

# Halfords' online sales soar 250 per cent with e-commerce solution from Salmon and IBM

## Overview

### ■ The Challenge

*Halfords wanted to boost sales by updating its Web site to provide a fully-integrated, multi-channel e-commerce solution. To make the most of the approaching Christmas period, the company needed a partner capable of delivering a solution fast.*

### ■ The Solution

*Worked with Salmon (www.salmon.com), an IBM Premier Business Partner, to deploy IBM WebSphere Commerce, linking core SAP systems to a new Web front-end, in line with the latest retail and technology standards.*

### ■ The Benefits

*Online sales increased by 250 per cent, giving it the highest turnover of any Halfords store; new functionalities encourage cross- and up-sell, raising average order value by 40 per cent; integration facilitates multi-channel sales effort.*



Halfords Group plc is the UK's leading auto, leisure and cycling products retailer, with around 420 stores and 10,000 employees. The group sells 11,000 different product lines, ranging from car parts and cycles through to the latest in-car technology, alloy wheels, child seats and roof boxes, as well as outdoor leisure and camping equipment.

Halfords' strategy for growth is to maintain and leverage its core strengths: the trusted brand and the scale and reach of its national retail chain.

When Halfords was sold by Boots to venture capital group CVC in 2002, IT

and business change was inevitable, as the company needed to separate itself from Boots' IT infrastructure. As part of this business change, Halfords wanted to improve its online shopping channel.

The existing site was proving difficult to manage and costly to maintain, and had already outgrown its underlying e-commerce infrastructure. Built originally to give customers basic online interaction with the Halfords' brand, the site was struggling to cope with growing volumes of traffic, and was unable to cater for the company's ambitions to increase sales still further.

Jon Asbury, Channel Development Manager at Halfords, comments: "Looking back, the reality was that we would have struggled to get through Christmas with the old site."



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Jon Asbury  
Channel Development Manager  
Halfords Group plc

### **Selecting a technology partner**

Halfords chose Salmon, an IBM Premier Business Partner, to develop, integrate and support a new e-commerce solution, using IBM WebSphere Commerce as the technical platform.

Salmon demonstrated the desired level of retail experience and had the skills required to build and integrate a multi-channel solution. Halfords chose to deploy IBM WebSphere Commerce because of its scalability, open technology standards and ability to support best-in-class, mission-critical enterprise applications. The WebSphere solution runs on the SUSE Linux Enterprise Server operating system.

“Choosing the IBM WebSphere technology was an easy decision,” says Jon Asbury. “Selecting the right partner to implement the solution was more difficult. We chose Salmon because they demonstrated a better understanding of the retail industry and had experience of delivering multi-channel solutions for some of the largest retailers in the UK – including the award winning Argos website. They also came highly recommended by our Head of Business Systems, who had worked with them previously at jungle.com.”

Halfords’ confidence in Salmon’s expertise paid off, as Jon Asbury explains: “Salmon’s project management was very good. A clearly-defined process underpinned the whole project. From the start, Salmon clearly understood our requirements. The functional specification was of a high quality, and we had very good visibility of what was happening throughout the project.”

### **Delivery in just 90 days**

Salmon began working on the project in July 2006, with a delivery deadline of the end of September – the pre-Christmas development cut-off date – which gave Salmon just 90 days to deliver the project. Halfords wanted the site up and running quickly and cost-effectively, as Jeff Leaver, Chief Operations Officer of Salmon, explains:

“The new e-commerce solution had to provide a future proof-online platform for Halfords to embrace multi-channel operations and it had to be done quickly. Halfords was aiming for the site to be its most successful outlet during the Christmas season – a target which we achieved.”

Salmon made use of a standard IBM WebSphere Commerce application framework, so that upgrading to subsequent versions of WebSphere would create minimal disruption and expense. As Halfords had already decided on the look and feel of the site, Salmon began the project with development of its schematics and functional dynamic pages, in line with industry standards such as CSS, XHTML and J2EE.

To help Halfords achieve its objectives of increasing online sales and optimising online search and merchandising, Salmon had to improve conversion rates and provide a better shopping experience for customers.

WebSphere Commerce helped Halfords achieve better navigation, minimizing the number of clicks required to get to each product, displaying product information in a more logical way, and introducing a

number of search-filtering options. Web site functionality was also extended in a number of other areas, including registration and check-out processes, and support for vouchers and promotions.

Salmon worked with Halfords' in-house team to integrate the solution with the core SAP fulfilment system and to the product catalogue, which holds all the information on more than 33,000 products. Stock levels and product descriptions are fed to the product pages from this catalogue, enabling the quick creation of new online product descriptions, and allowing Halfords' customers to check specifications and see if the products they want are currently available. Recommended accessories are also suggested when the user adds a product to their basket, aiding cross selling.

The Salmon and IBM solution also offers Halfords a number of innovative features, helping to set the Halfords brand apart from its competitors. For example, a 'Car Selector' feature gives customers the ability to match audio equipment, wiper blades and accessories to their make and model of car.

After testing was completed, and once the site had gone live, Salmon provided daily support to ensure any issues were dealt with quickly and efficiently. At the same time Salmon provided knowledge transfer to enable Halfords' staff to manage changes, content, and product and promotional requirements.

### **Multi-channel e-commerce integration**

Halfords now has a solid e-commerce platform, developed in line with both

retail and technology standards. The site is increasingly integrated with its other channels – helping Halfords become a true multi-channel retailer. With improved usability and increased functionality, the site is more efficient to manage and maintain, and customers can find what they are looking for quickly and easily.

"Sales have increased by 250 per cent since the re-launch of [www.halfords.com](http://www.halfords.com), making it our highest turnover store, and the most visited sports and leisure website in the UK," comments Jon Asbury.

The site now receives over 200,000 visitors per week, and sales conversion has improved substantially – the average order value is over 40 per cent higher than before. Offline sales have increased too, as many customers now choose to browse online before visiting their local store.

Halfords plans to maintain its investment in its multi-channel strategy until all channels are fully integrated, allowing any order, through any channel, to be delivered anywhere – ensuring the highest level of customer satisfaction.

Salmon will continue to develop new capability, features and functions to enhance the customer experience, adding value to Halfords' business by offering advice and guidance to help Halfords substantiate its position as an industry leader. With IBM WebSphere technology and Salmon's expertise, Halfords is confident of a bright future in a competitive environment.

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*Jon Asbury  
Channel Development Manager  
Halfords Group plc*



**IBM United Kingdom Limited**

PO Box 41  
North Harbour  
Portsmouth  
Hampshire  
PO6 3AU

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