



## Fulfillment Services Provider Releases Solution for Retail Fixtures Management

### Overview

**Country or Region:** United States

**Industry:** Professional services

### Customer Profile

Founded in 1997 and headquartered in Green Bay, Wisconsin, FulfillNet is a provider of solutions and services related to brand identity through fulfillment and direct mail.

### Business Situation

FulfillNet wanted to help a major customer automate a time-consuming process for managing and reporting on in-store fixtures and merchandising.

### Solution

Working with Microsoft Gold Certified Partner Skyline Technologies, FulfillNet used the Microsoft Silverlight browser plug-in to develop a fixture-management module for its proprietary solution, ShopDev.

### Benefits

- Helps raise customer competitiveness
- Reinforces reputation for innovation
- Helps grow business and revenues
- Breaks down barriers of traditional user interface

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*Kate Burgess, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, FulfillNet*

In just over 12 years, Wisconsin-based FulfillNet has become one of the leading names in custom fulfillment services. One factor in its success is the company's ShopDev software, which helps customers move from forecast-based to demand-based fulfillment. In its ongoing efforts to make ShopDev more powerful, FulfillNet worked with technology partner Skyline Technologies to build a module for in-store fixture management. Based on the Microsoft Silverlight browser plug-in, the module automates the capture of information on platforms, racks, and other point-of-purchase assets and the reporting of investment and allocation information. As a result, FulfillNet customers are streamlining asset management and becoming more competitive, and FulfillNet is showcasing the module to reach new customers. Moreover, with Silverlight, FulfillNet has a foundation for the continued enhancement of ShopDev.



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Rob Czypinski, IT Manager, FulfillNet

## Situation

Founded in 1997 and with a current workforce of 35, FulfillNet delivers “brand power” by helping manufacturers manage multichannel, multibrand fulfillment and distribution programs for their marketing collateral and point-of-purchase equipment and materials. FulfillNet stands out from the competition with a proprietary software solution known as ShopDev. Created in 2002 with the help of Microsoft Gold Certified Partner Skyline Technologies, ShopDev is designed to help FulfillNet customers manage production and distribution of point-of-purchase assets in a novel way: according to store demand, instead of by traditional forecast-based processes.

From its inception as a tool to help FulfillNet support point-of-purchase campaigns and ordering, ShopDev has been developed into a full, online, channel marketing and management solution with centralized data collection, analysis, and maintenance capabilities. FulfillNet customers use ShopDev not only to order and ship point-of-purchase marketing program materials cost-effectively, but also to deliver the right materials at the right time to a given retailer. As a result, ShopDev has helped several FulfillNet customers reduce their print and shipping costs by more than 35 percent.

Not long ago, FulfillNet faced the challenge of helping a major apparel manufacturer manage its “fixtures”—the platforms, racks, and other equipment used for the display of product and marketing collateral in a retail setting. “For manufacturers of consumer goods, these fixtures, each of which can cost hundreds of dollars, create an inviting ‘shop within a shop’ at the retail level,” explains Rob Czypinski, IT Manager at FulfillNet. “For this reason, fixtures play a

significant role in the overall marketing program for a product line.”

Capturing information on fixtures and monitoring their condition and usage constitutes a complex process involving regular in-person visits by merchandising and sales representatives. Traditionally, after snapping photographs showing the condition of the fixtures and how they compare with those of competitors, these representatives compiled the pictures and documents into reports detailing their observations, and then sent them in email to regional managers.

“For managers to make the most of their point-of-purchase marketing programs, they need these reports to be timely and complete,” Czypinski says. “But in the past, for the merchandising and sales representatives charged with delivering the reports, it was difficult to capture the information in a consistent, efficient, and comprehensive way. That is why we were asked to build a ShopDev module addressing the challenge.”

## Solution

As a foundation for developing the new module, Czypinski looked first to the Microsoft Silverlight browser plug-in. This was because the original ShopDev solution was based on Microsoft ASP.NET and related technologies, and because Czypinski was familiar with the technology thanks to a 2008 demonstration that Microsoft Gold Certified Partner Skyline Technologies had provided for him and his FulfillNet colleagues.

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The ShopDev fixtures module provides detailed information in various formats, including charts, images, and reports, that are easy to view and update.

ideal for providing the powerful and engaging visuals that would appeal to our clients, particularly those based in the design culture.”

Over the following five months, a team of five Skyline Technologies developers used Silverlight—as well as the Microsoft Visual Studio 2008 development system, Visual Studio Team Foundation Server, and other Microsoft technologies—to develop the ShopDev fixture-management module.

Initially released to the apparel manufacturer, and now part of the overall ShopDev offering, this module automates the reporting that is central to the fixture-management process. Instead of manually compiling photographs and notes and then sending them in email to management, merchandising and sales representatives simply open the Web-based solution and enter photographic and textual content into a template. The template prompts the representative for the precise information that is needed on a given fixture and sends

the information to a central database. When the representative has entered all the required information, a report is automatically generated and sent to management and other key personnel.

