many other commercial and educational organisations, as well as weather enthusiasts and casual purchasers.

The Challenge

In a few short years, **Weather Shop** had made several leaps in technology to enable it to manage an increasingly large turnover. In its infancy, the business used Sage Line 50 for back-office functions and spreadsheets were also much in evidence. In 2004, a US mail order management package was acquired which integrated with the retail tills, and specialist eCommerce software.

“ We didn’t want hundreds of different systems. We wanted a single integrated solution which could take us into the future and support our business as we explored new opportunities. ”

Alistair Barron, Founder and Managing Director, Weather Shop®

It also distributes to other retailers.

When Alistair and Sue Barron opened for business in 2002, they offered every purchasing option right from day 1: by telephone, by mail order, in person or over the web. As a result, today their customer base extends around the globe.

In 2005, **Weather Shop** moved to a purpose-built retail outlet in Eastbourne’s Sovereign Harbour marina development. Covering 2,000+ sq ft, 5 The Waterfront is not just the UK’s only highstreet weather shop; it is possibly the largest in the world. At present, it also houses the distribution and office premises, with additional warehousing nearby. This impressive retail operation and excellent pre and post-sales support differentiate **Weather Shop** in the marketplace, reassuring remote customers that they are dealing with a bona fide business.

However, the mail order package was not ideally suited to either the UK market or the company’s specific needs. In addition, the database then in place was struggling to cope with the demands placed on it.

As experienced IT users, Alistair and Sue soon recognised that these systems would not be able to support the rapidly growing business, and they began the search for a wide-ranging solution which would handle point-of-sale, mail order and telephone ordering, web-based sales and inventory control. Greater robustness, long-term flexibility and improved reporting were high on the list of required features.

The Solution

Alistair outlines the thinking behind the decision to buy a solution based on Sage 200 Wholesale and Retail:

"We didn't want hundreds of different systems. We wanted a single integrated solution which, in conjunction with our eCommerce software, could take us into the future and support our business as we explored new opportunities. We trusted the Sage brand and knew that we would always be able to count on excellent support, as Sage is so widely used across the UK. Its broadly familiar look and feel would also make recruiting new staff easier."

Weather Shop chose Milton Keynes based **FD Systems** to be its Sage Business Partner. **FD Systems** has over twenty years' experience in supplying systems to the retail industry and as Sage Developer can tailor Sage software to specific requirements, including adding its own mail order management module and integration with credit card authorisation software. **FD Systems** also offered its Activate module, which communicates between the web software used by **Weather Shop** and Sage 200.

FD Systems developed and installed a tightly integrated solution comprising Sage 200 Wholesale and Retail, Sage Document Manager, Sage PayPoint with till hardware, **FD Systems'** Activate product and a Microsoft SQL Server database for increased scalability and interaction with readily available eCommerce packages.

The Benefits

Today, the **Weather Shop** system, with tailoring from **FD Systems**, supports all aspects of the business: the warehouse, customers' orders, retail sales, purchasing and accounts. Sage 200 is seamlessly linked to Sage PayPoint electronic point-of-sale software, so that transactions at the Eastbourne retail outlet are incorporated into every aspect of the solution. Customer and stock information, therefore, reflects company-wide activity, helping managers to maintain tight control of a diverse business.

As Alistair observes, "Running a multichannel company in a competitive sector is a serious challenge. We need to be able to forget about our IT systems, while we concentrate on the business."

In particular, **Weather Shop** has enjoyed improvements in customer service and inventory control.

"We can work in a mail order/telephone order environment, or use sales order processing for account customers. We enter the order, with the system automatically completing the address details, and just press a button. It goes and gets the money and parks it into Sage. Everything is done from a single page, from order-taking to receiving the payment, right through to shipping the goods out of the door."

What began as a small husband-and-wife business now has ten knowledgeable and experienced employees, and Alistair is keen to acknowledge their contribution to the company's success. He believes the team's ability to provide excellent customer service is where the business scores over outlets such as catalogue stores, online auctions and general retailers.

Whichever route customers choose to make a transaction, their details are captured, stored securely and made readily available so that whoever picks up the 'phone or answers an email has the customer's buying history at their fingertips. This enables staff to respond rapidly to any queries about products or orders and allows them make product recommendations, based on past purchases.

In addition, with the transmission of information between the web software and Sage 200 now being fully automated, the effort previously spent on entering customer data has been eliminated, along with associated data-entry errors, leaving more time to focus on the customer's needs. The database is continually refined and this close contact with the marketplace has given **Weather Shop** such an in-depth understanding of customers' requirements that it is consulted by manufacturers of leading brands worldwide.

In the same way, all staff now have ready access to information on some 1,000 stock items. Whereas in the past there has been a real problem with unreliable stock bin figures, Sage produces accurate and timely information which staff can count on. Responsibility for ordering new stock can be shared across the team, with Sage also supporting purchase order processing.

FD Systems

FD Systems is one of the largest Sage business partners in the UK. Our expertise covers the full breadth of the Sage product range. In order to service our expanding customer base we have strategically located offices throughout the UK and Ireland. We focus on developing strong relationships with our customers that are built on high levels of expectation and continual delivery of added value.

To find out more please speak to one of our solutions advisors on **0870 873 4387** or visit www.fdsystems.co.uk



The future

Sage continues to grow with the **Weather Shop** business as it goes forward into the future. The new location for the warehouse is being developed and exciting commercial opportunities are being explored, including offering complementary services such as installation and data management, and building a stronger presence in the agricultural sector. The business is also planning to use Sage CRM software to run tailored marketing campaigns for both new and existing customers.

On the software front, the next plan of action is to add a module to streamline the shipping process further by handling tasks such as calculating shipping weights and sending the information automatically to the shipper's software. **Weather Shop** is also considering how the system might be further tailored to enable predictive ordering based on seasonality – a real advantage for any company in the weather business. Its eCommerce software is also due for a refresh to cope with growing volumes of traffic.

It's an exciting time for the business and it is hard to predict which avenues will prove the most rewarding, but **Weather Shop** has a flexible system to facilitate and manage its growth as a multi-channel business.