



HICKS AIRBAG COVERS CLIENT PROFILE



S U C C E S S S T O R I E S

Usually, the description of a signature network installation points to the size of the installation. This implementation of a major accounting package in an open-standards environment for a small automotive aftermarket manufacture is just the opposite. The customer, Hicks Airbag Covers, needed a bottom-line difference that only a heavy-hitting, scalable accounting and manufacturing package could offer. The thinking behind this bold move was that if two major problems — inventory control and returned-item management — could be solved immediately, the fact that the company would only have to effect a single change to carry it through many years of growth was simply a plus to be realized later.

Going all the way to a new environment, while a formidable mission for any company, was especially critical for this million-dollar-plus business dependent on an off-the-shelf software package. In a truly small business, every hour of every day is vital to the bottom line.

This is a story of how Groupe Allez came, saw, and conquered the problems of an automotive manufacturer in a way that didn't intrude on day-to-day operations, and didn't require fitful efforts to "fine-tune" the new information realm they created.

A big jump in software capabilities is often accompanied by a big increase in headaches, at least for a while. Aware of this, the client surveyed a number of solutions before deciding on Groupe Allez, focusing mainly on that company's experience in successfully leading professional firms through potentially troubling transitions. Groupe Allez chose SouthWare for Hicks Airbag Covers because even though it works for very large companies, its scalability meant that the customer could use only the features they needed for the desired results and leave many large-company features waiting until an appropriate time to exploit them.

The task was to select a product that would "go" from day one and "grow" into the future. A network had to be designed and implemented to support the software package and the information needs of management. Hardware had to be specified and installed. The client's total business needs had to be understood before being solved with SouthWare. And finally, training had to be conducted that would yield a return on the client's investment in such varied areas as management, shipping and receiving, return authorizations and data manufacturing. Everyone had to understand what the new system could do for them, or the potential on Hicks Airbag Covers' bottom line would be diluted.



Hicks Airbag Covers Vital Statistics

URL: www.hicksairbagcovers.com

Employees: 10

Location: Morgan County, Alabama

Founded: 1999, from an automotive business begun in 1975

Distribution: Product ships worldwide

Business model: Hicks Airbag Covers provides affordable, nonfunctional alternatives to replace blown factory airbags. The company stocks hundreds of items to ensure that products normally ship the day they are ordered.

All elements of manufacturing and distribution take place under one roof at Hicks Airbag Covers. Molds are created and modified to honor trademark and design properties of OEMs, yet designed in an appealing style to ensure that the value of the end-user's vehicle is maintained. Molding compounds and procedures were developed by Hicks Airbag Covers to successfully fill this automotive interior industry niche. To be successful in this industry, the players must offer a wide variety that's always in stock. It must be easily identified (especially in hard-to-determine model years) through diligent detective work, and must be the result of years of rebuilding experience to meet the expectations of the installer. But most importantly, the product must please the most critical component in the demand chain, the customer.

Hicks Airbag Covers depends on Groupe Allez and SouthWare to deliver and manage value from top to bottom of the manufacturing and distribution process.

Continued



HICKS AIRBAG COVERS, CONTINUED

“Groupe Allez gave us a jump in ordering and shipping from day one, a 25% increase with no additional staff.”

The project took place over a four-month period in late 2001. SouthWare's platform independence enabled use of existing hardware running multiple operating systems on the network during the migration period, so that aging Windows workstations could be replaced with new Linux workstations as needed, avoiding the turmoil caused by a wholesale network conversion and distributing the cost over a longer period.

On the last day of the transition period, the new Groupe Allez-implemented system went live. Suddenly, the client could easily report on its customers, returns and inventory.

Return rates dropped dramatically because of the improved inventory management and reduced returned stock. Hicks Airbag Covers was able to implement a Return Authorization system to anticipate an expected rate of returns, track the causes of legitimate returns and enforce the company's return policy across the board.

Power management. The new system permits the ability to continue to work through short power outages, and reducing network problems caused by unplanned shutdown.

Stability. The stability of Linux server, Linux workstations and the SouthWare product reduced overall downtime and virtually eliminated system halts. More work gets done on the production line, a boost for the company's bottom line.

Security. Secure Internet connection and remote access to the network enables the bookkeeper to work from home, and allows the accountant to pull financial data as needed. The company makes better use of information in the competitive, nip-and-tuck world of small manufacturing as a result. In addition, management stays active in decision-making even while on the road.

All company information resides in a secure, attack- and virus-free environment.

Integration. Integration with online store means inventory is automatically kept current with SouthWare. No human intervention is required, even with an expanding business, and orders are more quickly processed.

Productivity. Linux workstations running SouthWare, the Mozilla web browser and OpenOffice word processing & spreadsheet suite provide a stable, inexpensive work environment for users. Hicks Airbag Covers experiences fewer system problems, full compatibility with standard file formats like Microsoft Word and Excel, and no onerous licensing issues —another positive contributor to the company's profits.

If you'd like to know more specific information about Group Allez' contribution to the Hicks Airbag Covers project, please contact them via the information below.

Groupe Allez is focused on leading accounting departments to Linux solutions.

Groupe Allez LLC (spoken “group ally”) combines years of experience in the Linux operating system integration, software development and expertise in SouthWare, a popular accounting package for small-to-medium businesses. Groupe Allez may also partner with other SouthWare resellers when their clients need to establish a partial or total Linux environment, or if they require open-source applications currently unavailable for SouthWare.

Open-source systems have become popular in recent years. Begun decades ago as an alternative to expensive operating systems designed more for sellers than users, Linux has come from an underdog position to the ruler of the burgeoning group of Microsoft alternatives.

The members of the Groupe Allez consortium have six years of experience in the successful development, marketing, installation and support of integrated IT solutions based on the Linux platform. The group has successfully operated The Net Effect as a software development and integration house, which they will continue to operate alongside Groupe Allez in order to serve non-accounting clients. The group has experience supporting enterprises as diverse as law firms, restaurants, automotive dealers and parts manufacturers, consumer products retailers and financial planners.

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To find out more about Groupe Allez or to discuss a partnership on a project, please contact Glenda Snodgrass at

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