

Mikasa sets a world-class table with integrated IBM software platform.

Overview

■ Challenge

Web-enable Mikasa's full product catalog by integrating online store with backend systems, so customers can search and purchase easily and efficiently; minimize time-to-market for new Web site features

■ Solution

Mikasa.com, a multifunctional online store featuring a fast, intuitive catalog search engine, a gift registry and personalization capabilities; the store is integrated with Mikasa's backend ERP, inventory and fulfillment systems

■ Why IBM?

IBM solution provided unmatched scalability, quick response times, reliable transaction processing as well as a robust development environment; IBM offered in-depth retail e-business experience

■ Key Business Benefits

Ability to carry 20,000 SKUs compared to 400 in previous e-commerce site; improved customer service; shorter time-to-market and cost savings through use of existing fulfillment system; 100% ROI within projected timeframe

■ Business Partner

Pulver Technologies



Mikasa offers one of the largest selections of dinnerware in the world with as many as 500 patterns available at any one time.

For many people, creating an exquisite table setting is a passion—one that keeps makers of fine china and crystal tableware going strong. One such enterprise is Mikasa, Inc., based in Secaucus, New Jersey. With a workforce of 3,200 employees, Mikasa has long been recognized as the leader in tabletop fashion in dinnerware, crystal stemware, barware, flatware and decorative accessories for the home. The company distributes through 167 Mikasa retail outlets as well as leading department stores and boutiques across North America.

“Before, very few of our customers knew that we carried 20,000 products. Now, thanks to IBM and Pulver Technologies, customers can navigate that entire range online, and order in seconds.”

—Seth Rubin, Director of e-Commerce Marketing, Mikasa, Inc.

Key Components

Software

- IBM WebSphere® Commerce Professional Edition
- IBM WebSphere Application Server Advanced Edition
- IBM WebSphere Studio Application Developer
- IBM WebSphere Commerce Studio
- IBM DB2® Universal Database™ for Windows NT®
- IBM DB2 Text Extender
- SAP R/3

Servers

- IBM Intel processor-based server
 - IBM @server iSeries™
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Finding the right piece of china is one of the pleasures of collecting a pattern, so knowing what is available is essential. With more than 20,000 different items and a multitude of patterns, Mikasa sought a virtual marketing channel that could present its impressive variety more effectively than any traditional store. But the company's original Web storefront—lacking an automated inventory-tracking mechanism—carried only 400 products, hardly a representative selection. To make matters worse, employees had to re-input order information to get the warehouse to ship each item, because Mikasa's Web site was not integrated with its backend fulfillment systems.

Aware that it was missing sales opportunities, Mikasa began searching for a vendor that could put its entire catalog on the Web and assist in redeveloping the Web site as a fully integrated e-business solution. The search ended with another world-class brand—IBM—and the WebSphere software platform for e-business from IBM. Mikasa chose WebSphere software because it provides scalability, quick response times and reliable transaction processing, as well as a robust development environment for quickly creating customized applications. "We were seeking industrial-strength technology with a worldwide reputation for quality, and that's what we got with IBM and WebSphere software," says Erik Redmond, Internet project manager, Mikasa.

The next step was to find an integration team with in-depth experience in implementing and customizing Web sites for large direct merchandisers. Mikasa selected an e-business implementation group that is now part of Phoenix, Arizona-based Pulver Technologies (formerly part of Web Emporium). Says Redmond, "We chose the Pulver Technologies team because of its proven expertise and collaborative approach, which complemented our IT style."

Leveraging the out-of-the-box functionality of IBM WebSphere Commerce Professional Edition, which enables developers to quickly tailor solutions to fit specific business needs, the Pulver Technologies team built Mikasa's new online storefront at www.mikasa.com in just 12 weeks. Pulver Technologies now hosts the site and processes Mikasa's orders and payments. Because the site has been integrated with Mikasa's inventory and fulfillment systems, customers can't inadvertently order out-of-stock items, and fulfillment costs are kept low. "Before, very few of our customers knew that we carried 20,000 products," says Seth Rubin, director of e-commerce marketing at Mikasa. "Now, thanks to IBM and Pulver Technologies, customers can navigate that entire range online, and order in seconds. Because we can process the orders automatically, back-office personnel are relieved of keying in order data and can concentrate on more productive tasks. We're confident we have already achieved our projected return on investment."

"DB2 Text Extender allowed us to create a lenient and responsive search engine that works with the customer and helps produce the desired search result quickly."