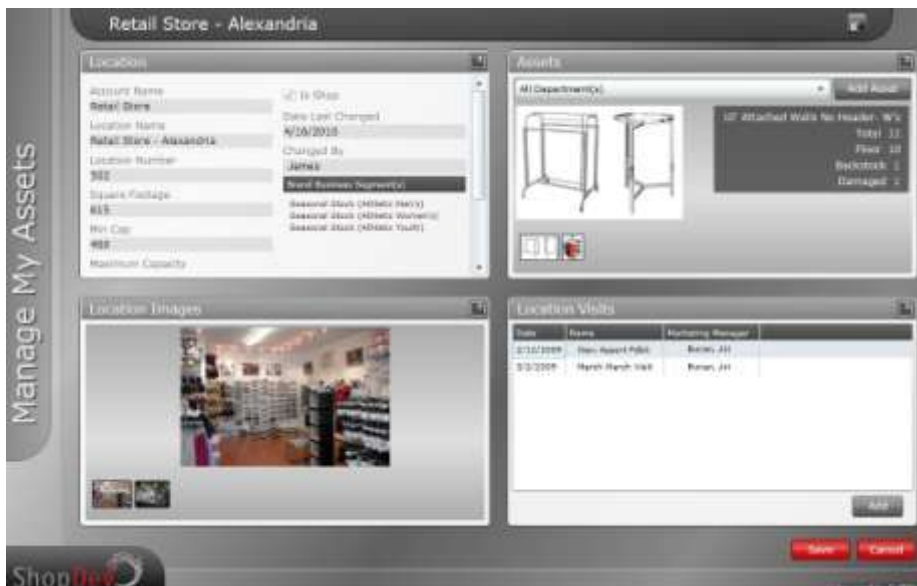
For Czypinski, Silverlight is central to the power and utility of the fixture-management module. “Silverlight gives us the performance to make viewing and navigation transparent so that the template is easily accessible and usable,” he says. “Silverlight makes it possible for users to drill down. They can collapse certain areas and enlarge others, and incorporate data, images, and text on the same screen. Silverlight also enables users to ensure they are gathering all the information required, so they can be confident their reports are complete.”

## Benefits

With the new ShopDev fixture-management module, FulfillNet is helping its customers become more competitive, which reinforces its own reputation as an innovator and helps it appeal to new customers. The company also appreciates that, in Silverlight, it has a foundation for continued innovation, a benefit also enjoyed by its partner Skyline Technologies.

## Makes Customers More Competitive

According to a recent FulfillNet survey, the merchandising and sales representatives using the new ShopDev fixture-management module feel that it offers a “major improvement” over the process they used in the past. “With this new module, users have the ease and flexibility of entering information in an intuitive way,” Czypinski says. “This makes a significant difference in their ability to do their jobs well, because they often have limited time at the retail site to gather the information they need and compile their reports.”



“With Silverlight, we can implement exactly what our clients want. That is a very big deal—for them and for us.”

Tim Miller, Senior Software Engineer,  
Skyline Technologies,

Through the Silverlight-based interface, users not only can enter new information, but also access historical information with ease. “The representatives can review fixture and event details relating to a given account or store and where they might need help to optimize the brand and business results,” Cypinski says. “The representatives can learn all this without having to search through archives of emails, as they often did in the past. This saves them time and energy, and helps them trust the information.”

The managers to whom these representatives are reporting can trust the information as well. “Managers can be more confident in making strategic decisions based on the information that the representatives provide, and these decisions can determine the success of a particular marketing campaign,” Cypinski says. “With the new ShopDev module, manufacturers have a powerful tool to make them more competitive at the retail level.”

#### **Reinforces Reputation for Innovation**

Helping to make its customers more competitive also helps to make FulfillNet more competitive. “Having successfully deployed this module gives us one more success story to tell when we visit with prospective clients,” says Kate Burgess, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of FulfillNet. “The work we have done with Silverlight highlights our reputation as an innovative, forward-thinking company that is always seeking new ways to help businesses tackle challenges.”

Cypinski concurs. “We expect to expand our business and our revenues as a result of the usability and functionality enhancements made possible by Silverlight,” he points out. “Those enhancements solidify and perpetuate our tradition of using

disciplined technological innovation in helping our clients reach their goals.”

Accordingly, FulfillNet is both considering and planning further Silverlight-based enhancements to ShopDev. For example, it is field testing enhancements that would enable the fixture-management module to run on tablet computers, which would provide even greater flexibility for merchandising and sales representatives. The company also is rewriting the ShopDev home page and considering usability upgrades to modules that support multibrand and express ordering and daily replenishment.

#### **Breaks Down Barriers of Traditional User Interface**

According to Tim Miller, Senior Software Engineer at Skyline Technologies, the work that he and his colleagues have done on the fixture-management module and other ShopDev modules demonstrates how Silverlight can help “break down the barriers” of the traditional user interface.

“Menus and drop-down lists tend to be rigid, but in the Silverlight environment, controls are flexible and dynamic,” Miller explains. “We have taken advantage of this to create a solution that enables users to customize the interface while using it to capture a lot of information in different formats—and to do that effectively and efficiently without sensory overload.”

In terms of development, Miller says the Silverlight experience was so different that he and his colleagues initially didn’t know what to expect. “We were excited from the get-go, but there were also a lot of unknowns because Silverlight was not in widespread use at the time we started our work,” he says. “It was difficult to break away from our mindset regarding the limitations of earlier technologies.”

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Miller says such thinking is not limited to developers alone. "We have used Silverlight not only for FulfillNet, but for other clients as well, and we see a similar response, time and again," he says. "At first, there is enthusiasm but also some skepticism, and then there is that breakthrough moment when clients realize they can do virtually anything they want with this technology. What a contrast that is with earlier projects we were involved with—using a different platform—when our client might find out late in development that a mocked-up design cannot be implemented as they would like.

"With Silverlight, we can implement exactly what our clients want," Miller concludes.

"That is a very big deal—for them and for us."

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