

## IBM's Sphere of Influence

BY RICHARD V. DRAGAN

Aimed squarely at larger companies, IBM's **WebSphere Commerce Professional Edition 5.5** (\$80,000 per CPU) offers a truly scalable platform for e-business. If you can get over the initial sticker shock, this package is remarkably deep: IBM has bundled many

(come) Quick Start option that sets up and connects the various components, which include IBM DB2, IBM's HTTP Server, and WebSphere Application Server 5.0 as the underlying platform.

Of course, quick is a relative term: The wizard ran for about 2 hours. Additional components for the recommen-

dation engine (using technology from LikeMinds) and the Commerce Analyzer for a data mart require separate installation procedures.

You can swap out selected components—using Oracle as the database instead of DB2, for example—in the set-up utility. For production environments, the wizard automates creating a three-node installation

In addition to the expected support for searching, shopping carts, and placing and tracking orders, the default store includes advanced features such as guided selling, which brings site visitors to products interactively. There's also support for auctions (including a discussion board to post messages about items on the virtual block), plus excellent support for multiple languages (10 by default) and over 20 currencies. Support for a payment module to process credit card orders on- or off-line also comes built in.

For administrators, the Commerce Accelerator tool is a very impressive console for controlling every aspect of a store. This menu-driven Web application provides easy access to categories, products, users, orders, and campaigns. It also gives you a handle on advanced options for auctions and tweaks for the guided-selling features.

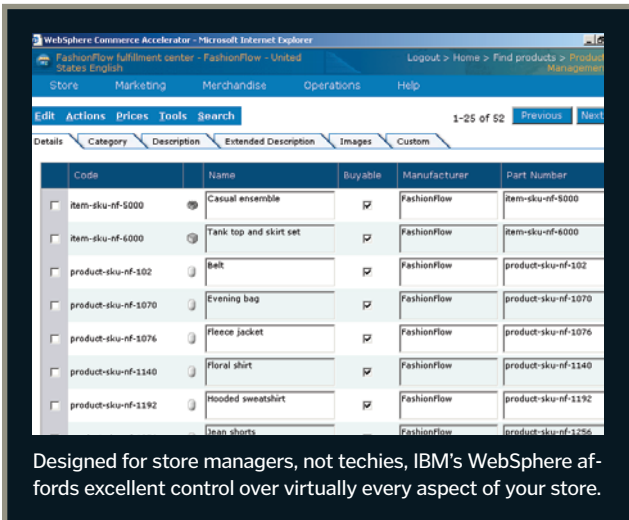
With WebSphere, IBM has done an excellent job at letting business managers control a site instead of having to call IT for everyday store maintenance. A good example of this is the Promotion wizard, which guides you through the details of setting up sales and discounts. Logic for discounts is extensive and even includes support for how to handle overlapping discounts.

Another standout feature for business managers is the Products screen, which gives you powerful searching capabili-

server, and commerce components reside on different servers for scalability.

WebSphere also provides a half-dozen sample stores in store archive (.sar) files, which are very helpful when you're creating a new online store. Using a wizard, we created a sample online clothing store and simulated browsing and shopping activity for 100 users.

The default functionality found in these sample stores is truly impressive.



Designed for store managers, not techies, IBM's WebSphere affords excellent control over virtually every aspect of your store.

advanced capabilities in the core product, including analytics, auctions, and extensive site administration for business managers.

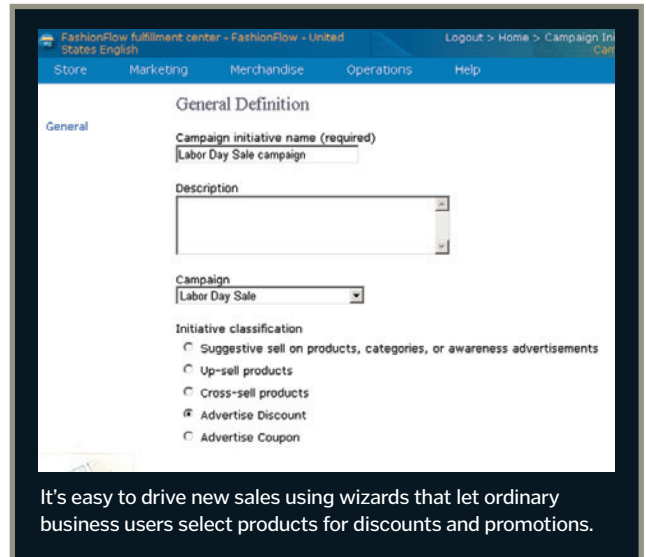
We installed WebSphere under Windows Server 2000 with SP3. (As a J2EE-based solution, the platform is also available on Linux and AIX.) The release comes on ten CDs, five of which are required for the minimal recommended installation. There is a (wel-

ties for finding products to view and modify. We liked the screen that listed all the images associated with a set of products. Adding a product was also speedy enough, though uploading new product image files required a separate step. We also applaud the control you're given over ads and banners, which you can easily configure throughout a site by means of a convenient screen.

Reporting in WebSphere is also strong, with about a dozen precanned reports for tracking inventory and orders, overall site revenue, and other metrics for your store. IBM's experience with real customers shines here—and throughout the product—since the reports needed for real-world stores (such as tracking expected inventory shipments and customer returns) are included. The Commerce Analyzer tool sets up a data mart based on your store's sales data and lets business decision makers determine what's working and what's not with over 200 reports.

Online stores generated by e-commerce solutions usually come half-full or half-empty, depending how you look at them. It's usually up to your development team—or third-party add-ons—to customize the store for your precise needs. IBM bundles almost all of the whistles and bells and real-world necessities for most B2C and B2B scenarios. This raises the price tag of the solution, but you aren't likely to find any limitations. The default store has features that will likely cost more to implement on your own.

All things considered, IBM's WebSphere is a deep e-commerce solution that's tailored to the needs of real business users.



It's easy to drive new sales using wizards that let ordinary business users select products for discounts and promotions.

WebSphere Commerce Professional Edition 5.5

Direct price: \$80,000 per CPU. IBM Corp., 888-746-7426, [www.ibm.com/websphere/commerce](http://www.ibm.com/websphere/commerce). ●●●●●