IBM

Queensboro finds Net.Commerce and DB2 a perfect fit.

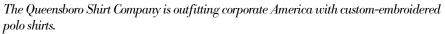|	
Application	Corporate apparel e-commerce Web site
Business Benefits	100% ROI in one year; annual savings of $360,000 in overhead costs; 30% increase in sales in three months; 30% reduction in catalog printing costs; 30% of orders received online, with projection of 50% in two years
Software	IBM Net.Commerce IBM DB2® for AS/400® IBM DB2 Universal Database™ for Windows NT® IBM Net.Data® IBM HTTP Server Java™ technology
Hardware	IBM AS/400
Business Partner	Cephas, Inc.

In a fast-changing corporate world, identity is key. In recent years, the number of corporate acquisitions and mergers has risen to unprecedented levels, leaving many of the resulting companies asking: "Who are we?" The Queensboro Shirt Company, based in Wilmington, North Carolina, has been helping companies answer that question. The company manufactures polo shirts that it will custom-embroider to sport any company logo, product, team name or slogan, giving employees a sense of pride in their collective mission.

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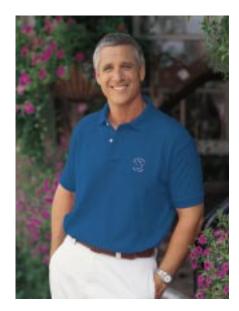
—Steve Little, President, The Queensboro Shirt Company

The Queensboro Shirt Company is outfitting corporate America with custom-embroidered polo shirts.

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e-business

It's about business, not just technology.

Queensboro will embroider shirts with any business, team or event logo.

"Net.Commerce and DB2 provide the reliability and scalability to support our growing e-commerce needs. Together, they are already handling 30 percent of our orders, and I expect that number to reach 50 percent in two years."

–*Steve Little*

Since its founding in 1982, Queensboro had sold its products through catalogs, taking complex orders from corporate customers over the phone. But, beginning this year, the $7 million company began communicating with its clientele through a Web site powered by IBM Net.Commerce, IBM DB2 Universal Database and IBM Net.Data. Designed, implemented and hosted by IBM Business Partner Cephas, Inc., the Web site enables customers to place repeat orders online. This improves the efficiency and speed of order processing while reducing Queensboro's overhead costs. "We are saving $360,000 annually in overhead costs and 30 percent of our catalog printing costs," says Steve Little, president of Queensboro. "As a result, we expect to achieve 100 percent return on investment within one year of deployment."

Do it yourself with Net.Commerce

In designing the Web site, Cephas learned it would require a flexible solution to meet some of Queensboro's unique needs. For example, Queensboro greatly depends on the repeat business of its clients. To encourage repeat purchases, the company uses a three-tiered pricing system, rewarding customers with greater discounts as they buy more from Queensboro. The pricing structure required that the site be tied in to the company's customer information database. "The Web site must be able to recognize an existing customer, know how many pieces they have purchased in the past and tell them how many more items they need to purchase to reach the next discount level," explains Little. "Net.Commerce was really the only product that lent itself to doing this."

In conjunction with Net.Commerce, Cephas uses Net.Data to write macros that make Web site development easier. "Net.Commerce, along with NetData, provides a very powerful environment for developing e-commerce Web sites. It allows you to build tools and libraries that give you richer functionality as you become more familiar with the product," says Randy Rhodes, vice president of operations for Cephas. "Previously, we had been using an internally developed application to create Web sites. But, when Net.Commerce came out, we saw that it was a better business solution."

The company's back-end order processing system runs on an IBM AS/400 server at Queensboro, while the Web site is hosted by Cephas on a Microsoft® Windows NT server with IBM HTTP Server (formerly Domino Go Webserver™). Customer account information is imported from DB2 for AS/400 into DB2 Universal Database for Windows NT on the Web server.

DB2 ready to support rapid growth

"We can attribute 55 percent of our new customer acquisition growth to our Web site," notes Little. "Net.Commerce and DB2 provide the reliability and scalability to support our growing e-commerce needs. Together, they are already handling 30 percent of our orders, and I expect that number to reach 50 percent in two years."

The growth Queensboro is enjoying is placing increasing demands on its server. "To increase our bandwidth, we plan to migrate the Web server to a dedicated IBM RS/6000® server later this year," Rhodes explains. Eventually, Little plans to host the site on Queensboro's own dedicated AS/400 server. Rhodes continues, "The cross-platform flexibility of DB2 makes these transitions worry-free."

Currently, orders generated from the site are manually entered into the back-end AS/400 server at Queensboro. In the next phase of the ongoing rollout, Cephas will integrate the Net.Commerce site with the back-end system, fully automating the order process. "We want to decrease mundane tasks as much as possible. With Net.Commerce taking the orders for us, our staff can focus on providing a higher level of customer service," says Little.

Tailored e-commerce with Java technology

Java technology also played a big role in helping Cephas customize the site to the particular needs of Queensboro's business. While most consumer e-commerce sites are designed for customers buying single items, Queensboro's corporate customers generally purchase several dozen shirts in a variety of sizes and colors. Placing such an order can be tedious on sites that require buyers to add items to a shopping cart one at a time. Because Net.Commerce supports Java technology, Cephas was able to create a Java applet that provides realtime updates of the shopping cart contents. This is particularly helpful in keeping track of large, complex orders.

Cephas also developed "Express Order," an application that creates an order grid displaying shirt styles and colors along one axis and sizes along the other. Customers simply enter the desired quantities in the appropriate row and column in the table. In this manner, an entire order can be filled on one screen and submitted with a single mouse click. The application was designed with a minimal use of graphics to facilitate faster page download. This allows busy purchasing agents—who often already know what they need—to fill in and submit an order without unnecessary delays. JavaScript technology is used to calculate total quantities for the order in realtime.

"Our goal was to have 20 percent of our orders coming through our Web site by the end of 1999. But, we have already reached the 30 percent mark, and the site has been up for only three months! It's been wildly successful."

—Steve Little

Queensboro's new Web site makes shopping for a variety of shirt colors and sizes easy.

Upon submission of the order, Net.Commerce ensures that the transaction is completed securely with industry-standard, 128-bit Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) encryption.

Dressing for success with WebSphere

Queensboro is far from finished with the development of its online catalog. Working with Cephas, the company is continuing to add value to the site, using new development tools that enhance the Web experience. One such development tool that has captured the interest of both Queensboro and Cephas is IBM WebSphere™, a set of software products that helps develop and manage high-performance Web sites. "WebSphere handles servlets with great efficiency," notes Adi Rosenblum, a software engineer at Cephas who helped create the Queensboro site. "That is a big plus for us, because we are always trying to improve performance on the server side. The other big asset of WebSphere is database connectivity. We do a lot of Java connectivity directly to DB2 to extract information and display it in HTML pages. The ability of WebSphere to manage those database connections and to do connection pooling is something we are looking forward to using in future Web site development."

Like the high-quality polo shirts that Queensboro is so proud of, the Web site is made from a complex weave of strong materials. When Queensboro founder Fred Meyers first saw a need for shirts that fit well and wear long, he set out to fulfill it. Now, seeing a need to capture a growing market with improved customer service and automated processing, the Queensboro Shirt Company has added Cephas and IBM e-business solutions to its fabric. The combination appears to be a perfect fit.

Little exclaims, "Our goal was to have 20 percent of our orders coming through our Web site by the end of 1999. But, we have already reached the 30 percent mark, and the site has been up for only three months! It's been wildly successful."

For more information, please contact your IBM marketing representative or IBM Business Partner.

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