

Our First ePLUM Roll-Out!

by Tom Barclay, National Accounts Manager

Invatron Systems Corporation and RealTime Grocer have joined forces to successfully deliver a combined implementation of ePLUM and RealTime Grocer (RTG) Enterprise in December of 2001. The recipient is Western Beef, a twenty-five store high-volume supermarket warehouse chain in the metropolitan New York area. ePLUM is Invatron's distributed application that provides scale management seamlessly across one heterogeneous network. It centralizes scale item management through a single database and server for the entire enterprise. RTG Enterprise is a suite of real time applications supporting back-office, in-store and logistic systems for the retail grocery industry. As an integrated product, RTG Enterprise extends ePLUM into their financial reporting back-end.

James Abbene, President of RealTime Grocer stated, "The Invatron partnership has extended the vision of real time information exchange for the supermarket industry by providing a mechanism to synchronize fresh food scale management. By combining our two products, Invatron and RealTime Grocer provide an end to end solution for retailers—from labeling to production analysis". "Western Beef promises to be the first of many successful roll-outs between these two innovative companies. We look forward to continued development between our two software houses and delivering new software products and services to the supermarket industry".

Western Beef is Invatron's first implementation of ePLUM. Interest in Thin-Client solutions is increasing and several additional ePLUM roll-outs are expected in the next 12 months. For more details, contact National Sales Manager Tom Barclay at 1-905-282-1290 ext.224.

MarkeTechnics 2002 See Invatron at booth 1347

MarkeTechnics is running from February 3-5, 2002 in San Diego. The show is earlier than usual this year so don't forget to mark your calendar! You can find Invatron at booth 1347 of the San Diego Convention Center. We will have PLUM Scale Management, PeriScope Perishables Management, and our new thin-client scale management offering ePLUM on display for you to review.

In addition, Invatron is presenting PeriScope on the show floor in the Demonet area at 2:00pm on Sunday February 3—in conjunction with Hobart and Symbol. This is your chance to understand PeriScope from a high level perspective with a group of industry peers. In depth PeriScope demonstrations can always be seen by dropping by our booth for a visit.

Customer Input Driving PeriScope Development

by Joe Smirlies, Development Manager

Thanks to the many invaluable contributions of our retail partners, the PeriScope DSS (Decision Support System) continues to grow. Customer input is ensuring that our feature set meets the real-world business requirements of the grocery industry. We are confident that PeriScope can enhance the efficiency of fresh food operations, because all features are field tested for optimal performance. Our current release, now at version 1.3.0, has seen many improvements:

- A new Summary version of the Cutting List Report makes it easier to read and isolate recommended cuts only. This report takes meat managers straight to the heart of their production requirements.
- Added Shrink Detail Report options summarize PLU detail, department and category information as well as report on all stores in a multi-store setup.
- An improved Case Layout Manager handles expiring case layouts better, moves changes to the stores more easily and manages layouts corporately.
- Re-designed report headings leave more room for details and help ensure all details are displayed.
- New Markdown options provide dynamic coupon, replacement barcode and UPC Type 0 (or fixed price) item labels. Label messages can be changed on the fly and markdown reasons tracked as well.
- Tighter integration with the Hobart Information Tracker (HIT) software reduces keystroke and decision making requirements on the floor.
- New Markdown Profiles link information by item, category, department or store. This supports tiered markdowns, discount amounts by package value, and the tracking of markdown types and values.

The coming year will see many new functions added to the PeriScope feature set as we respond to customer needs. Contact us for updates on current development.

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Are Traditional Applications at an End?

by Axel Doerwald - President

We are now witnessing the death knell of traditional in-store applications. This is not necessarily a bad thing. For more than twenty years, retailers have had to deploy increasing amounts of hardware and network infrastructure to satisfy the ever-growing demand for in-store applications.

A myriad of applications from numerous vendors are now required at store level to operate effectively and remain competitive. The next wave promises to add systems for computer-assisted ordering and perpetual inventory on top of that.

For those of us who have watched this for a while, it seems clear that the tide is starting to turn. After a few false starts, web technology has reached a level of maturity that compels us to re-think traditional store strategies. Thin-client is now the order of the day.

In meeting after meeting, it has become clear to me that retailers are now more willing than ever to trust their wide and local area networks. Instead of batch transmissions, on-line transactional capability is now the order of the day. In-store databases that typically require periodic tuning, maintenance and upgrades are being replaced by large-scale central database servers capable of handling the volume of data required to operate many stores concurrently.

What needs to be evaluated however is if a centrally

operated, thin-client solution can be justified without an increase in application functionality. Is there enough merit in replacing a working, in-store application for a web-based one just to get it out of the store? In this time of fiscal constraint and shrinking budgets due to the current economic malaise, this question has more relevancy than one might think.

The central question we need to ask is, "How does this make us more competitive (or efficient)?" To answer this, we need to carefully analyze the operational costs of maintaining an in-store system against a centralized system. Aside from positioning for a future increase in store counts due to acquisition or organic growth, how do these costs compare?

