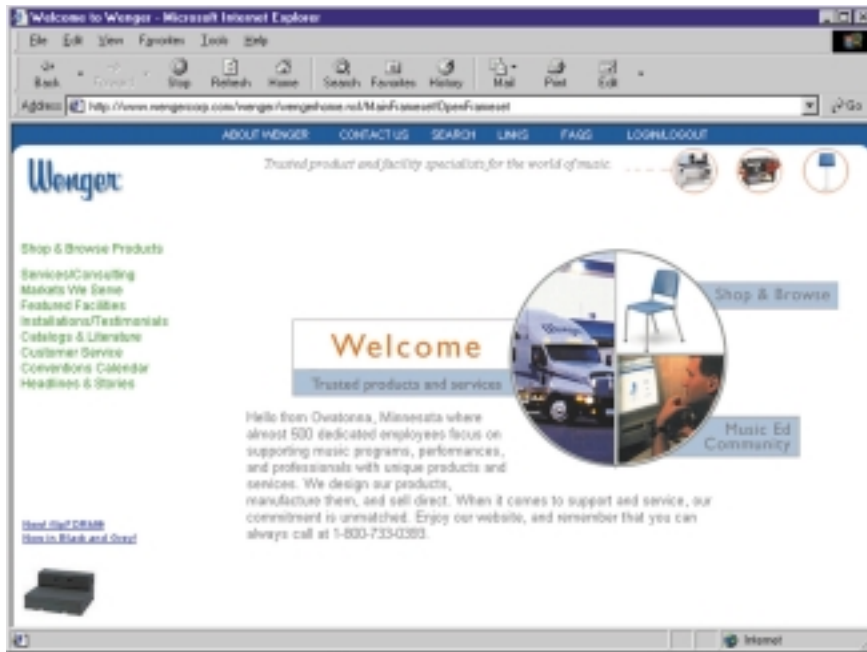# Wenger Corporation Expands Sales by Bringing Self-Service to Customers

It sounds like a dot-com business plan from the late 1990's: a highly specialized e-commerce site, catering to music educators and performers. But Wenger Corporation represents the new mainstream of Internet players. Wenger has already done the hard work of growing a successful traditional business. New Web tools and technologies offer an opportunity to break through some of the traditional inhibitors to its growth -- not by replacing its people and its brick-and-mortar assets, but by augmenting them with online service, ordering and collaboration.

Using Domino and WebSphere

For over a half century, Wenger has provided music educators and performers worldwide with everything from choral risers to acoustic shelving to conductor's batons. Today, Wenger is putting its relationships and expertise to work in a whole new venue. Using IBM WebSphere and Lotus Domino for AS/400, Wenger and Lotus Business Partner netASPx have created a complete e-commerce Web site that delivers better service to customers, streamlines sales, and opens up a world of new growth opportunities.

New mandates for growth

Wenger has built a loyal customer base through direct, consultative sales, and by being the only company to provide a complete suite of music performance products. With hundreds of products in their catalog, a typical sale can be complex. "There are literally hundreds of ways of putting these products together to meet the needs of a performing group, and often products must be made to order," says Gregg Nelson, Wenger Manager of Marketing Services. "As a result, we've established an expert staff of 36 inside sales people, and about 20 in the field working every day with customers."

Need -- sales not constrained by sales resources

Yet Wenger management became aware of the limitations of this model. In relying exclusively on direct sales mediated by a skilled sales person, sales volume is constrained by the availability of sales resources. It is also a system with some inefficiencies, such as paper orders that needed to be re-entered into Wenger's backend systems. Through the years Wenger's systems and procedures have served the customer base well, and contributed to the success of Wenger. However, market and business demands clearly called for a new strategy.

"We needed to better serve our customers, improve or own business model to reduce transaction costs, and attract new customers from the global market."

– Nelson summarizes the mandates he had from management

Selecting Domino and WebSphere

Nelson and his team designed a self-service Web site where customers can browse a catalog for rich product information, 24 hours a day. Wenger wanted a comprehensive solution that could generate quotes, take orders and calculate shipping costs. Wenger knew it needed to accept purchase orders as well as credit cards. Nelson says, "Most of our newer competitors only accept credit card payments. But we've been doing this for years, so we knew the system needed to accept POs. We understand our customers and their needs. Our competitors struggle to do this."

