

Retail POS built for rapid growth

Simple, small, fast and (almost) indestructible



Simply
nuc[®]

SØSTRENE GRENE



Taking payments is a fundamental part of retail. The easier the process, both for shop assistants and customers, the greater the likelihood that customers will talk about their experiences and return to the store to buy again. Søstre Grene is a unique retail chain that is all about building on dreams and creating unique and memorable experiences for their customers. Their products include carefully chosen home décor items, kitchenware, textiles, furniture, books, electronics, gardening accessories, and creative crafts. In short, it's a woman's dream home store.

Søstre Grene has rapidly grown to more than 260 stores in 16 different locations across Europe and has plans to open more in the near future. They also have successfully expanded into the omnichannel, adding larger furniture items to their portfolio of products, which can be purchased online. This is in addition to creating a memorable in-store experience where customers can browse beautiful home décor and accessories. Engaging their customers, meeting their customers' needs, and nurturing brand loyalty in innovative and effective ways are a key element of Søstre Grene's success.

The stores are based on a franchise or joint venture concept and Søstre Grene is very conscious about equipping their partners with the innovative technology they need for success, while keeping costs to a minimum - especially given continued economic uncertainty and the challenges endured in retail during the pandemic.

Stable computer systems, consisting of robust components that are easy to maintain, have become a

high priority to ensure that stores can operate effectively and reliably. Traditional Point of Sale (POS) systems interface with several peripherals such as bar coder readers, scanners, printers, and credit card readers; and reside on local networks making them slow and cumbersome to operate. Søstre Grene started experiencing major challenges with their legacy systems. The performance of the old hardware started to decrease, and it became less responsive. Maintenance and repairs were also becoming increasingly expensive, and this was creating a real business impact, leading to lower customer satisfaction and lower profit margins.

In the fast paced and competitive world of retail, slow and unreliable is not good

When upgrading their computer hardware, Søstre Grene required a solution that was faster, more flexible, and easier to maintain than their previous POS system with legacy hardware. Most importantly, it needed to be rugged, because accidents happen. Disruptions needed to be minimized as in the case when someone spills coffee over the cash register, or trips over a cable and accidentally powers down the system, or it simply freezes mid-transaction because the system is overloaded.

When accidents happened with the previous POS system, it was taking up to 13 minutes to fully reboot. No customer is going to be happy about waiting that long to complete their transaction. Finding computer hardware that improved performance in all aspects of business operations, including rebooting, was a way to keep customers happy, while providing operational security to their franchisees and joint venture partners.

Paying should be simple, technology shouldn't complicate it

Søstrene Grene wanted computer hardware that was robust, fast, easy to use, and easy to fix. Most of all they wanted to simplify the POS systems as much as possible because they had big expansion plans that couldn't be held up by technical glitches.

They were already using Intel NUCs in their back offices and as newer generations were launched with higher performance levels and capabilities, they were also becoming more affordable. This inspired them to develop their own PC-based POS, building off the use of Intel NUCs, customized to Søstrene Grene's specific needs.

One of these needs was for the hardware to be so simple that any of the store assistants, even those new to the job, could fix most issues. In addition, the systems also needed to be built so that they could be repaired by sourcing parts from local IT vendors if needed. In the past, the stores were dependent on an external service, which delayed repairs as they required a phone call and a "truck roll" for the repair person to show up. This kept stores with a broken POS system in limbo, unable to serve customers effectively adding to business costs. Keeping spare parts on hand with systems that are easy to repair eliminated the need for a costly external repair service.

Building simply, breaking rules (and hardware), and delivering something highly advanced

Affordable and simple aren't usually associated with technological advancement, but this was exactly the challenge that Søstrene Grene gave to Simply NUC, a leading provider of customized mini PC solutions. The POS system had to be modular, and easy and intuitive to use. It needed to be powerful enough to process inputs from the multiple systems in the cloud linking to the head office, including a catalog of more than 4000 products, and able to efficiently interface with different peripherals, as well as a variety of systems across Europe.

The legacy POS systems were no longer working effectively, even if competitors were still using them. Søstrene Grene was eager to break the rules. The idea behind building a modular POS was that if any component broke down it would be affordable and easy to replace or repair. Of course, they needed to find out what it would take to break the system. Fortunately, Simply NUC was on board with this.

Søstrene Grene was given full permission to test the hardware and they didn't hold back. They manhandled the NUCs, spilling water on them, unplugging them, even giving them to kids to play with. Where weaknesses were found, improvements were quickly applied. One of the customizations was to add four additional high-speed USB-C ports to the NUC to connect peripheral equipment such as touch screens and portable monitors. The new technology screens were equally robust and fast, so there wasn't a low-speed connection slowing down the system. With four additional USB-C ports it was possible to plug in whatever other equipment was needed.



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Convenience and price are everything in retail

From concept to installation took about 8 months and included extensive testing in warehouses.

Implementation of store upgrades with the new POS system started late in 2021 and currently 40% have been completed. Installations can be completed within an hour, with another hour for training. Even older shop assistants are beaming about how simple and easy the new system is to use. And the new systems are fast, taking less than a minute to start up, compared to the 13 minutes boot time of the previous system.

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A huge benefit of partnering with Simply NUC is that they're an Intel Titanium Partner so even during the pandemic there was no problem getting stock of a variety of mini PC devices. Sostrene Grene has a requirement for several hundred additional units to complete the upgrade process across all their stores. Through Simply NUC, it's possible to get customized units quickly and have confidence in the quality because they have been thoroughly during the manufacturing process. Simply NUC's reliable supply lines make expansion plans easy to implement. As new stores are opened, it's a simple and fast process to install the 2.0 systems and train staff on it.

The cost savings of over 20% have been quite substantial too, which has business partners smiling. It's all part of being able to provide stability to franchisees and joint venture partners, despite volatile market conditions.

Collaboration and customization

Collaboration between Sostrene Grene and Simply NUC has been a key element of the project's success. The process started with asking cashiers in stores about what frustrated them with the previous system, and lead to actions like getting the existing POS supplier to provide touch screen options for testing. It then moved on to finding out what works and why, how interfaces can work better, and testing and providing feedback on a broad portfolio of units to decide on specific needs. Because Simply NUC is highly customer oriented, it's even been possible to add in customizations on the startup screen, which highlight Sostrene Grene's brand. In terms of support services, Simply NUC has a number of options including online chat, remote troubleshooting, and live agents; but they haven't been needed yet, because the system just works.

Stability and efficiency helping to drive growth

Sostrene Grene is not just expanding the number of stores they're opening; they're also expanding the size of their stores. This is all part of their growth plans, and the larger stores have more cashier points. Being able to deploy POS systems quickly and confidence that systems are easy to use and maintain is an attractive proposition to franchisees. It makes the administrative side of business much easier, leaving them free to focus on generating more sales.

Simplicity has been achieved in the collaboration between Sostrene Grene and Simply NUC resulting in the operational stability to help drive retail growth.