A central system clearly places increased burden on your networks and could require further infrastructure investments. Instead of more store system specialists, more network and database administrators are needed. Large-scale server clusters are required to handle the centralized applications. Redundancy is imperative in maintaining an up-time guarantee to the business.

Another important consideration is time spent deploying upgrades and new releases to potentially thousands of stores. Much of this can be batch installed and does not require a site visit. When an occasion arises that does require a store visit, how will it be handled?

See [The End of In-Store](#) on Page 4

Plum Functionality Just Keeps Expanding

by Steve Chesney, Client Services Manager

Happy New Year! 2002 promises to be an exciting year at Invatron. The whole support team is looking forward to serving you.

We have a great number of new features to offer in our PLUM Host and Store applications as well as a new thin-client application called ePLUM. As well, we are introducing a new service for on-line training and support. Customers can take advantage of timely and cost effective assistance, customized to your specific needs.

In 2001 we worked very closely with several PLUM Host and Store Customers to find out what enhancements or new features can truly provide significant improvements in the way scale data is managed.

Some key additions to our 2002 release schedule are:

- Improved Host performance in the import, export and merge routines to reduce processing times.

- A new optional component or plug-in for Host and Store to support InterMedia's Deli Kiosk. This component passes scale supported data from PLUM to the InterMedia Deli Kiosk system.

- A new Host interface for managing corporate, region and zone data; including a new Store Zone data layer to make exception data like new store openings and store specials easier to manage.

- Linked Ingredient support for Host and Store that links ingredient text records and eventually builds one text record for the scale label. This minimizes data entry time by updating one ingredient text record that can now influence many ingredients.

- Added Store flexibility in managing scale to database data comparisons including; automated compares, filtering by data field, automatic reloading for items that show a discrepancy in the compare and more.

- New support in Host and Store for scale data fields such as percentage tare, special message text and more (for scales that support these features).

- New Scale Driver support in Store for scales like the TEC SL9000 FTP, Bizerba GXCOM TCP/IP, Berkel TCP/IP and more.

New Custom Training with WebEx

Invatron can now deliver PLUM training classes on-line through a web-based access tool called WEBEX. This tool allows multiple locations to participate in real-time product demonstrations. Generic classes can be scheduled for multiple customers or custom training can be tailored to specific customer needs.

On-line training is an exciting new tool that promises to greatly reduce delivery costs. To inquire or schedule a session, visit our website at www.invatron.com.

Industry News

This is our own corner for the latest in developments in scale management from any industry vendor. Send your submissions to info@invatron.com.

Giant Eagle

After 12 months of evaluating and helping develop PeriScope DSS, Giant Eagle has expanded their three-store pilot from the Depth 100 and 200 level to include the Depth 300 forecasting model that provides projected inventory movement and production recommendations.

Harris Teeter

Harris Teeter is currently piloting PeriScope DSS in a single store to understand known shrink, implement a markdown program and quantify potential returns on investment.

Winn-Dixie

Winn-Dixie is evaluating PeriScope's Depth 100 and sales data in a 20 store division to understand shrink (specifically markdowns) and stales as a percentage of sales. The data will be used to improve in-store efficiency.

Note: Indicators from current PeriScope DSS pilots indicate a return of 1-2% of department sales; with additional savings upon installation of the forecasting component and user adoption of the application data and feature set.

Scoping out your Supply Chain with PeriScope

by John Moynihan, Consultant

PeriScope, Invatron's latest innovation, delivers immediate, direct benefits to retailers by enabling them to significantly improve the store level management of fresh food production and inventories, identify and address shrink issues, and substantially improve the bottom line for fresh food merchandising. However, store level benefits are only the tip of the iceberg. PeriScope also provides long term benefits that extend up the perishable supply chain from the store to the retailer headquarters and beyond to the retailers' trading partners.

PeriScope integrates previously disparate fresh food commodity data into a comprehensive information database at the store level to drive fresh food management activities. The PeriScope database provides complete product flow visibility by maintaining numerous checkpoints as the product flows through the store. These checkpoints include:

- Item, price and promotion data from PLUM.
- Production data extracted from digital scales.
- Markdown, discard, and inventory data gathered by operations people using handheld technology.
- Sales information extracted from POS systems.

Retailers can use the total visibility PeriScope provides to identify and correct disjoints between production

New TCI Interface for PLUM

by Tom Barclay, National Accounts Manager

Invatron and TCI Solutions Inc. have just completed an interface between Invatron's PLUM Scale Management application and TCI Solution's, HOPM² (Headquarters Price-Merchandise Manager) and SMM (Store Merchandise Manager). The new interface enables the TCI applications to direct all forms of fresh food item information to Invatron's PLUM Scale Management system for distribution to the in-store labeling and weighing equipment.

Both TCI and Invatron have worked with a number of retailers to achieve a totally integrated solution for item management. We look forward to offering these capabilities to grocery retailers worldwide.

