

Location Services for the Retail Industry

It has always been all about connections; from the people you know, to the places you shop. The 'connected' experience is built on community, trust, and understanding. In the retail industry, retail corporations strive to provide the kinds of unique experiences that will allow them to better connect with their customers. In order to achieve this goal, business owners must streamline operations, implement tight supply chain management practices, and engage the customer from the point of contact to the point of sale.

Today's Challenges in Retail:

Poor Customer Connections

- :: Retailers need to find multiple channels to provide store locations and other peripheral information to customers
- :: Retail firms lack an efficient way to communicate inventory and service availability based on location
- :: Securing customer loyalty through effective customer resource management and brand differentiation can be challenging

Limited Business Insight

- :: Forecasting customer needs and behaviors using demographic statistics and key customer attributes from disparate data sources can impact real-time scale to new opportunities
- :: Retail firms' profitability margins decrease with loose controls and decreased visibility into the status of supply chain shipments
- :: Key performance metrics are difficult to analyze, creating challenges for identifying targeted opportunities to connect with customers

Barriers to Innovation

- :: Changes in systems and websites can be difficult to scale, costly to implement, and cause substantial downtime
- :: Retail firms need a way to integrate retail data management systems and group relevant information in a central location
- :: Retailers need a way to streamline communication throughout the organization so that there is universal access to real-time information as it becomes available

Virtual Earth Advantages

The Microsoft® Virtual Earth™ platform is an integrated set of services that combines advanced viewing options, including exclusive bird's eye view¹, aerial, and 3D imagery, with innovative mapping, location and search functionality. It enables retail companies to engage business partners and customers by providing innovative solutions and a visual display of data. Additionally, the service oriented architecture enables them to easily develop solutions that leverage customizable features and imagery, dynamic maps, driving directions, and powerful data visualization and reporting capabilities without significant financial investments. Retail companies use the Virtual Earth platform to realize the following benefits:

Empower: The Virtual Earth platform empowers retail companies by providing tools to help them manage data and connect to users more effectively. By leveraging the powerful Virtual Earth data visualization capabilities, they can use the platform as a foundation for building location intelligence solutions. Empowered with the most up-to-date information, retail companies can focus on connecting with users and delivering the best products and services.

Real: The Virtual Earth platform offers reliable imagery and data allowing retail companies to build a precise view of their organization. Exclusive bird's eye imagery¹ allows them to create richer connections with their users by allowing users to view and familiarize themselves with locations before arriving. Enhanced geocoding provides the most accurate and up-to-date results possible for efficient driving directions and position locators. Pushpin information boxes allow users to learn about a location or quickly visualize information relevant to that location. Combined, these features result in a more enhanced and immersive website experience.

Professional: The Virtual Earth platform utilizes open-standards based technologies, and offers flexible licensing options that fit almost any budget, enabling retail companies to develop innovative solutions through a cost effective approach. With 99.9% availability, retail companies can be confident that the platform services will be available when needed.

Virtual Earth Platform for the Retail Industry

With the Virtual Earth platform, retailers can create an immersive experience that enables customers to easily search, locate, and visualize store locations along with other locally relevant information. Seamlessly integrate the Virtual Earth platform with websites, applications and services to deliver the highly visual and locally relevant retail information your customers and end-users care about most. Imagine the possibilities with Microsoft Virtual Earth:

Strengthen Customer Connections

- :: Customize maps with unique pushpins and information boxes describing both location and inventory or service availability using unique brand elements
- :: Reduce customer service call costs by providing customers with locations, driving directions, and other peripheral information with Virtual Earth store locators
- :: Engage customers with exclusive bird's eye views¹ enabling them to get detailed views of specific locations from various perspectives

Improve Business Insight

- :: Track and forecast customer needs and behaviors by visualizing demographic statistics and customer attributes to help predict needed inventory and potential sales revenues
- :: Visualize business metrics, distribution networks, and supply chain shipments by integrating the Virtual Earth platform with business intelligence applications
- :: Quickly visualize multiple sets of data such as buying trends or sales statistics by layering information within the Virtual Earth environment

Grow Through Innovation

- :: Expand current services by delivering new online offerings that leverage location and geospatial solutions
- :: Visualize data by integrating line of business applications with location based information such as GeoRSS feeds or sales performance statistics for specific stores
- :: Through an open standards platform, Virtual Earth speeds time to deployment and helps minimize IT costs by integrating with existing technology investments

Virtual Earth in Action

"We cut our development time and cost by 20 percent, so customers were able to start benefiting quickly...As we extend our store locator with new features and use it to support other projects...we can cut the time to benefit for those extensions, as well."

-Evan Klopp, Solutions Architect of Starbucks

Scenario: A major retail chain needed a way to make its locations more discoverable. It also needed a solution that would scale to meet its needs as it grew.

Solution: The chain implemented the Virtual Earth platform and used it to provide a convenient way for customers to find and learn about store locations. The chain found that customers that were already familiar with store locations would still use the mapping solution to learn about the latest offers.

Benefits: By implementing a scalable solution, the chain reduced down time and dramatically cut costs of development. In one year it projected that savings would reach \$240,000. In addition, the chain created a deeper connection and community with its customers allowing them to access the most up to date information and offerings. This created a peripheral but dynamic marketing opportunity for the chain.

To learn more about how Starbucks saved money using the Virtual Earth platform, please go to: <http://www.microsoft.com/casestudies/casestudy.aspx?casestudyid=48570>

More Information

For more information, please visit www.microsoft.com/virtualearth. For more information on Virtual Earth for the Retail Industry, please visit www.microsoft.com/virtualearth/industry/retail.aspx.

In addition you may contact a Virtual Earth Sales Specialist: North, Central, and South America, e-mail: maplic@microsoft.com. In Europe, Africa, Middle East, and the Asia Pacific region, e-mail: mapemea@microsoft.com.

¹ Available in many metropolitan areas.

Locate. Innovate. Integrate.