—Dave Pulver, President and CEO, Pulver Technologies

Complete, integrated e-business solution

By leveraging Mikasa's backend systems, Pulver Technologies was able to move to the Web quickly with an integrated solution that utilized the e-business strengths of DB2 and WebSphere software from IBM, saving the cost of reworking existing fulfillment applications. Today, in addition to hosting the site, Pulver Technologies automatically routes orders to Mikasa's SAP R/3 enterprise resource planning (ERP) system on an IBM @server iSeries system, setting the fulfillment process in motion at the warehouse.

"Pulver Technologies had our online store up, running and integrated with our legacy ERP system even before we implemented the SAP R/3 solution," Rubin says. "It was only recently that Mikasa made a strategic decision to implement the ERP platform from SAP—IBM's e-business technology alliance partner. The implementation team was able to switch the legacy ERP-integrated Web site transparently to the SAP platform, thanks to the strong SAP optimization built into IBM's e-business software products."

Creating a unique shopping experience

Mikasa stocked its new Web site with thousands of products—and with unique features such as an online gift registry. Since Mikasa replicates its product and customer data between its Web site and its point-of-sale systems, the gift registries on the site and in the stores are always synchronized. Comments Redmond, "Integrating our solutions across both retail channels makes it easy and convenient for customers to purchase where they like. And DB2 provides the robust, scalable database we need to manage data for both channels."

Through the "MyMikasa" member registry, customers can register their own patterns, enabling Mikasa to send e-mail promotions based on customer preferences and shopping behavior. Members can also review past orders and store various addresses for convenience at gift-giving times.

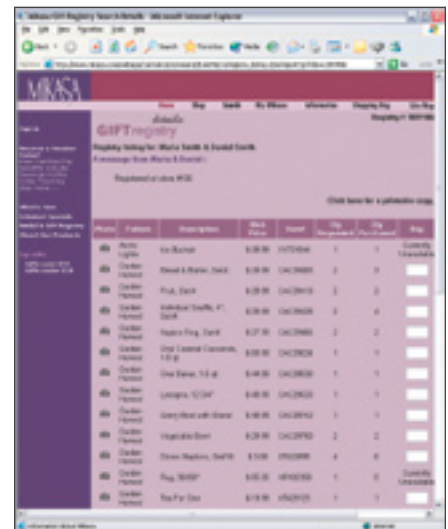
Spelled it wrong? DB2 gets it right!

To help Mikasa's customers find products quickly—even without the correct product name—Pulver Technologies used IBM DB2 Text Extender to create a search engine. With the sophisticated thesaurus, phonetic search and fuzzy search technology that DB2 Text Extender provides, customers can find products even if they misspell product names or describe them inaccurately.

Says Dave Pulver, president and CEO of Pulver Technologies, "DB2 Text Extender allowed us to create a lenient and responsive search engine that works with the customer and helps produce the desired search result quickly."

"With our IBM WebSphere e-commerce solution, customers will come back again and again because we're providing outstanding service as well as outstanding china."

—Erik Redmond, Internet Project Manager, Mikasa



By purchasing online through Mikasa's gift registry, shoppers can automatically have items shipped directly to the registered party.

Solution provides robust infrastructure

When a customer places an order on the mikasa.com Web site, custom applications developed by Pulver Technologies securely transmit the order information to Mikasa's iSeries server, where additional custom applications pass it to SAP R/3. The SAP software verifies key details such as item identity and pricing, transaction total and customer address. Mikasa's homegrown applications upload orders to the warehouse at night. When orders are shipped, Mikasa sends the shipping details to Pulver Technologies, along with a notification to process payment.

IBM DB2 Universal Database for Windows NT, residing on an IBM Intel processor-based server, manages all the product and customer information for the Web site and stores. WebSphere Commerce Professional Edition and IBM WebSphere Application Server

Advanced Edition run on a separate Intel processor-based server. WebSphere Application Server manages transactions with the database, delivers Web pages to users through IBM HTTP Server and runs the Java™ code that powers some of the site's features. To develop this code, Pulver Technologies used IBM WebSphere Studio Application Developer. The firm developed catalog pages with IBM WebSphere Commerce Studio. "WebSphere software provides a powerful development environment that will enable Mikasa.com to be first-to-market with fresh, innovative features as customer needs and requirements evolve," Pulver notes.

Building good relationships with customers is critical to Mikasa, because customers keep their tableware for years, replacing and adding pieces regularly. "With our IBM WebSphere e-commerce solution, customers will come back again and again," says Redmond, "because we're providing outstanding service as well as outstanding china."

For more information

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