



# MINT VELVET

"From that very first store that we opened in Chichester,  
to now, where we have over 150 locations on the UK  
high street and a very big digital ecommerce business  
... we've had Barron McCann and Retail Assist with us all  
the way."

## Background

In June 2009 women's fashion start-up, Mint Velvet, engaged Barron McCann and Retail Assist as its outsourced IT partner. Mint Velvet's exacting brief was that all IT systems, software/hardware, infrastructure and communications had to be fully operational for go-live on 1st October so the retailer could run a fully multichannel business from day one. Barron McCann and Retail Assist were tasked with delivering a fully operational infrastructure from scratch, across the Head Office, logistics hub in Milton Keynes, 2 solus stores, and 14 House of Fraser concessions.

## Business Challenge: Tight Commercial Deadlines

One of the former founders of Mint Velvet, Stuart Grant, explained: "If our deadline had been missed, it would have been impossible to trade in House of Fraser stores. Failure, just being a little late, wasn't an option. We would have had to defer launch until Jan/Feb, losing up to six months' trading."

As a start-up, Mint Velvet was simultaneously locating and hiring new personnel at multiple levels, working on design and merchandising of new ranges, establishing key channels and choosing sites. Limited availability of senior personnel meant that empowerment of the project team, led by Barron McCann and Retail Assist, was critical. Stuart Grant observed: "Barron McCann and Retail Assist led the whole project. They were the specialists with a proven record, so we outsourced to them. In terms of project governance, we set clear requirements and agreed the process. Barron McCann and Retail Assist were then empowered to take it all forward."



## Rapidly Planning the Optimum Solution

First, Barron McCann and Retail Assist recommended systems flexible enough for all requirements, including Head Office and warehouse, systems integration across the supply chain connecting e-commerce, store systems and 14 concessions. With Merret at the heart of the infrastructure, we supported the implementation and integration to the following platforms:

- Merret for merchandising management, supply chain, warehousing – integrated with partner solution Infinity PoS
- Design by BT Fresca of Fresca Commerce
- E-commerce platform with proven stability and ease of integration between Merret/Fresca to share product/pricing information, pass sales data back to Merret, and send fulfilment data to the logistics centre
- Remote access solution from Cisco for staff to access services via laptops
- Microsoft Head Office infrastructure including Exchange, file and print, and Outlook
- Web Access Remote management of website usage, mail scanning, verification
- Warehouse physical setup, creating a working office space, implementing RF network

Former Mint Velvet Non-Executive Director, Chris Inman, commented: "We started with a blank sheet and met Barron McCann and Retail Assist. From then, we had established the merchandising system by taking Merret 'out-of-the-box' and we had set up Head Office systems, in just 6 weeks. Incredible."

## The Solution and Business Start to Take Shape

Barron McCann and Retail Assist managed solus store openings and designed and delivered extensive support services, including:

- 1st line support - dedicated Help Desk
- 2nd line support for Infinity PoS via the expert Store Systems team
- 2nd line Merret support via a dedicated Applications team
- 3rd line support for software and applications
- Hardware maintenance
- Operational support for all devices including the Head Office server infrastructure.

# Fast Facts



## Challenge

Mint Velvet had only 3 months to prepare for market launch, to exploit a critical House of Fraser partnership, open solus stores, and launch an e-commerce site, all in time for the Autumn/Winter season. All IT systems, software/hardware, infrastructure and communications had to be operational for a 1st October go-live, so the retailer could run a multichannel business from day one.



## Solution

Barron McCann and Retail Assist recommended delivering business-critical IT as a software-as-a-service (SaaS) managed solution. The partnership delivered a complete solution in three months and under budget, to support both the initial market launch and a growing business. Retail processes, infrastructure, equipment and support with integrated merchandising, supply chain, warehousing, store POS, e-commerce and fulfilment were all catered for.



## Benefits

Mint Velvet launched successfully, emerging as a credible, fully formed, fully operational retailer. The solution allowed Mint Velvet to easily open second and third waves of stores. With a platform scalable for growth, no radical changes were needed. Mint Velvet's sales topped £10m in its first full year of trading.

## The Project is Delivered On Time and Under Budget

Despite the pressure and the scale of the undertaking, the team delivered on time and for 17% less than the original budget. This resulted in a powerful, scalable, multi-channel merchandising system and fully transactional website, founded on a robust end-to-end retail IT and communications infrastructure.

Implementation was phased:

- Head Office/distribution hub (end-to-end merchandising and supply chain system) from July-August – including build/configuration of the IBM Series i Platform
- Website/e-commerce, integration with Merret/fulfilment by end September
- Integration with POS, all systems ready in stores/concessions by 1st October

Stuart Grant commented: "In terms of timescales, this is the sort of project you would be lucky to complete in 9 months. By approaching things in the way we did, we completed it in 3 months. We weren't just talking about a few stores: this was a fully operational business, including warehousing, Head Office, all infrastructure, all ecommerce. What really set the project apart was the aggressive pace at which things had to happen. Working with Barron McCann and Retail Assist and using Merret made that possible."

## Trading Exceeds Expectations

Mint Velvet's first 3 months' trading exceeded expectations and the company rapidly expanded, with Barron McCann and Retail Assist project managing further implementations. The systems accommodated a second wave of openings in Spring that doubled the size of the business (20 additional House of Fraser concessions, 3 concessions in Fenwick and an outlet in an independent store).

One year on, Mint Velvet was able to impress the industry by reporting sales in excess of £10m. Autumn/Winter saw Mint Velvet trading in 62 outlets after expanding into John Lewis in the UK and Menarys and Arnotts in Ireland. The existing IT infrastructure made this growth seamless across the varied solus, concession and shop in shop trading formats.

MINT  
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+44 (0) 1332866500



[sales@barronmccann.com](mailto:sales@barronmccann.com)



[barronmccann.com](http://barronmccann.com)

