IBM

Priority Flowers adds wings to flowers with WebSphere Commerce Suite.

Overview

■ **Application**
B2C flower store shipping direct from growers with integrated CRM system

■ **Business Benefits**
Sales 400% higher than projections; online store up and running in less than 40 days; overnight service with no additional administrative costs for company; 100% ROI projected in 1 year
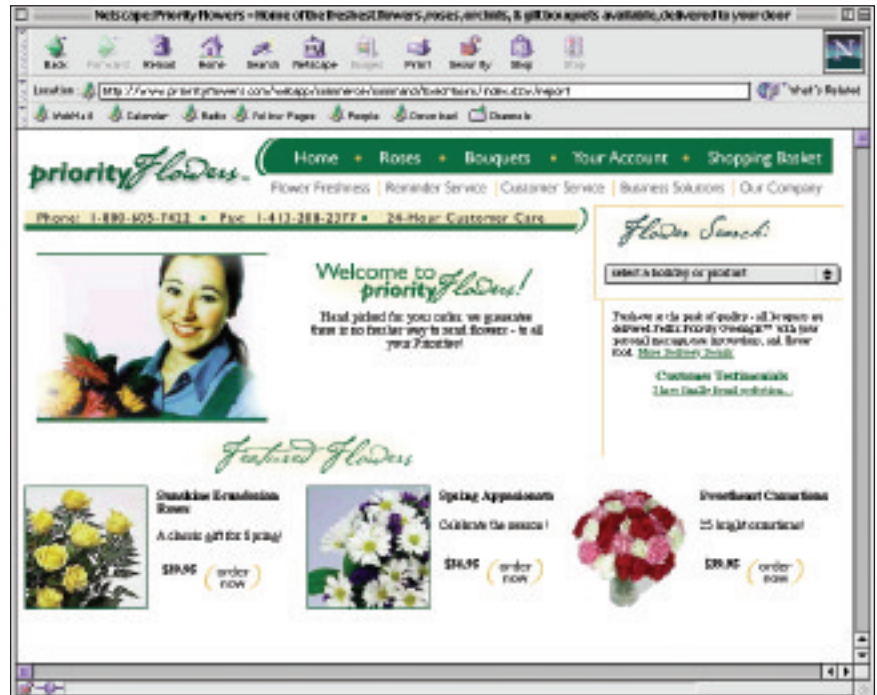
■ **Software**
IBM WebSphere® Commerce Suite;
IBM WebSphere Application Server;
IBM DB2® Universal Database™;
IBM Net.Data®

■ **Servers**
IBM Netfinity®

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

To keep its customers happy, Priority Flowers ships direct from the growers' fields using a Web-enabled flower store integrated with growers' fulfillment operations, Federal Express and customer service systems.

In the 1930s ordering flowers by telephone—and having them delivered clear across the country—was a novelty. Seventy years later, even though the Internet is making floral networks operate more efficiently, floral businesses still fulfill orders the way they used to—using either flower wholesalers or local florists near the delivery point. The flowers vary as widely in quality as do the services that deliver them. By the time the flowers pass through the middlemen and get to their destination, the bloom is frequently off the rose.

"IBM and Trifecta delivered on their promise to get us to the Web quickly with a robust site integrated with growers' backend systems and with Federal Express Priority Overnight shipping."

– Marshall Sims, President, Priority Flowers

e business®

With IBM WebSphere Commerce Suite powering its online flower store, Priority Flowers can take and fulfill tens of thousands of orders on the days before Valentine's Day and Mother's Day.

Enter entrepreneur Marshall Sims of Priority Flowers, who decided to create a new distribution model altogether. Priority Flowers delivers flowers directly from growers in Ecuador, Colombia, Florida and California within hours of being hand picked from the fields.

Sims searched for the ideal e-commerce platform to bring his service to the Internet quickly, eager to beat large flower retailers who were fertilizing their budding online businesses with millions of dollars in promotions and advertising. He evaluated Microsoft and Blue Martini software, but in the end he was guided by industry reports which named IBM WebSphere Commerce Suite the top e-commerce software package. Sims decided that IBM, with its stable market presence and experience building Web sites for some of the largest, highest-profile Internet retailers, would be the best technology vendor for Priority Flowers.

Priority Flowers still needed help building custom functions into its Web site and integrating its ordering and delivery services. Says Sims, "We contacted IBM and said, 'Can you put us in touch with a firm that will deliver on what they promise?' And they immediately put us in touch with Trifecta Technologies."

IBM Business Partner Trifecta Technologies of Allentown, Pennsylvania, delivered the launch version of Priorityflowers.com in less than 40 days, and Priority Flowers began flying flowers to delivery destinations by Federal Express Priority Overnight service. The flowers are guaranteed to be significantly fresher than flowers from other 1-800 and online flower shops.

