IBM

Strategic Thought keeps profitability in mind with e-Engineering.

Overview

■ **Challenge**
Reduce time to market and deliver measurable value in e-commerce consulting services

■ **Solution**
e-Engineering—consulting and implementation of e-commerce solutions based on IBM WebSphere® software platform for e-business

■ **Why IBM**
IBM perceived as market leader in Web technologies; IBM WebSphere Application Server chosen for scalability, security, usability; IBM MQSeries® chosen for its transactional quality and multiplatform support

■ **Key Business Benefits**
100% annual incremental revenue growth; 700% increase in revenues from IBM solutions in the last 3 years

Having chosen IBM as its strategic partner for middleware, Strategic Thought established a WebSphere Innovation Centre in its Wimbledon offices.

Despite the dot-com bust—or perhaps because of it—IT consultancies such as London-based Strategic Thought Ltd. are finding it even more important nowadays to cut through the hype to prove their value to prospective clients. "Our clients are less interested in radical new business models tailored for the 'new, new economy,'" says Richard Higgs, Strategic Thought's managing director. "Instead, they're fixated on their real bottom line, as they strive for the fastest and least risky path to market."

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e business

Key Components

Software

- IBM WebSphere Application Server, Advanced Edition, Version 4
- IBM WebSphere Commerce Suite, Version 5.1
- IBM MQSeries, Version 5.1
- IBM MQSeries Integrator
- IBM MQSeries Workflow

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– Richard Higgs

Founded in 1987, Strategic Thought specializes in e-Engineering, a term the company coined to describe how it empowers companies to implement new business processes, extend corporate brands and reposition themselves in the market—all the while protecting their investments in their core IT environments. An IBM Premier Business Partner since 1999, Strategic Thought applies its e-Engineering approach through flexible, component-based e-commerce solutions using various products from the IBM WebSphere software platform for e-business—including WebSphere Application Server, WebSphere Commerce Suite and the MQSeries family of products.

"As a business whose revenue has grown by 700 percent in the last three years, we believe we have developed the right competencies to be the leading e-Engineering consultancy," Higgs says. "While this has much to do with our business focus and attitude, it is well supported by our technical partners. Our e-Engineering methodology is centered around IBM, which has demonstrated an ongoing market leadership in all aspects of Web technology."

Criterion goes paperless with MQSeries family

At the core of Strategic Thought's e-Engineering solutions are what it calls "transaction and information hubs," which enable customers to leverage existing mainframe and client server systems while continually deploying, updating and replacing applications that rely on these systems. "Our chosen technology to enable these busses is IBM MQSeries Integrator," explains Higgs. "The transactional quality of MQSeries Integrator and the number of environments it spans are unparalleled in the industry, as is the long-term investment IBM has made in this area."

Strategic Thought recently put this approach to work for Criterion Assurance Group, a Hampshire, England-based insurance and risk management firm. Criterion wanted to eliminate the paper from its workflow processes, which are fed by data streams from its numerous insurance-company partners.

To automate these workflow processes, Strategic Thought used MQSeries Integrator to establish a hub through which messages pass between Criterion's applications and those of its partners. MQSeries secures the delivery of these messages. Within Criterion, MQSeries Workflow manages the claims processing

workflow across several disparate internal systems. When the process requires communication with a partner, MQSeries Workflow routes the communication through the MQSeries Integrator hub.

According to Nigel Cooke, Criterion's chief executive, the company opted for the IBM solution from Strategic Thought "because it provided everything we needed from a single source." The paperless office strategy is expected to deliver significant internal and external returns on investment.

dooyoo gets consumers talking with WebSphere Application Server
In many of Strategic Thought's engagements, WebSphere Application Server has been a key component of the application architecture. For example, dooyoo.co.uk chose a solution from Strategic Thought based on WebSphere Application Server and other WebSphere software for its Web-based consumer opinions platform. "Our objective was to offer a Web site that is dynamic, personalized, easy to use and useful for all," says dooyoo Founding Director Jonathan Menmuir. "We conducted an in-depth evaluation of products on the market and ultimately narrowed down our selection to IBM WebSphere Application Server and BEA WebLogic. We chose WebSphere software because we were impressed by its scalability, security, usability and the level of support offered by IBM and Strategic Thought."

When it is ready to roll out multichannel, multilanguage offerings that users can access through PDAs and other mobile devices, dooyoo will look to WebSphere Transcoding Publisher and WebSphere Translation Server. As Menmuir concludes, "With IBM technologies delivered through Strategic Thought, dooyoo will become the number one independent forum for consumers to share information quickly and easily."

Skills help shorten time to market
In addition to laying down e-business infrastructure and integrating legacy and Web-enabled commerce systems, Strategic Thought helps customers design and implement the transactional front ends of their e-businesses. Higgs notes that for most e-commerce sites, time to market is a critical success factor, which puts considerable pressure on IT consultants. "If you cannot deliver the key components of your solution within 40 days—an e-commerce year—you and your enterprise are in trouble," Higgs cautions.

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Strategic Thought recently won IBM's coveted Platinum Performance award, becoming one of only four IBM Business Partners to be recognized with this honor from among 280 companies.

For this reason, Strategic Thought has taken pains to establish best practices in e-commerce project management and development. It also places great emphasis on the skills of its staff. For example, its WebSphere Commerce Suite practice consists of eight consultants, each with individual IBM certifications in a range of WebSphere technologies—including MQSeries, WebSphere Application Server and WebSphere Commerce Suite. They can help customers make the most of WebSphere Commerce Suite, Version 5.1, to get their e-commerce sites up and running quickly or improve existing e-commerce sites through integration with suppliers and partners.

Strategic Thought has also established a proving ground for its customers' applications. Its WebSphere Innovation Centre (WIC)—the first of its kind in Europe—functions both as a WebSphere demonstration site and as a chargeable "test center." At the WIC, Strategic Thought consultants, certified by IBM, recreate customers' computing environments and run their applications with live data, so customers can envision how WebSphere software will fulfill their requirements. Higgs says of

the WIC, "The ability to show how the WebSphere family of products can integrate into a customer's existing setup has become an essential part of our business model. Companies considering using these products now use the WIC as a matter of course."

The next step: Web services
For Strategic Thought, the relationship with IBM has been one long success story. "IBM has a proven track record of bringing to market new technologies that enable an organization to take advantage of fresh commercial opportunities to increase profitability and revenue," Higgs says. "At Strategic Thought we are growing annual incremental revenue by 100%."

It's no wonder Strategic Thought is excited about the prospect of opportunities in emerging Web services applications. "IBM shows a continued adherence to standards associated with the deployment of e-business applications based on SOAP, UDDI and J2EE," Higgs notes. "Because of IBM's leading position in the Web services arena, we anticipate further strong growth in our consultancy and development business by leveraging IBM technologies to deliver Web services solutions to UK and European businesses."

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G325-1922-00