ERP & CRM

Kreatos: hairdressers with a digital mindset go for Combell hosting

The digital world has become hard to avoid, even for hairdressers – for customer interaction, information or treatment history. The chain of hair salons Kreatos, which chose Combell hosting services, is a perfect example of the convergence of manual and digital skills.

Wherever you go in Flanders, you will see the logo of the Kreatos hair salons, from Aartselaar to Zwevegem. In 1995, the hair salons, which were originally independent businesses, have become a franchise. And this decision was definitely not a mistake: 20 years later, there are no less than 125 hair salons in Flanders and the Netherlands, which employ a total of more than 500 people.

Several factors contributed to this growth. Kreatos has its own training studios, where employees are thoroughly trained. The teams' expertise has already been celebrated through a series of nominations and awards in several competitions. Moreover, everyone can go to these hair salons anytime, from Monday to Saturday, without needing an appointment. But there is more: if you are not happy with your treatment, you can come back to the same salon within 14 days (with your receipt) and get a new treatment for free, which is quite unique!

Customers are a top priority

But one of the main reasons for the success of Kreatos is the smart use of digital tools. Via electronic VIP customer cards, customers and their treatments are recorded in a database, which all

Kreatos salons can access. The great advantage is obviously that the customer can go to any salon in the chain: employees can see the full history of previous visits and instantly know which products and colours the customer usually uses.

This also helps create a database that is used for communication purposes: customers are informed about special offers, contests, new products and new hairstyles via the Kreatos newsletter and "Shine magazine" (available on the website and in hard copy in the hair salons).

POS system developed in-house

It is obvious that this digital part requires a decent back-end. While hairdressers are busy taking care of customers with scissors, hairdryers, brushes, trimmers, curling irons and aluminium foil, a POS system, which has been developed in-house, ensures that the details of the treatment are recorded properly and that the customer is charged the correct price.

18 years ago, the POS system was developed in-house in VB6, out of necessity – back then, there were very few software tools available to chains. The advantage was that Kreatos could make the necessary changes in-house. Over the years, several modules have been added in VB.net, and in the end, the VB legacy code was completely replaced.

Cloud server: stability and faster response

This POS system, which runs locally in the salons, communicates with the database server. With the number of salons and customers increasing, the amount of data continued to increase, and Kreatos turned to Combell. Kreatos ICT Manager Philip Van Beeck explains:

"I originally went online to find a Belgian provider for our website, since I wanted to have a local contact. Combell offered the services we were looking for, and other customers seemed to be very happy with them."

"In the beginning, our needs were quite modest. We only had a website with limited data traffic that has been hosted on a VPS at Combell for many years. However, over the years, we have started focusing more on our online presence. In addition, new applications have been developed for our customers and our POS systems."

"Due to the increasing amount of data traffic and the demand for better stability, we had to start looking for another solution. After consultation with Frederick Nuytens, our account manager at Combell, we decided to start using a cloud server as a database server. This was a very positive experience, and a few months later, we also decided to transfer our web server to a cloud server. The entire process went smoothly, without any major problems; a couple of minor issues were found, but technicians always took fast and appropriate action. Our latest project consisted of also transferring all the e-mail addresses of our salons to Combell."

Communication with the salons

Kreatos currently has two cloud servers with Combell and uses mail hosting for the salons. The 10 employees who work at the headquarters use Exchange. And IMAP mailboxes are used for communicating with the salons. All of these systems are hosted by Combell. Communication with employees is indeed very important. Philip Van Beeck:

"It was necessary to streamline and automate the data flows between the headquarters and the salons. And we intend to pursue this strategy in the years ahead. We are currently working on several other projects with a view to making a difference for consumers, but also for our franchisees and employees."

Some figures

The website currently attracts between 25,000 and 30,000 visitors per month. The busiest times are between 8 A.M. and 5 P.M., with peaks when new content is added to announce a contest, publish information about photo shoots and new trends, etc. An average of 100 GB of data traffic is generated on the website. There are 120,000 e-mail addresses in the file used for the newsletter, which is sent out 12 times a year. The website was also developed in-house, using Drupal, Laravel and several applications developed in PHP.

Philip Van Beeck is also very happy with the database server:

"For the database server, we think the most important requirement is that it ensures fast response times. Since we have installed this server on a cloud server, everything has gone smoothly and we still have headroom for growth. The number of salons continues to increase, as does the amount of data, which are stored centrally."

If you ask Philip Van Beeck what he finds important when choosing a provider, his answer will include standard factors, such as budget, technical requirements, SLAs, etc. But he also adds:

"Make sure you find a reliable partner. We intentionally went for a Belgian provider, because they have a local contact. Combell has always been the most reliable partner to us."

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