

/Briefcase

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Northdoor delivers a fresh approach to managing IT support at Pret A Manger



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Like all retail companies, Pret A Manger's management team relies on IT to run its business effectively and respond quickly to changes in consumer demand. StarKIS, a retail management solution built around a Sybase database, runs from Pret's London head office and is used to analyse daily sales, stock levels, banking, till and delivery information from its 118 shops. The application also enables senior management to set pricing and product availability profiles centrally and communicate changes to the branches.

So when Pret's IT support situation suddenly changed, finding a new support specialist with the right blend of skills, expertise and infrastructure became a vital priority. StarKIS is truly 'mission-critical', and with limited support Pret was exposed to significant levels of risk. And all this came about in the week that Pret's new IT director joined the company. The solution lay with IT support specialists Northdoor, whose packaged single-source support gave Pret the peace of mind and controlled costs it needed.

Northdoor - passionate about support

From an IT perspective, Pret A Manger's ability to do business depends on two things: the continual availability of StarKIS and an efficient data replication and upload procedure at its 118 shops. With limited support for StarKIS, Pret's new IT director Andrew Walker knew immediate action had to be taken.

Without the skills or resource to handle support in-house, his first step was to approach Sybase to see if it could recommend an experienced IT support specialist. This led to an initial meeting between Northdoor and Pret in March of 2001, and the commencement of a ManageLine contract in April of the same year.

ManageLine - proactive support for mission-critical systems for a fixed monthly fee

Northdoor's ManageLine service provides proactive remote support for a wide variety of IT products, ensuring optimum levels of availability and performance at a controlled, pre-agreed cost.

Andrew Walker explains why Northdoor was selected:

'StarKIS is an absolutely vital tool for our business. It enables us to view information from our shops and gain a clear picture of daily business activity. And management can also capitalise on emerging trends by changing pricing or product availability profiles for each shop at the touch of a button.'

'Given the importance of the application to our business, good support is vital to ensure it's always available and functioning well. We knew we needed a versatile partner who could demonstrate both technical acumen and a real commitment to deliver on their promise. Northdoor filled us with confidence from the very first meeting and have continued to live up to and exceed our expectations. Our staff can be very demanding, but Northdoor's service-led approach and technical expertise have lent a true sense of partnership to the relationship.'

A pragmatic approach to support services

Although Northdoor was originally contracted to manage the daily data replication process and was not asked to support the StarKIS code itself, the level of commitment and technical expertise demonstrated in the first few months of the relationship led Pret to broaden the original remit and increase its level of cover.

Andrew Walker takes up the story:

'All too often IT suppliers agree to take on a project before they are sure they can deliver a solution. That's not our experience of Northdoor. We've found them to be very pragmatic and honest in their approach to building a relationship with us, and it's a quality we really value.'

He adds that Pret was impressed right from the start of the contract with the speed with which Northdoor is able to pinpoint the likely cause of any given problem during the replication process. And Pret was also impressed by Northdoor's willingness to go the extra mile in terms of service delivery:

'Their insistence on proving why a particular piece of code has to be the cause of a bug really sets them apart. In doing so they often have to go beyond the call of duty – and beyond the terms of the ManageLine contract – but it ensures that StarKIS functions better in the long-term.'

ApplicationLine – bespoke support for bespoke applications

So when Pret decided to document the bespoke StarKIS source code they immediately turned to Northdoor's new ApplicationLine service, which provides support for the bespoke elements of applications. In doing so Pret achieved two significant benefits, as Andrew Walker explains:

'With the source code documented by Northdoor as part of their ApplicationLine service, we now have an effective insurance policy for the application. Should we experience a major problem we know that they will be able to step in and debug or alter the source code at short notice. This gives us real peace of mind and will help ensure the application can be fully supported for years to come, thus maximising the return on our initial investment.'

'And from a related perspective, we don't have to worry about employing a full or part-time member of staff to provide the same level of cover. Instead, through ApplicationLine, we now have a cost effective way of managing both risk and resource, while still ensuring we get best-in-class service.'

Next steps

Andrew Walker has no hesitation in recommending Northdoor's support services for the peace of mind and cost-effectiveness that they deliver. And on the basis of this relationship, thoughts are turning to future enhancements to StarKIS, as Andrew Walker explains:

'We are in the initial phases of planning the next series of enhancements that we will be making to StarKIS, including a longer-term goal of offering customers online ordering facilities. There is every chance that Northdoor will be involved in these projects given their particular expertise in the application of Internet-based technologies, and we are very much looking forward to building on our present relationship.'



NORTHDOOR

Reshaping the way you do business

About Northdoor

Northdoor plc is a leading provider of the know-how, products and services needed to deliver the business benefits of advanced technologies.

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