In its first year alone, Priority Flowers expects to achieve a 100 percent ROI and $10 million in sales, beating its $2 million goal by 400 percent. In addition, the fresh, longer-lasting flowers and the fast, efficient service have created many repeat customers. According to Sims, "Our launch site delivered on our promise to ship fresh flowers from the grower overnight to customers. And WebSphere Commerce Suite and Trifecta delivered on their promise to get us to the Web quickly with a robust site integrated with growers' backend systems and with Federal Express Priority Overnight shipping."

"With this WebSphere Commerce Suite e-business solution developed for us by Trifecta, we can handle 10,000 orders per day as easily as we can handle one. And the quality of the site reinforces the value of our brand."

– Marshall Sims

Clearing the flightpath for flowers

Customers ordering a dozen red roses for Mother's Day can either search the site using the "Flower Finder" search engine or choose from the promotional displays on the home page. To transmit the orders to growers—then on to moms' tabletops all over the U.S.—Trifecta first had to customize order systems for each of the seven growers with which Priority Flowers does business.

To do that, Trifecta leveraged the systems the growers already had. Says Trifecta President Doug Pelletier, "Some of the growers accept orders through e-mail, while others have order-entry systems that we can populate directly." Trifecta, which also hosts the site, automatically takes orders out of IBM DB2 Universal Database and transmits them to the proper supplier five times per day, and more often during peak buying times, such as Valentine's Day and Mother's Day.

Growers are equipped with Federal Express' Powership server, which they use to generate tracking codes for each order and print out shipping labels. Using Federal Express' software, Trifecta wrote C++ and SQL statements to integrate that code with WebSphere Commerce Suite and DB2 Universal Database, triggering e-mails to notify the customer when the order is shipped and when it is received.

While the flowers are in transit, customers wanting to find out where an order is can securely log onto the Priority Flowers site with an e-mail address and password. Using the tracking code in the DB2 user profile, IBM WebSphere Application Server accesses the Federal Express tracking site, which displays the current location of the flowers. The seamless connectivity between Priority Flowers and Federal Express enables the two companies to collaborate cost-effectively, providing the customer with fast, efficient service.

DB2 enables robust customer service

Priority Flowers outsources its customer service function. Using Trifecta's adaptation of WebSphere Commerce Suite's customer service functionality, the outside customer service representatives (CSRs) have full access to the orders on DB2 Universal Database. CSRs can speak with customers, and take telephone orders and enter them into the database in realtime. They can also check the customer's order status and complete or change an order for them. CSRs also access the database to conduct live chat sessions with customers and "push" product pages to customers' Web browers.

> *"Even though some of our applications are quite complex, DB2 Universal Database is transparent. We can always see what is happening and optimize it for speed."*
>
> *–Doug Pelletier, President, Trifecta Technologies, Inc.*

IBM Business Partner Trifecta Technologies needed a scalable and robust database capable of supporting complex e-business applications; they found one in IBM DB2 Universal Database.

For Priority Flowers' coupon function, Trifecta created custom tables within DB2 with up to 20,000 coupons at a time, and transmits them to Priority Flowers' marketing partners, who distribute coupons to their employees and customers. On their own sites, the marketing partners can view reports generated by WebSphere Commerce Suite and see which products have been purchased and how many coupons have been redeemed. CSRs also have access to the tables to determine whether a customer's coupon is still valid. Says Jessica Nichols, project manager at Trifecta, "The nice thing about WebSphere Commerce Suite is that we could customize this functionality at a fraction of the cost of stand-alone customer service software. And DB2 has the flexibility that allows us to develop applications enabling multiple entities to access the database securely and make real-time changes to it."

With the performance-monitoring utilities provided by DB2 Universal Database, Trifecta can check query paths to make sure that new applications do not create system blockages. "Even though some of our applications are quite complex, DB2 Universal Database is transparent," says Pelletier. "We can always see what is happening and optimize it for speed."

Two-tier architecture designed for scalability

WebSphere Commerce Suite, Pro Edition, Version 4.1 drives the business logic of the Priority Flowers online flower store, using IBM WebSphere Application Server as a Web server, and to access the Federal Express server. IBM Net.Data retrieves product and order data from DB2 Universal Database. WebSphere Commerce Suite, WebSphere Application Server and Net.Data run on one IBM Netfinity server and DB2 Universal Database runs on another. Trifecta can add more servers as the site scales up.

To host the site, Trifecta became one of the first IBM Certified Hosting Advantage Partners. The designation, which involves a full audit by IBM, enables Trifecta to host and manage sites based on the WebSphere software platform for e-business.

Priority Flowers has witnessed peak buying of 18,000 orders before Valentine's Day and 20,000 before Mother's Day, significantly above its projections. Says Sims, "With this e-business solution based on WebSphere Commerce Suite and developed for us by Trifecta, we can handle 10,000 orders per day as easily as we can handle one. And the quality of the site reinforces the value of our brand."

For more information

Please contact your IBM marketing representative or IBM Business Partner.

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For more information about Priority Flowers, visit: *www.priorityflowers.com*

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