



# Staples means business: new Web site draws corporate buyers.

<b>Application</b>	B-to-B e-commerce: automated ordering for contract customers
<b>Business Benefits</b>	Reduced order processing costs; able to provide new purchasing channel to B-to-B customers
<b>Software</b>	IBM Net.Commerce IBM DB2® Universal Database™ Workgroup Edition IBM MQSeries® IBM WebSphere™ Performance Pack IBM HTTP Server
<b>Hardware</b>	IBM RS/6000® IBM AS/400®
<b>Services</b>	IBM Global Services IBM e-business Services

As retailers rush to set up shop on the Internet, they're discovering that their biggest opportunities lie not with the consumer masses but with the massive purchasing power of other businesses. Gartner Group's latest estimate indicates that business-to-business (B-to-B) e-commerce will generate \$7.3 trillion worth of sales transactions worldwide by 2004.\*

But Staples—the leading B-to-B e-commerce marketplace—realized that tapping into that burgeoning market is easier said than done. In addition to accommodating the business processes associated with corporate procurement,

Staples needed to integrate the terms and conditions of the individual contracts through which it services its medium- and large-size business customers.

*“IBM’s B-to-B e-commerce solution has enabled Staples to bring a new purchasing channel to its medium- and large-size business customers.”*

*– Anne-Marie Keane, Vice President of Business-to-Business Electronic Commerce, Staples.com*



IBM leveraged its knowledge of Staples' back-end AS/400 architecture to Web-enable key shopping, ordering and order tracking functions on StaplesLink.com.

Staples, a multi-billion dollar retailer that pioneered the office supply superstore industry, had already launched a B-to-B online solution and was experiencing a demand exceeding its capacity. It became clear to Staples' senior IT and executive management that increased scalability and an integrated back end were key to a successful B-to-B e-commerce approach.

Staples turned to IBM to design, develop and implement its new Internet ordering system — StaplesLink.com — with a scalable architecture and integration with back-end ordering systems.

In a short period of time, IBM was able to complete the development and testing of StaplesLink.com. The key: using the Application Framework for e-business to combine standards-based e-commerce software, middleware and hardware with proven industry and systems integration expertise.

"IBM's B-to-B e-commerce solution has enabled Staples to bring a new purchasing channel to its medium- and large-size business customers," says Anne-Marie Keane, vice president of business-to-business electronic commerce for Staples.com. "Needless to say, the Web site has also reduced our cost of processing orders.

#### Meeting unique B-to-B needs

The online ordering system, based on IBM Net.Commerce PRO (now part of the IBM WebSphere Commerce Suite family), is customized for each contract customer. Items included in the contract are highlighted in the online catalog, and contract-specific prices appear on the online order form.

A custom shopping list function on the site speeds repeat ordering, as does the Quick Order option, which enables customers to add items by entering the SKU instead of browsing the catalog.

The catalog and contract information are stored in IBM DB2 Universal Database Workgroup Edition, running on an IBM RS/6000 server. Two additional RS/6000 servers house the Web server software — IBM HTTP Server — as well as Net.Commerce. A fourth RS/6000 server houses the load-balancing component of IBM WebSphere Performance Pack (formerly IBM Network Dispatcher).

Because employees purchasing office products must obtain approval from various sources within their companies, StaplesLink.com also incorporates a purchase authorization process. Approved orders are automatically routed by IBM MQSeries to Staples' back-end order processing and fulfillment systems, running on IBM AS/400 servers. Order status information is periodically fed back to the Net.Commerce system by MQSeries, allowing corporate buyers to see the status of their orders in near realtime.

According to Keane, the success of the project was the result of the concerted efforts of IBM and Staples. "The breadth of IBM Global Services' capabilities, and its ability to work closely with Staples.com business and IT teams, allowed us to complete the project under a very aggressive schedule," she says.

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\* "B-to-B May Hit \$7.3 Trillion by 2004," *The Industry Standard*, January 27, 2000.

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