



# *Best-of-Italy.com offers premium Italian products to consumers in 80 countries.*

**Application** B-to-C boutique mall offering premium Italian products from more than 30 vendors

**Business Benefits** 1,000% first-year revenue growth to \$2 million in annual revenues; customer savings of 20% to 40% over traditional retail channel; 25% reduction in development cycle, with full-featured Web site launched in three months; up to 7,000 visitors per day; low-overhead sales channel for vendors

**Software** IBM Net.Commerce  
IBM DB2® Universal Database™ for Windows NT®

Italy. For many, the name evokes images of romantic venues, sidewalk cafes and timeless art. For others, exquisite consumer goods from supple leather jackets to brilliant Murano glassware come to mind. Until recently, those wanting to enjoy quality Italian products had two options—travel to the country or search expensive retail shops in their own countries.

Today there's an easier way—online boutique Best-of-Italy.com. Based in Bressanone/Brixen in the northern, German-speaking part of Italy, Best-of-Italy.com offers premium and hard-to-find products for more than 30 vendors, including fashion items,

jewelry, gourmet foods, home and garden supplies, handicrafts and fine wines to consumers worldwide.

*“The day we decided to start the company was the day we bought DB2 and Net.Commerce. They are flexible and functional, and their price performance easily surpassed other solutions we reviewed.”*

*– Walter Schramm, Founder and President, Best-of-Italy.com*



*Best-of-Italy.com offers premium products from more than 30 Italian vendors to consumers worldwide using IBM e-business technology.*



*It's about business, not just technology.*



*After submitting orders, consumers receive e-mail confirmations, which include a tracking number and a link to the UPS Web site.*

Before opening Best-of-Italy.com's virtual doors, Founder and President Walter Schramm knew that the e-commerce site had to be developed with the needs of customers, business partners and the future in mind. That meant finding software suited to creating and running a convenient, flexible Web portal. It meant being able to share order information easily with vendors hosting stores in the online mall in realtime. And based on Schramm's market research, it also meant building an IT infrastructure that would accommodate rapid growth.

The same careful research that led Schramm to e-commerce also led him to IBM, which he found was repeatedly listed as having the best-of-breed solution in industry reports. Schramm opted to power the online shopping mall using IBM Net.Commerce (now part of the IBM WebSphere™ Commerce Suite family) and IBM DB2 Universal Database for Windows NT. "The day we decided to start the company was the day we bought Net.Commerce and DB2," says Schramm. "They are flexible and functional, and their price performance easily surpassed other solutions we reviewed." The IBM account team subsequently worked with the executive team from Best-of-Italy.com to create a detailed e-business strategy, including an IT architectural infrastructure, implementation objectives and plans for future growth.

#### **The best products at the best prices**

Best-of-Italy.com, which ships to discriminating consumers in 80 countries around the world, is finding the market for Italian products to be a lucrative one. The company realized a 1,000 percent revenue growth in its first year—from \$200,000 to \$2 million. By offering products online, Best-of-Italy.com is also able to maintain lower overhead costs and consequently offer its customers Italian list prices, which are 20 percent to 40 percent lower than the average prices found in U.S. brick-and-mortar retail shops.

The 30 vendors represented comprise a virtual "Who's Who" of Italy's most respected brands and retailers, including Munari, Ferrari, Venini, La Pavoni and Italcaffe. And the business-to-consumer (B-to-C) Web site is so friendly and easy to use that *Business Week* named it a top Internet shopping site, along with some of the most recognized e-commerce names in the U.S.\*

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*—Walter Schramm*

### **The e-commerce solution of choice, right from the start**

IBM software has been instrumental in helping Best-of-Italy.com achieve its goals. For example, the scalability of DB2 is being leveraged as Schramm's growth expectations are realized. In its first year, traffic on the site grew from 500 unique visitors each day to more than 7,000. The site catalog—stored in DB2 Universal Database for Windows NT—lists 1,000 items, including 400 wine items. And for those who want to see Italy (and other countries) for themselves, Best-of-Italy.com also serves as a portal to a growing number of select travel sites where visitors can review information and book hotels and tours.

“DB2 is a very scalable and flexible solution. Theoretically, we could put millions of products into the catalog,” says Schramm. “And because DB2 is an industry standard and so widely used in Europe, we're already realizing the benefits of easy integration as we link directly to the inventory and warehousing systems of our suppliers.” Best-of-Italy.com plans to integrate IBM WebSphere Application Server, Advanced Edition later this year, thereby allowing it to automate communications between front-end transactions and supplier back-end systems.

In addition to the ease of integration with the systems of its business partners, Schramm notes that Best-of-Italy.com's standardization on DB2—and the credibility earned by its association with IBM—has been a plus in signing up top vendors, too. Because many of them use the database, they already understand its many advantages.

### **Ease of use for vendors and customers**

“Net.Commerce and DB2 provide vendors—with stores on the Web site—with a means of selling efficiently and securely,” explains Schramm. “We're able to offer vendors new markets while creating very little overhead. In turn, they can give us a good price, which we pass along to our customers.”

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*Consumers around the world can now savor the taste of Italy's finest gourmet foods at [finigourmet.com](http://finigourmet.com), one of many Italian merchants with stores at [Best-of-Italy.com](http://Best-of-Italy.com).*

Customers receive more than low prices. To ensure prompt order fulfillment, vendors agree to log on to the Web site each day to check and download their orders. DB2 Universal Database makes the process almost effortless — delivering order information along with an e-mail that alerts the supplier to the new order. Best-of-Italy.com has a global contract with United Parcel Service (UPS) to deliver items, so suppliers simply place one call and UPS picks up the shipment. For high volume items and to accommodate vendors who do not wish to fulfill their own orders, Best-of-Italy.com has a warehouse and fulfillment department. Best-of-Italy.com plans to migrate to the most recent release of IBM WebSphere Commerce Suite, Pro Edition (formerly IBM Net.Commerce) later this year, citing its support for Java™ and XML technologies as key factors.

Net.Commerce and DB2 lend a helping hand in delivering on Schramm's commitment to complete customer satisfaction in other ways. For instance, DB2 places a notification on the Best-of-Italy.com system when a product is out of stock. This eliminates potential frustration that results when a customer thinks an order is on the way, only to discover otherwise later. When an order is placed, Net.Commerce automatically generates an e-mail to confirm each order. The confirmation includes a tracking number with a link to the UPS Web site, allowing customers to track their order status. This process helps keep customers happy while lowering administrative costs and customer service overhead for Best-of-Italy.com.

#### **Faster development, guaranteed enhancements**

The flexibility and functionality of Net.Commerce and DB2 helped Best-of-Italy.com develop and deploy its Web site in three months. Schramm estimates that this is one quarter of the time that would have been required to create the site from scratch.

“We were able to easily adapt the package to target local market needs for different taxes, shipping costs and languages,” notes Schramm. He wanted buyers to view tailored product prices incorporating the appropriate taxes and shipping costs based on the order destination. And to accommodate consumers from Best-of-Italy.com's largest initial markets, the site is available in both English and German. Plans for Italian, French and Japanese versions are underway.

Best-of-Italy.com is confident the Web site will scale with its fast-track growth. “This industry changes quickly, and we want to focus on improving our business, not our software,” says Schramm. “Having the backing of IBM and industry-standard solutions such as Net.Commerce and DB2 Universal Database ensures that we always have the most current functionality on our site. We will never be obsolete.”

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\*“E-tips for Europe's Santas,” *Business Week*, November 15, 1999.

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