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## MAC IN BUSINESS

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# Fruitful partnership

Food industry supplier Frutex found that growth presented special challenges, so it turned to SapphireOne for an integrated system covering finance, human resources, inventory and customer relationship management. BY ANTHONY CARUANA

Who doesn't love the story of a family-owned business that grows, stays in the family and remains successful for over 40 years? Even better, a company that took its first leap into using computers to support the business in the days of the Apple IIc and has never abandoned the platform? That's what New South Wales-based Frutex has managed to do.

Frutex is a supplier to the bakery and pastry cook industry. This includes dried fruit, tinned fruit, frozen products, flour, chocolate, sugar and other ingredients. In addition, it makes spices, through its Spice Masters business, that are supplied to well-known brands such as Masterfoods. Frutex also supplies well-known cereal brands with the fruits they add to their cereals.

Having started in a small store almost five decades ago, it's now a substantial business, employing 120 people. It grew out of a cake shop and the business now has the third generation of family members operating it.

In the early years Frutex used an Apple IIc for product lists and looking after inventory. In 1988 Harry Magiros developed a Mac-based system while at university, which the company ran with for 10 years. But by 1999, with the Y2K issue, GST and a growing business, the company needed to find a new system to help its growing business. That's when it turned to SapphireOne.

SapphireOne is an integrated system covering finance, human resources, inventory and customer relationship management. Designed to run on the Mac, SapphireOne is continually being improved.

When *Macworld Australia* last looked at SapphireOne a couple of years ago, it had introduced integrated VoIP so that customers could be called directly from the system. Since then, the application has added many new features including a richer browser-based application that can operate even when network coverage is marginal.

"It's super fast. If you're on a 3G connection and only have one bar of coverage it will still work," SapphireOne CEO John Adams says.

For sales representatives on the road this is a great benefit. They can quickly look at a customer's sales history, create an order, get the customer to sign on the screen and send the order back to the office almost instantly.

In addition, SapphireOne now has an integrated payment gateway, so customers can pay instantly from their mobile device. It's also recently added a module that supports businesses that hire products out to customers. Mapping support is also integrated, so if someone taps on an address on the screen, navigation apps automatically launch.

"We've deliberately not gone down the app route," Adams says. "We've deliberately gone for a browser-based solution. That way you're not locking a customer into a specific platform."

Although SapphireOne works straight out of the box, one of the things Adams focuses on is making sure that the system works with the customer's specific needs.

"One of the things we've done for Frutex, for example, is that we've added a map of their warehouses, which are spread over 13 acres. That shows the user where the product is," he says.

The map was loaded as an image and SapphireOne has the intelligence built in to know all of the warehouse bays and rows, so that it can all be put together. This means that an operator can pick the items in an order in the most efficient way possible.



**On the road.** Frutex sales rep Peter Sharkey takes orders on his iPad from The Sweet Spot Patisserie in the Sydney suburb of Randwick.



**Time-saver.** An order is processed by scanning a barcode. Manual processes that used to take an hour, now take a few seconds



**Tracking system.** A Frutex employee uses a Bluetooth scanner to scan incoming stock to an iPad running SapphireOne.

Harry Magiros is the IT manager at Frutex and is one of five siblings of the current generation of the family. He was there when the company made the leap from home-grown systems – that he designed and created – to SapphireOne.

"In '99 we looked at commercial systems because we'd outgrown what I'd done," Magiros says. "We then looked at all the products on the market and chose SapphireOne. The main reason was that they were local and also because they were dual platform – Mac and Windows."

When Frutex started using SapphireOne, it ran the software without any customisation, straight out of the box. About three years ago, Magiros started focusing more on the family business, having sold his own company, and initially looked at improving workflows and procedures.

"One of the big issues was that we had sales reps all over the country – primarily Sydney but also Melbourne and Queensland," he says. "We were trying to streamline the process of ordering."

"We tried things like portable fax machines, taking photos of handwritten orders and emailing them back to the office. They were unreliable. Laptops were too bulky and lacked battery life. All of a sudden Apple came up with the iPad. That solved a lot of our issues."

The combination of long battery life, light weight and good form factor made the iPad a great fit for Frutex. However, the other side of this was that at about

## We've deliberately gone for a browser-based solution. That way you're not locking a customer into a specific platform

the same time, Telstra's 3G network was starting to expand, giving business people a good, reliable connection while on the road. The question then remained: what was the best way to use this new capability?

Frutex considered using its website as the gateway from the outside to the business but decided to work directly with SapphireOne. The software company had already partially developed the interface Frutex was looking for with another client. Frutex further developed this, and Magiros says it allowed sales reps "to very easily get all the information on a customer and place the order on the road. By the time the reps are back in the office, the order is picked and ready to go."

This process means that order fulfilment went from taking two days to just a few hours.

Many of the products that Frutex sells are frozen, which means they need to be loaded onto trucks at the last possible moment. The previous process required the dispatch team to review all of the outgoing orders, one at a time, and then look for the frozen goods by reviewing each line of each order.

Working with SapphireOne, Frutex now has a barcode on every invoice. Each invoice is scanned and a manifest for the truck lists all of the frozen items that will be shipped. The manual process that used to take close to an hour now takes a few seconds.

"The time savings for our staff from this process alone are huge" Magiros says.

In many cases, Magiros looks at the business and finds a process that can be made more efficient and, as he has a deep product knowledge of SapphireOne, can identify a function within the application that the business can use. However, that's not always the case.

"Sometimes I'll come up with an interface or workflow that isn't in the software but would help us. SapphireOne will modify their software to accommodate that," he says. Depending on the nature of the modification, that update may only be applied to Frutex or, in some cases, the change is rolled out to all of SapphireOne's customers.

It's tempting to think such a comprehensive system might require many weeks of training for users to become productive. But Magiros says, "I can take a salesperson who really doesn't know that much about our products or customers, give them these tools and have them selling within a couple of days."

"SapphireOne stores all of the information instead of it sitting in people's heads." 📱