IBM

Rodale rescues its e-business with WebSphere Commerce Suite.

Overview

■ **Challenge**
e-business software platform discontinued, leaving company without support

■ **Solution**
Online bookstore redesigned with IBM WebSphere® Commerce Suite

■ **Why IBM**
IBM and WebSphere Commerce Suite gave customer the confidence to relaunch its virtual store with minimal risk

■ **Key Business Benefits**
Projected 100% payback in 2 years; Web sales growing every month; site updates in hours, not weeks; 40% savings in administrative costs for updating online catalog

■ **Business Partner**
Trifecta Technologies, Inc.

Powered by IBM WebSphere Commerce Suite, Rodale's easy-to-manage online bookstore sells publications about organic living and health and fitness, fulfilling orders automatically without having to re-key information.

Like many Web-based enterprises, Rodale's first online bookstore was not perfect. But it did a good job of providing an easy and convenient way for customers of the Emmaus, Pennsylvania-based publisher to purchase health and organic lifestyle magazines and books on the Internet.

More troubling was the fact that the business-to-consumer (B2C) Web site was not integrated with Rodale's Mail Order and Cataloging System (MACS), a group of COBOL programs used to manage ordering, billing and shipping processes in the publishing industry. This meant

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–Greg Schaller, Manager of IT Planning and Enterprise Architecture, Rodale

e business

Key Components

Software

- IBM WebSphere Commerce Suite
- IBM WebSphere Application Server, Advanced Edition
- IBM MQSeries®

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–Greg Schaller

employees had to check orders and reenter them manually, undermining some of the potential labor-saving benefits of e-business. It was also difficult to put new products on the Web site or get new promotions up and running. Content management was a specialized function performed by IT staff, diverting resources from more productive pursuits.

In fact, there were many ways the site could have been improved, but this was all moot when Intel purchased and then discontinued iCat, the underlying transactional software powering the Rodale site. "Suddenly we were without a stable platform," says Greg Schaller, manager of IT planning and enterprise architecture for Rodale. "We had to pick the most important new features we wanted, such as backend integration and easy updating, and find the best technology platform to get a new site up and running as quickly as possible."

Rodale evaluated technology vendors such as Microsoft and Vignette but felt most comfortable with IBM, due to the company's extensive e-business experience. "IBM and WebSphere Commerce Suite gave us the most confidence, and we needed to feel that we would be minimizing risk," says Schaller.

Since building the entire site in-house would have stretched Rodale's IT staff too thin, the publisher sought the assistance of a Web implementer. Browsing through the IBM PartnerWorld Web site, Schaller found Trifecta Technologies, Inc. in nearby Allentown, Pennsylvania. "We were extremely impressed with their talent and their team," says Schaller. "And 60 days later we had a site up and running—it was phenomenal."

Exodus Communications in Sterling, Virginia, hosts the site, which is powered by IBM WebSphere Commerce Suite, Version 4.1. According to Schaller, the new Rodale Web site has been pushing up the publisher's sales every month since it went live in January. Faster catalog updating will save 40 percent in administrative costs per year. And easy updating of content and products by business managers is enabling Rodale to post special promotions whenever it sees an opportunity. "Our goal is to use the flexibility we now have to create discounts and target promotions for holidays and special occasions to bring in an additional three to five percent in sales during the first year," says Schaller. "We should be able to fully recover our investment within two years."

Integrated process for marketing, sales and fulfillment

Since 1930, Rodale has been a leading publisher of information on healthy, active lifestyles. With a mission to inspire and enable people to improve their lives and the world around them, Rodale reaches an audience of more than 30 million each month through its magazines, books, Web sites and interactive media. Rodale properties include such well-known magazines as Prevention, Men's Health and Runner's World. Rodale Books publishes nearly 100 new titles each year and maintains a backlist of more than 500 titles on the subjects of cooking, health, fitness, gardening, nature and spirituality. In 2000 and 2001, Rodale was named one of "The 100 Best Companies To Work For" by Fortune magazine. The online bookstore at *www.rodalestore.com* offers subscriptions to the company's magazines and a selection of approximately 250 books.

Customers can search the site by title, author and key word. Or they can choose from lifestyle categories such as women's health, men's health, sports, cooking and organic gardening. The homepage also displays themed promotions. Once customers have made their selections, they can choose one of several convenient payment and shipping options. Every night, the system automatically transfers orders in batch files to an Internet site using file transfer protocol. The MACS system accesses this site and pulls out the orders for processing.

Business managers can make product modifications at their convenience through a WebSphere Commerce Suite interface. Schaller comments, "Prior to this new technology, it took weeks to create a new promotion, but now a marketing manager can go in, add products, set up a discounting strategy and get a promotion up and running in hours. WebSphere Commerce Suite gives us and our customers the ability to get things done quickly and efficiently."

Responsive, scalable infrastructure

Anticipating future migration to WebSphere Commerce Suite, Version 5.1, with its Java™ programming capabilities, Rodale and Trifecta used JavaServer Pages™ (JSP™) extensively in the site relaunch. IBM WebSphere Application Server provides a runtime environment for the JSPs to present store pages to the customer.

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Extending the platform to expand functionality

Rodale's IT department created several sites that are integrated with the online store. One of these is a Java technology-based customer relationship management (CRM) site where customers can obtain account information without the assistance of a customer service representative. Customers who want to know the status of an order choose the customer service option from the main store and are transported seamlessly to a separate site where they can return a book, make comments, check their order or account status or make a payment.

To answer customers' questions, WebSphere Application Server uses IBM MQSeries to send messages in XML format to the MACS fulfillment system on Rodale's backend server. On this server are Java programs which Rodale created to recognize the type of transaction required by the question, retrieve the necessary data and send the answer back to WebSphere Application Server as an XML message through MQSeries.

WebSphere Application Server also runs the JSPs for Rodale's "micro-sites," individual book promotion Web sites that the company advertises through direct mail. Customers who visit the a micro-site and decide to buy the featured book are transferred to the main store site at *www.rodalestore.com.* If they wish, they can then go on to shop for other books.

There will be more enhancements to the Rodale online store when the company migrates to WebSphere Commerce Suite, Version 5.1, next year. Schaller and the marketing staff are looking forward to using IBM WebSphere Commerce Accelerator to create cross-selling campaigns and "hot spots"—promotional offers that can appear anywhere on the site, activated according to business rules.

"With the infrastructure provided by WebSphere Commerce Suite, we know we can continue to perfect our e-business and respond to changes in the market," says Schaller.

For more information
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For more information about Rodale and Trifecta Technologies, Inc., visit:
www.rodalestore.com
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