



An Alphabet for Success:

ABC, RTC, & IBM

by Rick Lawson *RTC Group, Inc.*


ABC Fine Wine & Spirits, based in Orlando, has been an institution in Florida for over 50 years. Founded in 1936 by Jack Holloway, ABC has grown to be one of the largest private retailers in the U.S. with over 200 stores. But to continue this success into the 21st century presented some challenges.

As Charles E. Bailes, III, President and CEO of ABC observed, "In order for ABC to be successful in the future, we must deliver the products and services we provide to our customers at lower costs than any of our competitors."

ABC also wanted to develop an exciting new

store format in select markets. They envisioned an upscale store idea offering new services, such as wine tasting, an expanded product line including gourmet foods and cheeses, and a larger selection of fine wines and gourmet gift baskets.

In early 1994, ABC began a search to find both the solutions and vendors who could meet their requirements. Their previous systems consisted of an IBM 4381 mainframe and IBM 3680 POS terminals running homegrown application software. Led by the IBM account team, ABC quickly decided to "rightsize" to an AS/400 and to select new POS hardware and software.



ABC was impressed with the database power of the AS/400 as well as the significant financial savings in maintenance, software, and utility costs. Host side project work included determining the programs that would be converted and migrated, and what applications would be purchased specifically for the AS/400.

The POS situation was just as critical to ABC. "ABC was looking for a PC-based device with enough capability to cover our needs for the foreseeable future. We also wanted a multi-tasking environment — we can't shut sales down to receive merchandise or perform other administrative functions. We wanted application code that was easily modifiable so it could be quickly customized to our specific needs," said Marc Wigmore, CFO of ABC.

After a fierce competitive battle, IBM and RTC won the ABC business due to their unique total solution. ABC decided on IBM's 4694 POS terminals and RTC Group's HTP-POS application in an OS/2 environment.

As Wigmore explained,

"Our choice was the IBM solution because we just have a better comfort level with IBM and RTC. We've done business with IBM for almost 30 years, and we know what to expect from them. I was impressed with RTC's sincerity, eagerness, and desire to succeed. The fact that IBM endorsed RTC as their business partner also was reassuring."

ABC had a very aggressive rollout schedule. IBM was able to provide superior account management and implementation services such as site preparation, hardware and software distribution, and a strong maintenance plan.

RTC was able to provide a total solution which included their HTP-Link AS/400-based polling package. The HTP-POS solution was selected because the object-oriented architecture let RTC deliver ABC-specific functionality that no other competitor could duplicate.

The HTP-POS architecture meant unprecedented speed in developing customer-driven modifications. This meant that ABC was able to fine-tune the software as the rollout continued.

"The system has opened up our ability to add to our product line which was locked into a maximum number of SKUs. The timing couldn't have been any better. We've had to add to our product line to stay competitive," Wigmore said.

The Orlando business area is one where intense competition requires retailers to respond quickly. "The software is excellent!" Bailes said. "All employees find it very easy to use. It has eliminated customer waits and is easily modified to our changing needs and desires."

ABC is so confident in IBM and RTC, that even as the POS project continues, new projects such as real-time scanning applications, labor scheduling, and inventory control are being implemented.

