

# habitat

## Introduction

Habitat's business depends on staying ahead of trends and constantly offering their customers new ideas and new design-led products. With 42 UK stores that are run to embrace rapid merchandising changes and new product arrivals and departures, stock taking becomes a mission critical process. Stock tracking, loss assessment and distribution have to work in synergy to deliver to the requirements of today's customer demands. Habitat therefore looked to find a new system that could keep pace.

The Habitat Loss Prevention Department had assessed the current stock taking methods and had identified areas that required a more accurate system. Significantly, stock was being lost through a lack of accurate data collection, this was then compounded by the slow speed at which discrepancies were detected and followed up. A store-level system that was linked into Habitat's distribution centres was therefore sought which could collect data at high speed, and transfer it into useable business information, so that any discrepancies could be dealt with in real-time.

Habitat selected a system that utilised the latest handheld technology from Unitech. The software for both the PC and HT660 was developed and supplied by Portech.

Habitat purchased over a 100 Unitech multi-lingual HT660 handheld computers, to be used throughout their stores in the UK and Europe. Each store having a PC with Portech software running a link to the main SAP system. The PC also has a communications cradle attached to it for swift and easy data transfer between the HT660 and the PC.

Both HT660 and PC software was developed to take into account the future deployment into Europe. Hence configuring the software to run in different languages can be carried out in a matter of minutes by the user.

The HT660 is a fully functional Microsoft WinCE 5.0 handheld computer that packs a powerful processor and fits comfortably in the hand. Weighing just 12.69 ounces, the HT660 is extremely lightweight, making it suitable for repeated in-store use, but it is also rugged enough to with-

stand daily use in hardwearing retail environments. The solution makes stocktaking, price checking, goods in/out and order picking to name but a few easier than ever before. In addition, because speed is of the essence for Habitat, up to four applications can run at any one time on the handheld terminal allowing multi-tasking and so improving productivity. Interruptions, for example to deal with customer queries, can also take place, with the store person returning to the point at which they left the stock take, unlike previously where the handheld would have to be re-charged before reusing.

*"I've worked with Portech for over 12yrs. They devised our stock take system and it has made things so much easier. The service care they offer is outstanding. They're very realistic, simple yet very effective!"*

Karen Roberts – Retail Risk Manager Habitat (UK)



A stock take for Habitat is now carried out in the following way:

- HT660's are sent to the store.
- The user on the PC imports the data from SAP and allocates fixtures to the hand helds.
- The HT660's are used to count the stock in blocks of fixtures and then returned to the PC and the data downloaded.
- A report is automatically produced showing the counted stock.
- All captured stock count data can be sent back to the HT660's from the PC for a second count (Check).
- Facilities on the PC include enquiries on which fixtures have been counted or uncounted and at which location a particular product was found.
- There is also an ability to modify a counted item.
- At the end of the stock take (i.e. all fixtures have been counted) a valuation report is produced and the SAP system is updated.

### The business benefits

The mobile solution provided by Portech gives Habitat a high speed and thorough stock take i.e. uncounted fixtures are flagged up. This means that the store is closed or inoperable for a shorter period. There is also a reduction in errors in data entry and the main SAP system is updated much quicker. The reduction of time in the whole data capture area allows the discrepancies to be identified readily and can be dealt with immediately.

Prior to the introduction of the mobile solution the stock take would be done on paper and then sent back to the head office via post. This was fraught with problems such as lost data sheets, illegible handwriting, data re-entry issues into SAP to name a few. The manual process would take up to two weeks to complete by which time the stock levels would have changed considerably and back tracking would almost be impossible.

Habitat spokesperson added: "We have been able to transform our stock audit process to deliver strong benefits to our business down to the individual store level. The new system is more than a simple stock audit solution, it has huge potential to help us improve traceability of our products and manage our inventory more effectively at any time of the year. Store managers will be able to access real time product inventory during the order process and analyse turn levels far more accurately than the method we use today"

"We are delighted that Habitat chose to implement the HT660. A high profile installation such as this recognises the exceptional quality and user friendly design of this feature rich terminal and confirms its place in the data collection market as a reliable, cost effective and user friendly solution."

Jeffrey Huang - Managing Director Unitech (Europe)

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