IBM

Digital Possibilities brings Hoffmaster to the head of the table with interactive catalog

Reaching customers in remote locations and keeping them supplied with up-to-date catalogs has always been an expensive and protracted task for manufacturers. Hoffmaster, a market leader and innovator of premium decorative tableware for the institutional marketplace, has solved this problem with its new interactive online catalog and Web site powered by IBM Net.Commerce. In addition to expanding its market reach, Hoffmaster has uncovered new markets, and has found new ways to reduce labor and materials costs while improving customer service.

> *"Our interactive catalog gives our customers the convenience of browsing at their leisure.… Net.Commerce has given us a way to reach a much wider universe of customers, and has en-abled us to differentiate ourselves as a market leader and innovator in a commodity market."*
>
> —*Bob Korzenski, President, Hoffmaster*

Based in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, Hoffmaster, Division of The Fonda Group, Inc., serves customers in the restaurant, healthcare, education, lodging, and transportation markets through a national network of food service distributors. While the company offers a variety of off-the-shelf table covers, napkins, and

placemats, the design and printing of custom and seasonal tableware is a significant portion of its business.

Over 100,000 copies of the *Hoffmaster Seasonal* catalog are mailed to a wide variety of restaurants and other institutions twice a year. Customers use this catalog to select seasonal and decorative tableware that they can then personalize with their logos, or mix and match to create the perfect ambiance. The catalog allows customers to browse at their leisure, request samples, or call for more information.

Front-end flexibility speeds up design process

The Digital Possibilities Group, an IBM Business Partner certified for Net.Commerce, approached Hoffmaster with the possibility of developing a Web site featuring a convenient

Application	Interactive online catalog with secure credit card ordering
Software	IBM® Net.Commerce IBM DB2® IBM Net.Data™
Hardware	IBM AS/400® PC Server

online catalog with high-quality graphic templates customers could use to select and order fashion designs in real time.

As part of the IBM CommercePOINT™ complete end-to-end electronic commerce solution, Net.Commerce enables businesses to confidently enter the world of online

Raising e-commerce to a new level of responsiveness, Hoffmaster's Net.Commerce-based Web site allows customers to select from a variety of seasonal products online.

commerce. Net.Commerce is ODBC-compliant and includes five software components:
• Net.Commerce Server
• Net.Commerce Administrator
• DB2
• Lotus Domino Go Webserver™
• Net.Data

Using Net.Data, developers transform static HTML Web pages into dynamic Web applications using Web macros. The macros make it easy to add live data to Web pages, including information stored in Hoffmaster's DB2 database.

In this particular application, Net.Commerce is running on Windows NT.® Gene A. Magnetti, managing partner of Digital Possibilities, says, "Net.Commerce's cross-platform capabilities enable our implementation team to work productively with our graphic designers, who are more familiar with Windows NT. No matter what the environment, IBM solves the problem."

Working with customers online in real time

Samples of Hoffmaster's napkins, table covers, placemats, and other institutional paper products are published on the company's Web site at *www.hoffmaster.com.* New customers can view the designs, get helpful hints on decorating, and learn the location of their nearest distributor. Future capabilities include allowing established customers with password access to visit the site and work with Hoffmaster to approve or modify their tableware designs in real time. Compared to sending artwork proofs through the mail, designing on the Web can save Hoffmaster considerable labor and materials costs. And the company gains a competitive edge because the turnaround to the customer is 50 percent faster.

Back-end integration provides compatibility

Using Net.Commerce, Hoffmaster will be able to deliver customized product price lists online to each of its distributors. When a distributor requests a price list, the Net.Commerce software, running on Digital Possibilities' server in New York, can retrieve the distributor-specific pricing information from Hoffmaster's IBM AS/400 server in Wisconsin and merge it with a standard price list template.

Magnetti explains that this back-end compatibility protects Hoffmaster's investment in hardware and software. "It's important to Hoffmaster to have the ability to easily populate its online catalog with information stored in the database at corporate headquarters, and also to incorporate electronic orders back into this database for tracking and fulfillment. Net.Commerce is the only Web catalog tool on the market that offers unlimited customization possibilities while providing the flexibility to integrate front-end processes with the back-end database," he says.

Security for credit card orders

Net.Commerce will also enable Hoffmaster's customers to securely place credit card orders over the Web by means of Secure Electronic Transaction (SET). The SET standard was developed by IBM in conjunction with VISA and MasterCard. The major advantage of SET is that it encodes customer credit card numbers and keeps them hidden from all but the issuing bank. As merchants never see the credit card number, SET offers a very high level of protection.

IBM's advanced solution is cost-effective

Magnetti points out that even though Net.Commerce technology is "far ahead of the competition," it's more cost-effective than other products. "There are competitors selling a single Web catalog component for much more than the price of IBM's complete system. This enables us to provide complete solutions for what other vendors charge for software alone," says Magnetti.

In addition to Net.Commerce's superior price/performance, Bob Korzenski, president of Hoffmaster, is excited about the myriad marketing opportunities made possible by electronic commerce. "Our interactive catalog gives our customers the convenience of browsing at their leisure and buying decorative disposable tableware when *they* want to buy it. In addition to convenience and reduced costs, Net.Commerce has given us a way to reach a much wider universe of customers, and has enabled us to differentiate ourselves as a market leader and innovator in a commodity market."

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