Domino and WebSphere:
"The two work extremely well together . . ."

Working with netASPx, Wenger evaluated technologies to meet these needs. Karen Arens, netASPx Account Executive, explains why Domino and WebSphere were the best choice. "The two work extremely well together. WebSphere Commerce Suite is great at transactions and product catalog management. Domino makes it easy to create content for the rest of the site, because of the built-in workflow and because your people don't need to understand HTML or Java to create professional Web pages."

Opted for Domino and WebSphere
with new growth in mind

Wenger's preferred platform is the IBM AS/400. Joe Lutterman, Wenger's Manager of Information Systems, says, "We wanted to work on the AS/400 for reasons of scalability, reliability and security." The company has a very functional backend production system handling sales, quotes, and manufacturing. They opted for WebSphere and Domino with future growth in mind. "It made sense to start with a store that, down the road, will handle all the growth we could want, but still be flexible enough to add new features and technology, such as real-time audio and video or mobile computer support."

It took about four months for Wenger and netASPx to get the Web site running; they rolled it out two months later.

New customer experience

When customers come to the new Web site, they log on simultaneously to WebSphere and Domino. Domino manages the overall look and feel of the site and displays documents, while WebSphere manages e-catalog transactions and communicates with the production AS/400.

"We leveraged the real benefits of WebSphere Commerce Suite," says netASPx's Todd Meissner, who programmed the WebSphere side of the solution. "It gave us the table infrastructure for the catalog, and also the mechanism to handle the transaction flow. We didn't want to change what we had on our legacy AS/400, we just wanted to use it in a new way." Adds Lutterman, "We completely automated the integration of WebSphere generated quotes and orders with our existing systems. The AS/400 production system that we've used for years still manages our backend data, and still runs our day-to-day applications."

Business logic for the solution continues to reside on the production AS/400. "WebSphere creates transactions, backend programming connects to the sales and quoting application, and the system does what it always did. But now, a more efficient way of entering orders allows our sales people more of an opportunity to service existing customers and more of an opportunity to reach new customers," Lutterman explains.

Adding content --
as simple as creating a document

Adding content to the Web site is as simple as creating a document in a Domino database. Wenger has created an automated workflow that routes each draft document to appropriate approvers, and then posts it to the Web. This has empowered marketing staff to create content instead of having to rely on an IT department. Nelson says, "I can continue to play an active role in maintaining marketing content on the Web. I don't have to know any programming languages. That's an enormous benefit to the company. That's the Domino integration."

More and more customers opting for self-service

From the day the Web site launched, more and more customers are choosing to serve themselves. Wenger is being cautious to maintain the human touch that has served them so well in the past.

Each order is routed to a sales representative who can review it and follow up with a phone call, if needed. There's always a "Contact Us" button available, if customers need help. In the future, Wenger is looking at extending their consultative sales process to the Web by adding real-time collaboration with Lotus Sametime, and by implementing up-selling and cross-selling functionality in WebSphere Commerce Suite.

Attracting new customers through community dialog

To increase brand awareness, Wenger wanted to make the Web site not only a place to transact business, but also a place where members of the music community can communicate with one another. Nelson says, "We wanted to create a site people will come back to." An area of the site is set aside for just this, where community members can post band pictures and information about their venues. There is also a discussion area for community dialog, announcements, etc.

 Wenger is also looking to attract new customers by partnering with other companies with non-competing offerings. This year, they will be exploring options for partnering to offer sheet music, for example, or musical instruments through partnerships via the Web.

Helping customer while lowering cost

Nelson says Wenger is already seeing the benefits. "We're able to help customers help themselves to understand our products and how they interrelate. When a customer does get in touch with a sales rep, they've educated themselves. We're helping our

customers better, while lowering our internal cost of transaction. That's a net win for Wenger and for customers too."

Doing more with the same resources

Lutterman says, "It's going to take the company from traditional brick and mortar and give us the capability of leaping forward, and enabling company growth. Otherwise we were faced with the reality that if we wanted to increase sales, we'd have to grow our sales expense proportionately. Now, with a more efficient site and better customer service, we have the capability to grow our sales volume and do more with the same resources."

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