

Music Trades

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TRI-TECHNICAL SYSTEMS

MUSIC RETAIL SOFTWARE EXPERTS RETOOL FLAGSHIP

PROGRAM FOR MOBILE AGE





Tri-Technical Systems

Music retail software experts retool flagship program for mobile age



Coming soon: Tri-Tech's AIMsi v12.

IF TRI-TECHNICAL SYSTEMS had stopped innovating in 1984, it would still be remembered as the first company to rethink point-of-sale software for the unique needs of music retail. Fortunately for music stores everywhere, though, Tri-Tech had no intention of stopping. In the 33 years since it launched its first program, the software specialist has retooled its signature applications many times over to keep pace with the speed of technology. Its flagship software package, AIMsi, has built continually on its tools for inventory management, point-of-sale, accounting, and much more. Later additions to its software line have delivered an e-commerce application, called Active-e, as well as PC/Poll, a program for collecting and analyzing electronic cash register data. In its latest upgrade, Tri-Tech is poised to unveil the 12th version of AIMsi, with new tools it's been working toward for the past four years. In "AIMsi v12," the software has been fully adapted for use on mobile devices, with smartphone-friendly features for both music store employees and their customers. In addition, it delivers a customizable touch-screen-enabled point-of-sale interface, a new back-end database using Microsoft's intuitive SQL Server, new tools for scheduling tasks,

and a variety of menus and features that can be tightly customized to each business.

"We are nearing the finish line on this newest version of AIMsi," says Tri-Tech President Paul Acton. "We've rewritten the software from the ground up using a newer programming language to allow us to take advantage of more innovative technologies."

Based in Dubuque, Iowa, Tri-Technical Systems was established at a time when the software options for music stores were somewhere between inadequate and nonexistent. Founder and CEO David Cox had 18 years' experience in computer programming, but he was working in the equipment leasing business when one of his clients, a computer salesperson, happened to mention the problem: Music retailers couldn't find a workable software package because off-the-shelf applications had no tools for managing rentals, lessons, repairs, and other essentials of the business. Cox went on to found Tri-Tech along with his wife Julie, and introduced its first product under the name SoftMusic—which later became AIMsi. As Acton says, "AIMsi was developed to uniquely fit the needs of music retailers."

Over the years, AIMsi would add tools

for customer loyalty programs, employee management, and automatic ordering, to name just a few. Through a "module-based" design, the software can be configured with whichever combination of resources, or modules, makes sense for each business. For instance, AIMsi's base package can be augmented by a "B2B" module that networks with suppliers to keep track of available stock and pricing, or a "C2B" module that lets customers view their account history and make online payments. "Each module integrates seamlessly with the other modules and can greatly enhance the AIMsi experience," says Acton.

As Tri-Tech developed other software applications, AIMsi became the centerpiece in a suite of applications designed to work in tandem. With Active-e, it introduced tools to build a full-featured e-commerce site, including a customizable shopping cart feature and eBay and Amazon interfaces. And if Active-e is the virtual showroom, AIMsi acts as the back-end stock room and inventory management center, processing orders and feeding in real-time inventory information so the two are always in sync. PC/Poll is also built to feed data directly into AIMsi. "We have set ourselves apart by listening to our clients and creating fully integrated business control technology tools to match their specific needs," says Acton.

Since joining the business in 1990, with a computer science degree and experience at another specialized software company, Acton has been credited with driving many of the company's key technical updates. In addition, he's cultivated ties with music retailers, manufacturers, publishers, and distributors to open up a constant give-and-take between Tri-Tech and the industry at large. Over the years, he and his team have performed multiple overhauls of their software to respond to new needs and requests, building in features such as serialized inventory tracking, long-term rental inventory tracking, repair and service tracking, and many others. They've also elected to keep technical support in-house, rather than farming it out to call centers, so the team that built the software can be the team that responds when questions arise.

"We continue to consult with retailers and match them up with custom technol-



ogy solutions,” says Acton. “And our markets continue to evolve as technology provides more efficiencies in the day-to-day tasks involved in running retail businesses.”

Tri-Tech software solutions are now used by businesses across North and Central America, as well as the Caribbean, Australia, and other points around the world. As Acton notes, soft-

ware development is a business that never really slows down, not just because technology is always serving up something fresh, but because customers are always looking to tech solutions for the edge they need, whatever else is happening in their world. “In strong economic times, businesses push for growth by crunching data and looking for new revenue streams,” he explains.

“In slower economic times, businesses look to be more efficient as they are forced to run a little leaner. The tools that our software provides allow them to access data to better help them make the business decisions that will help them succeed.”

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