# Getting the Job Done:  Décor Precast, SysAcc Software, and TRAVERSE Client/Server

Décor Precast Co. Ltd is a manufacturer of interlocking bricks and paving stones in Stoney Creek, Ontario. Already supplying such super-store outlets as Home Depot and Meijer, Décor is experiencing explosive growth in operations throughout Canada and the United States.

Office Manager Shirley Hawkins oversees the accounting responsibilities and handles all general ledger and financial statement functions. "Simply put, Decor's goal is to be the biggest and best supplier of paving stones in the Northeast and Northern Midwest states as well as Ontario and Quebec. Our philosophy is simple:  provide the best product at the best possible price, with service and delivery that exceeds our customer's expectations. We are a privately held company and our production this year will be 25,000,000 square feet of paving stones. We have approximately 130 employees: 100 in Canada and 30 in the US."

On a referral from Open Systems, Décor contacted TRAVERSE reseller Zoltan Szakal with SysAcc Software in 1998. "We had been using Open Systems (the character-based version) for a very long time. Due to our growth, we needed suggestions on a solution that was scalable. We also wanted to adopt a Windows-based solution," Hawkins said. At the time, Décor was running OPEN SYSTEMS Accounting Software (OSAS) version 5.12, and they required some minor modifications to their sales history reports for in-house use. As their relationship grew, Décor began to tell Szakal about expansion plans. With a manufacturing plant in Stoney Creek and a new one under construction in Holt, Michigan, Decor is also planning to open a major distribution facility in Ohio.

Long distance business partners Szakal and Steve Sharpe operate SysAcc Software, Inc. Szakal--out of Toronto--handles sales, marketing and accounting, while Sharpe--out of Ottawa--manages TRAVERSE setup, modifications, and training. Szakal's financial and computing background includes a position as assistant controller at VIA Rail (Canadian equivalent of Amtrak), where he set up the first PC network in VIA's Toronto Rail Maintenance Facility. Szakal and Sharpe have separately worked with Open Systems for over ten years. Together, they formed SysAcc Software, Inc. in 1998, and the company was named the number one OSAS reseller in Canada that same year.

Décor wanted to keep its main data operations in Ontario but wanted the Holt plant to perform its own accounting functions. "We wanted one-stop shopping. In other words, while we needed both hardware and software, we wanted one company to handle the entire process. SysAcc took care of everything," Hawkins said. Szakal submitted a proposal for TRAVERSE C/S (Client/Server) version 8.33 with MS SQL 7.0, Citrix Metaframe and a secure Virtual Private Network, with a budget of around 120-150K. Szakal said, "They bought the proposal sight unseen." Szakal feels the transaction that took place between Décor and SysAcc is special and unique. "I believe that their acceptance of the proposal was due to a trust that developed when our relationship began in 1999," Szakal said.

Hawkins echoed the positive relationship. "We hired SysAcc in the fall of 1998. We are a growing company and needed a consultant who could grow with us and handle the challenges that this growth presented. We had been working with SysAcc for 6 to 8 months. We had reviewed our long-term requirements with Zoltan. He came back with the TRAVERSE Client/Server solution. We felt that SysAcc truly had our best interests at heart. While we had not even seen the product, we believed that SysAcc would get the job done. And they have."

Décor upgraded from OSAS version 5.12 by purchasing the TRAVERSE C/S General Ledger, Sales Order, Accounts Receivable, Accounts Payable, and Inventory modules, as well as a 12-user System Manager. Their data server is located in Ontario; however, the Canadian and US operations are two distinct legal entities. Szakal explains how the new system works. "All the accounting for the US operation is done physically from the Michigan location over the VPN. The Canadian corporation buys the entire inventory produced by the US operation. All customer sales are recorded on the Canadian books only. However, all orders shipped from the Canadian facility are entered into the system in the Ontario office, while any and all orders shipped out of the Michigan location are recorded onto the  Canadian data server by the customer service reps located in Michigan."

Through the Sales Order module, a packing slip prints in the Michigan office as soon as an invoice prints in the Ontario office. All other modules are used to perform day-to-day operations locally in Ontario and over the VPN in Michigan. The Purchase Order module will be implemented later, along with full manufacturing implementation, i.e., Bill of Materials, Material Requirements Planning and Work Order Processing. "Most importantly, TRAVERSE has allowed our Michigan office to operate seamlessly on our system here in Ontario," Hawkins noted. "We no longer have to worry about printing packing slips for Michigan. They do their own order entry, the invoices print here and the packing slips print automatically in Michigan. This has reduced the workload here in Ontario and spread it more evenly amongst our employees."

Citrix Metaframe is installed on top of Microsoft Windows NT Server (Terminal Server Edition). It essentially turns any computing environment into a true Client/Server architecture. All processing occurs on the file server, not on a user's desktop. Citrix Metaframe is layered over the NT Terminal Server because it allows for remote printing, whereas the current version of NT Terminal Server does not. This was crucial for the simultaneous printing of invoices and packing slips in two separate locations.

The Virtual Private Network is a secure, private network connection over the Internet. The Michigan location uses an ISP (local; no long distance). Checkpoint Software's SecureRemote is also installed on each computer in Michigan. This software authenticates a Michigan computer user to the firewall in Ontario, where authorized users are then allowed into the Décor network. The software uses sophisticated encryption routines to allow/reject users based on specific IP addresses, user names and passwords.

While SecureRemote authenticates the Michigan end user, the user launches the Metaframe ICA (Independent Computer Architecture) client software at the same time. Metaframe finds Décor's IP address, connects to the NT Terminal Server and then presents the user with a login screen (another authentication process, user name and password). After login, the user is presented with a literal Windows desktop—originating from the Ontario server—and then with a magical double-click, TRAVERSE is launched. In spite of the complicated-sounding description of the login procedure, the entire process (from dialing up the ISP to launching TRAVERSE) only takes 30-45 seconds.

Before the new installation, Décor Precast was using a Novell Netware network, but this was not meeting their long-term needs. Hawkins said, "While we were not having any specific problems, we wanted a software package that would grow as we grew. Also, we did not want to revisit the software issue again. Zoltan told us that with the scalability of TRAVERSE and SQL 7.0, we would never have to change software packages again."

SysAcc Software enlisted Charon Systems (a platinum Citrix reseller and systems integrator) to design a solution to support the TRAVERSE software. Décor did not want performance degradation because of the Windows-based implementation, and a remote location in Michigan was required for data entry into the accounting system. Décor wanted to maintain all data at the Stoney Creek location but allow Michigan independent order entry.

During Décor's busiest time of the year, the April 3, 2000 launch date for the new system was besieged by cable modem service delays. On March 30, 2000, the old system was shut down. Modifications were made, data conversion was tested and users were trained all before the set April 3 deadline. The modifications revolved around special customer pricing, built-in Freight Rate tables (to calculate freight charges automatically for each order) and specific printing requirements. Hawkins said, "We have some pretty specific requirements when it comes to customer pricing and freight calculations/charges. SysAcc was able to customize TRAVERSE to our exact specifications, including built-in and updateable freight rate tables as well as complex customer pricing such as freight included/excluded scenarios."

Training took place at both the Ontario and Michigan locations. Right on schedule, users began entering sales orders into TRAVERSE.