IBM

Napleton ignites $40 million revenue jump with online auto fleet sales.

Overview

- **Challenge**
  Improve customer service; accommodate rapid business growth without increasing staff; increase market exposure to facilitate customer acquisition

- **Solution**
  B2B Web site integrated with backend ordering system, providing online order entry, as well as order status reports and industry-related content

- **Why IBM**
  Lotus® Notes® and Lotus Domino™ functionality and ease of use suited Napleton's small-business needs

- **Key Business Benefits**
  100% payback in 2 years, with a 50% ROI; 59% growth in revenues over 3 years; 60% of revenues generated through the Web site; 15-20% increase in customer base; 2 major customers have become exclusive Napleton accounts; 75% reduction in paperwork

- **Business Partner**
  Vision Enterprises LLC

Part of the Napleton Dealership Group, Napleton Fleet offers a wide choice of cars and trucks from its 20 award-winning dealerships.

An unassuming hyperlink on the Napleton Fleet Web site reads, "Meet the Napleton Staff." Click on it, and up comes a list of nine devoted fleet professionals. Nothing about the company's size seems out of the ordinary — until you realize that Napleton Fleet (Napleton) sells nearly 7,000 cars and trucks every year to the likes of Dana Corporation, Motorola, Allstate Insurance, McDonald's and Boston Market, generating annual revenues of $108 million.

"The personalized service provided by our staff had always been a competitive asset, but it was getting increasingly difficult to serve our growing customer base adequately with paper-based order entry and status updates."

— Rick Nicoletti, General Manager, Napleton Fleet

e business

e-business — redefining the competitive environment in your favor

Key Components

Software

- Lotus Domino R5
- Lotus Notes R5

"I was so impressed with Lotus Notes and Domino that I never really looked at any other solution … Lotus Notes and Domino make it easy for me to manage my Web site and my business at the same time."

– Rick Nicoletti

As recently as three years ago, the Chicago-based fleet sales company took all its orders — from corporate fleet managers and leasing companies — by phone or fax. Either way, a Napleton employee had to spend time filling out order forms before the order information could be transferred to the company's backend system. As customers awaited their vehicles, Napleton would mail out weekly delivery status reports. And despite the reports, the company was inundated with status inquiries, not only from fleet managers but from their drivers eager to take delivery.

In the mid-1990s, Napleton Fleet General Manager Rick Nicoletti realized that with its labor-intensive order-entry and customer-service procedures, Napleton could not grow its business fast enough to compete against larger fleet sales and management companies. "The personalized service provided by our staff had always been a competitive asset," Nicoletti says. "But it was getting increasingly difficult to serve our growing customer base adequately with paper-based order entry and status updates."

Napleton's vision was to create a comprehensive online point of contact through which customers could place orders, get order-status updates and obtain useful fleet-related content. The Web site would also serve as a sales tool, driving awareness of and interest in Napleton, which would ostensibly shorten Napleton's sales cycle.

Vision helps drive e-business success

As Nicoletti was pondering which technologies would help get his e-business idea off the ground, a software consultant recommended Lotus Notes and Domino. She also put Nicoletti in touch with local IBM and Lotus Business Partner Vision Enterprises, which demonstrated the technology's potential for Napleton's business. Very quickly, Nicoletti realized that the Lotus software's combination of powerful Web-enabling and content management functions — with ease of use and low maintenance — was the right fit for Napleton. "I was so impressed with Lotus Notes and Domino that I never really looked at any other solution," he says.

Leveraging its extensive experience in Lotus Notes and Domino Web development and backend integration, Vision developed the Napleton Fleet Web site in just 16 weeks. The site uses Lotus Notes R5 and Domino R5 to drive AutoOrder, a secure self-service vehicle-ordering application, which is integrated through LotusScript with Napleton's backend ordering system. The Lotus software also delivers online status reports and publishes Napleton's company information and industry content on its Web site.

According to Nicoletti, the company now generates 60 percent of its revenues online. And although Napleton continues to enable customers to order by phone and fax, the online system has already cut the company's paperwork by 75 percent. Even more impressive are Napleton's business results, in light of a highly competitive and recently depressed fleet sales market. "Since we began taking orders online three years ago, we've seen our annual sales increase from $68 million to $108 million," Nicoletti points out. He figures Napleton recouped its investment in the IBM e-business solution in its first two years of operation and has since obtained a 50 percent incremental return on that investment.

Much of that additional business has come from a 15-to-20 percent increase in Napleton's customer base. The convenience of the company's online ordering has also convinced two existing clients—Dana Corporation and Motorola—to consolidate all of their fleet business with Napleton.

Lotus Notes and Domino offer security and simplicity
To use AutoOrder, customers logon to a secure page of Napleton.com with a user name and password. Access control lists in Domino ensure that only authorized fleet managers can place orders. The Web order form is a Notes form that Domino publishes in HTML format. Submitting the completed form online triggers Domino to send an e-mail notification to the appropriate Napleton representative, who reviews and approves the order, then transfers it to the backend system through a batch process that Vision created using LotusScript.

Napleton's online ordering has been a big selling point with fleet managers, and it has freed Napleton's staff to focus on providing more value-added services.

Napleton's backend system communicates electronically with the vehicle manufacturers' systems, sending new orders and receiving the latest vehicle status and delivery information. Every night, the manufacturers send Napleton delivery dates and the status of each vehicle on order, which are relayed to Domino through another LotusScript process, making the information available to fleet managers the next day.

Vision also leveraged the security features of Domino R5 to enable individual drivers—who are not authorized users of AutoOrder—to check the delivery status of their vehicles online, using their names and vehicle identification numbers. This relatively simple application modification, implemented just a few months ago, has made a huge difference in customer satisfaction. "I was amazed at how many e-mails I got from drivers thanking us for enabling them to check up on their new cars," Nicoletti says.

Easy to maintain, ready to evolve

As an e-business infrastructure, Lotus Notes and Domino provide the functionality and security Napleton needs —without the complexity inherent in more sophisticated solutions. Using Lotus Notes Navigators, Nicoletti— who also functions as Napleton.com's webmaster—can easily edit the order forms, the status report templates and all the Web site content. When he saves a Navigator document, Domino automatically publishes the updated information on the Web. "Lotus Notes and Domino make it easy for me to manage my Web site and my business at the same time," Nicoletti says.

Later this year, Vision will help Napleton add other functions to the site, including automated billing and realtime vehicle pricing. "I view e-business as a constant evolution," Nicoletti concludes, "and Vision Enterprises is a part of that evolution. The more we work with them, the more intimately they understand our business needs and the more valuable they become."

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