

# PMA Magazine

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Photo courtesy of Eastman Kodak Co.

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# The Dakis difference

By Bonnie Gretzner

Montreal-based company enables retailers to better serve customers online, in store

In today's Internet-based world, **Philippe Hugron**, president and CEO of **Dakis Decision Systems Inc.**, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, says he's still surprised how many retailers have such a small Web presence.

"We still hear retailers say they don't need a Web store. That's surprising, because people spend more time online than watching television, and consumers will look for product information online before going into stores," says Hugron, whose 5-year-old company delivers a "digital sales force" to retailers. "Consumers might not make a purchase online, but if you don't share your product, people will go elsewhere. It's happening, and smaller retailers need to get moving."

Dakis offers products and services, including the Dakis Humanized Expert, to help retailers increase service and sales, and reduce operating costs. Dakis created a turnkey solution – a sales automation tool – to enable retailers to have a better Web store presence and to deliver the same experience to customers in-store via kiosks, PDAs, and cellphones.

"The retail industry is lagging behind other industries, such as banking," says Hugron, citing banking services such as ATMs, Web and phone banking. "Many retail websites today are nothing more than

an online Yellow Pages ad. Our solution allows consumers to shop when, where and how they prefer. It makes it easier for retailers to be present at more touchpoints."

The challenge for small and medium-size retailers is time, knowledge and financial resources to build and maintain both an effective Web store and information resource. Dakis manages all the back information a retailer would need to feed a Web store.

"Only multinational retailers can afford a decent website, and even then they cannot offer complete product information. Very few can do cross selling, and this is where retailers make higher margins and more profits," says Hugron. "Gathering and standardizing information for cross selling is very time intensive. When we open a Web store – and our smallest customer has three employees – he gets the whole Web store, product information, and more features. We're allowing small retailers to be able to compete on the Web at a very affordable price."

## Get started

Camera and consumer electronic stores are an important market for Dakis, and Hugron



Philippe Hugron founded Dakis 5 years ago.

says the company is also working with U.S. photo buying groups.

One new customer is the **Japan Camera Management Group Inc.**, which has more than 50 stores in Canada. Hugron says they have seen a big change in terms of how the Web is used.

"We are very satisfied with actual results. In the past 4 months, we have seen strong double-digit increases in traffic, and we have seen a big change in terms of how the Web is driving in-store traffic and customer interactions," Hugron states.

Japan Camera is also pleased.

"When I first met with Philippe Hugron, I was very impressed with their application," says Japan Camera Management Group President **Philippe Charron**, who has personally worked for the past 1.5 years with Dakis. "We then decided to join forces, to create a new website for Japan Camera, and imbed their application. The Dakis group is ahead of technology, extremely productive, well organized and very efficient.

"We are extremely satisfied with our end product. Our website traffic count is continually rising. We now have one of the

## Fast facts

**Company:** Dakis Decision Systems Inc.

**Location:** Montreal, Quebec, Canada

**CEO:** Philippe Hugron, who has worked for technology companies such as Nortel, and has a background in accounting and marketing

**Employees:** 20

**Partners:** Include Graphx/Photogize, Microsoft, IBM, and Fujitsu

**URL:** [www.dakis.com](http://www.dakis.com)



best websites in our industry, and this is only the first step in our partnership. We are presently working toward developing new retail features.”

Dakis' first partner, sporting goods company **Broli La Source du Sport** (Brolisport), Ste. Hyacinthe, Quebec, Canada, provides a good example of the Humanized Expert at work.

Dakis software uses artificial intelligence to provide product and cross-selling recommendations for sales staff and customers. Brolisport accesses the information on an in-store kiosk. The program runs on a **Microsoft.net** platform and uses a customized questionnaire to determine the best sales processes for various products. The questionnaire is based on detailed input from store suppliers and employees.

This enables the staff to have detailed information at their fingertips on skiing or biking equipment, for example. The software will assess the pros and cons of products based on customer needs, and can provide both recommendations and products that might be a good cross sell.

## Get moving

Just about any retailer can benefit from Dakis services – the company works with retailers with less than \$1 million in revenues to those with more than \$1 billion.

Getting started with Dakis takes no longer than the time for the retailer to return the order form. There are no upfront costs to the retailer, other than any customization or design content they might request; and retailers pay a monthly fee for the software and data they use. Price depends on the size of the customer, the number of stores, and

The Japan Camera website, powered by Dakis, now features very detailed information for consumers.

number of services; but monthly costs for a single-store retailer start at \$95 per month.

The entire setup is done remotely, and Hugron likens it to simply flipping a switch. Integrating the site with other providers the retailer might have, such as an online photofinishing service, poses no integration problems, he says.

“We have customers from sea to sea in Canada and some in the United States, and everything is done by the Web,” he says. “That’s how we’ve been able to deliver an affordable price to retailers who couldn’t afford such a solution in the past.”

Getting set up for e-commerce has not posed a challenge for most retailers, says Hugron, as they are already accustomed to shipping orders via basic e-commerce they may already be doing or from customer phone calls. The biggest challenge comes from retailers who don’t believe they need a website, says Hugron. “Those who have been doing some work on their own understand, because we save them time and money.

“Many customers who buy our solution were already entering their own product information,” he explains. “They usually had one to three employees managing the Web full time and entering the product information, and they know and understand the pain of doing this by hand. These retailers see the value of our services right away.

“Other retailers simply don’t understand the largest guys are beating them because they are everywhere. The big retailers are online, in the papers, and have a large network of stores. To be able to compete today, specialty retailers need to have a good online presence.”

The Dakis product information and sales assistant kiosk helps retailers assist customers with detailed product information.



Another benefit to working with Dakis, says Hugron, is having a partner for IT problems. “Most small retailers have no IT resources, and many are scared of technology,” he says. “To have a partner just a phone call away has been good for lots of small retailers.”

Dakis works with several partners, including **IBM**, **Fujitsu**, **Microsoft**, and **Graphx/Photogize**, as well as kiosk manufacturers. Says Hugron of the partnership with Graphx: “Since we’re in Canada and they’re in the United States, we can help develop markets. By partnering together we can offer a full turnkey solution for the photographic market.”

Going forward, Hugron says Dakis is targeting North America to build business. The company continues to invest millions to continue innovation.

“Now we have a complete turnkey solution, we’re providing more tools for retailers to manage their businesses, and we’re making the solution even more accessible and easy to use,” he says. “We’re most interested in finding retailers that want to compete better and are eager to promote their products online and in the store.” ■

