



Business software problem is solved

SoftSearch launches world's largest business software store

by Corey Van't Haaff

Most retail software resellers carry 1,000 to 30,000 SKUs or separate titles of personal and general business software.

At SoftSearch, the company has information on over 250,000 commercial business and specialty software products.

"We have a much greater selection than other suppliers," says Kathy Woolverton, SoftSearch president. Started originally as a division of Synergy Computer Consulting Ltd. in 1990, the company was spun off as a stand alone entity in July 2003. "SoftSearch is the place where companies can find and purchase business specialty software."

*Ninety-five per cent
of commercial software
is not carried
in the retail channel*

In its earlier incarnation, SoftSearch was an information service, providing software research for a fee. In 1995, it went live on the Net and software publishers could add themselves to the catalogue. Today, SoftSearch includes an on-line store. "Previously, we were an information broker," says Woolverton. "Now, we're a reseller. We no longer charge for an information search. Too many companies hear about one or two products tailored to their particular industry but miss out on a lot of solutions that would be better for their businesses. They also don't necessarily know when a custom solution would be a better bet.

SoftSearch's huge database means customers need only go to one source to find the best application for their situation. "SoftSearch first came to my attention as an effective source of market research on the software industry," says David Dunnison, president of Accuzone Systems.



Kathy Woolverton President

"The SoftSearch database is a unique and significant asset that the company is now leveraging to address one of the most basic challenges in software—building effective market channels.

With its extensive range of software titles, SoftSearch is ideally equipped to help people locate software for specific needs. "SoftSearch carries horizontal solutions which span across multiple industries (like human resource or accounting software) as well as vertical applications which are industry specific. "We have 14 years working with customers looking for software tailored to their businesses.

We step outside the generic," says Woolverton. "With our knowledge, we can very quickly say to a customer 'which two or three key features do you need?' then suggest what application out of 250,000 would be best. We are familiar with the key components of each product. By knowing what questions to ask, we find the best solutions for our clients."

SoftSearch verifies each product before it reaches the live portion of its database and on-line store. If a product has not been recently reverified, it won't appear on-line but, says SoftSearch's vice president of operations Gary Meehan, it is likely still available for special order through SoftSearch.

Also, for businesses who want to ensure their staff are aware what software has been approved by the business as a corporate standard, SoftSearch offers a web based directory which they can link into their internal company web site. With its goal of being the largest reseller internationally of business specialty software, SoftSearch is already well on its way.

It intends to achieve its goal by developing its affiliate program and by partnering with software publishers.

*Innovative, profitable
resource gains acceptance
from associations,
trade publications
and resellers.*

Trade or industry associations and publications, and software resellers are three key types of SoftSearch's affiliates.

SoftSearch offers each of them some key benefits.

"We provide trade and industry associations and publications with a resource to offer their members and readers information on products and services available," says Gary Meehan, vice president of operations at SoftSearch.

The affiliate gets its own customized

on-line software store with a range of industry-specific solutions to meet the needs of their members. It's a similar story with resellers. SoftSearch supplements their product offerings with plug-in links on the resellers' own web site. "It allows the reseller to increase the number of products they offer their clients."

Seventy-five per cent of SoftSearch's business is American, and these affiliations allow SoftSearch to better reach customers who are already being influenced. But the customers and affiliates win big as well.

The data-base and on-line store offer an additional resource for affiliates' members and customers to find better solutions to run their businesses.

Affiliates increase their revenue streams with out incurring additional operating costs.

As the former vice president of operations at computer reseller Doppler Computer Superstores, and past Canadian president of on-line business retailer Onvia, Meehan keenly understands this need to expand customer solutions and profitable sales.

The first three affiliate verticals have been launched: manufacturing and engineering; floral and agriculture; and finance.

Within each vertical are multiple affiliates.

Affiliate partners currently in place include Certified General Accountants Association of Canada (CGA), Fabricators & Manufacturers Association International; Society of Financial Service Professionals, Investment Forum, and Futures Magazine. Over the next year or so, SoftSearch plans to launch another ten verticals.

"We predict greater than a 500 per cent increase in gross sales over the next few years," says SoftSearch president Kathy Woolverton.

*Software developers
adopt new
sales channel*

SoftSearch's software publishing partnership program is similar to its affiliate program: it's a win-win situation for everyone.

"We help software publishers expand their market reach," says Gary Meehan, SoftSearch's vicepresident of operations.

"We give them additional targeted sales channels and expand their market reach."

Peter Parrish, former president of Doppler Computer Superstores, is on SoftSearch's presidential advisory council. "I am very pleased to have the opportunity to assist Kathy Woolverton, Gary Meehan and the SoftSearch team in further expanding the SoftSearch on-line software market place.

It is exciting to participate in the ongoing development of this compelling new service for the software publishing industry." Partnership means inclusion in SoftSearch's catalogue and on-line store plus promotion to other industries, and more.

Software can range in price from \$500 to the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

For lower-end publishers, SoftSearch becomes a direct distributor. For those publishers with higher value products, SoftSearch acts as a sales lead or referral agent.

"We enhance software publishers' sales," says Meehan, "by finding additional customers and helping them to connect."

"These partnerships allow us to expand our catalogue," says Meehan. "It helps by offering a better selection and variety to the end user customer.

We encourage publishers to keep us up-to-date in real time." ■