In addition, TCI and Invatron are investigating prospective opportunities to connect Invatron's PeriScope DSS software with TCI's HOPM2 to further maximize retailer benefits across their existing customer bases. The PeriScope Decision Support System (DSS) helps retailers monitor and optimize fresh food operations around shrink, inventory control and replenishment activities. Both companies have moved to thin client architectures that provide a range of options for deployment.

and consumer demand. Over time, PeriScope data will create a rich source of information that can be used to understand and predict hourly or daily variance in consumer demand and adjust production as well as inventory action to decrease out of stocks, markdowns, and discards.

As PeriScope is deployed across all stores in a retail organization, individual store data can be gathered into a central database to provide a consolidated, enterprise-wide view of product flow. The *enterprise* component of PeriScope can be used to drive daily replenishment activities from head office or aggregated to facilitate and improve the performance of centralized functions such as category management and product procurement.

PeriScope information can also be shared with suppliers of case ready or pre-packed product to drive collaborative business processes. PeriScope provides business partners with significantly more accurate and timely information that they can use to improve the efficiencies of their production and distribution operations and dramatically decrease supply chain costs. The PeriScope data can also be used to support collaborative business practices including Vendor Managed Inventory (VMI) and Collaborative Planning, Forecasting, and Replenishment (CPFR).



Tech Tips:

This column reports some of the latest ideas we have come across for using Invatron products more effectively. Tips come from our support desk, vendors and most especially, you the customer. New suggestions are always welcome.

Dodging Report Errors in Plum Host

(Abridged from Technical Bulletin #0110)

Users of PLUM Host could receive an ODBC error with the latest version of Crystal Reports. The error message *Cannot Open SQL Server* appears if users are not the Administrator and they attempt to run the report under Windows NT 4.0 or 2000.

To correct this problem, the file P2sodbc.dll needs to be updated in the c:\winnt\system32 directory. A file update is available for download from the Crystal Decisions website: <http://support.crystaldecisions.com>.

Refreshing PeriScope Reports

Users can run a report and then discover that not all of the transactions they expected to see made it into the report. This can easily happen for example, if the shrink report is run while discards are still being scanned. Just clicking the refresh button on the browser will re-run the report. The report is displayed without having to select the original criteria all over again.

The Case for By-Count or Fixed-Weight

Using By-Count and Fixed Weight units of measure is sometimes a little confusing. Both measures gauge multiple numbers of the same item.

Take 6 muffins at \$1.99 for example. If the muffins are measured by-count, the label shows a set number of items beside the price. The price is calculated by the number of pieces—not weight. If the muffins are measured by fixed-weight, the label shows a net weight and no calculation is required. Local and State law determines if a net weight statement is required. Consult your Perishables Specialist for details.

On PLUM's Item Maintenance screen, users select a unit of measure in the Price Unit field, enter the number of items in the Multiple field and, if fixed-weight is used, a net weight in the Fixed Weight field. Both measures can have a number more than one in the Multiple field. The Multiple key at the scale however, is only used for by-count items to override the pre-set value. A couple of general rules to follow are:

If the product requires a price calculation based on a set quantity it should be measured as By Count.

This commonly applies to prepared foods.

If the product requires a net weight statement it should be measured as Fixed Weight. This commonly applies to Bakery Items.

For more ideas, customers with access to Invatron's support website can visit the Tech Tips page at: http://www.invatron.com/site/support/library_frames.html

The End of In-Store (cont'd from pg. 2)

At Invatron, we have invested the last 3 years developing a framework for web-based solutions. Two applications have now been developed with this framework; PeriScope and ePLUM. At the core of each of these offerings are a robust and reusable application server engine and generic messaging server. With ePLUM, our plans go far beyond the capability of traditional scale management. We intend to enhance the utility of scale management—not just handle item records better.

This involves continued change "behind the scenes" along with the scale vendor community. The more functionality we can provide to manage your inventory of store equipment, the more utility you gain by moving to a centralized system. In addition, the same application server and messaging server components we use for ePLUM and PeriScope can potentially power other applications we or our partners develop.

In evaluating this type of technology though, you as retailers must weigh some important considerations relating to economic and competitive benefit. Like anything, the return on investment must be justifiable and quantifiable to those that write the checks. Without tangible increases in functionality you may be replacing one set of cost burdens with another.

I look forward to working with you through 2002 and making your plans a reality. I also hope to see many of you in San Diego for MarkeTechnics. For those attending, enjoy the show.

Customer Corner

If you could have just one wish for scale management, what would it be? Where do you want to see the industry go in the future? Who do you talk to for help with a bug no one has seen?

If you have an issue to raise, a script to share, or kudos for a job well done—tell us about it! Your comments could appear in our next issue.

Invatron will make every reasonable effort to respond or make referrals when requested. We reserve the right to select items based on industry appeal and to make content suitable for publication.

Send you comments to info@invatron.com.



Happy New Year from the staff at
Invatron Systems Corp!