IBM

Hitplay Media streams video into dollars with WebSphere Application Server.

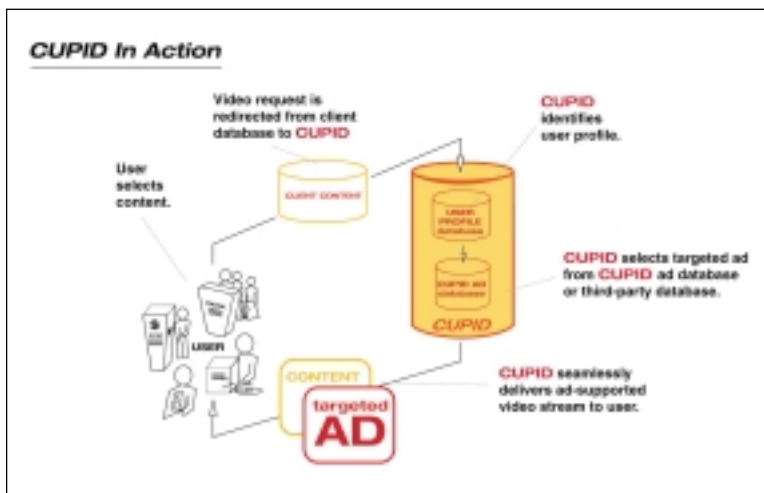|	
Application	Application service provider of targeted video solutions for Web sites, advertisers and corporations
Business Benefits	1,000% growth in number of video deliveries in 4 months; anticipated 5 million ad-supported videos by year end
Software	IBM WebSphere® Application Server, Advanced Edition IBM DB2® Universal Database™ for AIX® IBM HTTP Server IBM VisualAge® for Java™
Servers	IBM Netfinity® IBM RS/6000®
Business Partners	DSS Epoch Internet

Say you're surfing the Net and suddenly have an urge to see downhill skiers churning up Alpine snow. You click onto your favorite video on-demand Web site and choose a skiing video clip. What you see first, however, is a brief video commercial offering discount skiing travel packages. This is interesting, you think. After all, deep down, you wish you were on the slopes.

Matching in-stream video ads with video content and thus capturing users' buying impulses is part of the advertising and media-enabling services of Los Angeles, California-based Hitplay Media (*www.hitplay.com*). Hitplay creates revenue-generating solutions to enable companies to maximize the dollar value of their streaming video activities.

Leveraging Hitplay's proprietary Cupid Targeted Technology platform, Cupid AD provides the latest in targeted video messaging, such as advertising insertion. Cupid-enabled Web sites receive a dynamically targeted advertising solution that includes comprehensive tools and services.

"We chose the WebSphere software platform for e-business because we value IBM's complete e-business solution over any one product."

– Cheryl Lee, Vice President of Engineering, Hitplay Media

CUPID In Action

Hitplay's Cupid AD dynamically inserts brief, targeted video ads matched with video content streams.

e™

e-business

Hitplay, a market leader in targeted video solutions, started up a year ago, poised to take advantage of an untapped streaming media market. According to Todd Harris, Hitplay president and CEO, "The vast majority of Web site owners and corporations do not have the expertise and enabling tools to generate revenue from their broadband video initiatives. We knew how to help them make money, but we needed an absolutely stellar technology infrastructure to reach our vision." The challenge for Hitplay was to find a robust technology platform to support its clients' on-demand video plans.

Positioned on the cutting edge, the company knew that only a thorough evaluation of available software offerings and an astute choice of partners could save it from making costly mistakes. An intensive search of the software market for application servers followed, and Hitplay narrowed the field to Microsoft® IIS, Allaire ColdFusion, BEA WebLogic and IBM WebSphere Application Server.

WebSphere Application Server, part of the IBM WebSphere software platform for e-business, won. "We found competing products to be more difficult to administer than WebSphere Application Server and rejected their operating systems' dependence and proprietary architectures. Hitplay focused on solutions that would be geared toward running applications," according to Hitplay Vice President of Engineering Cheryl Lee. "In the end," says Lee, "we chose the WebSphere software platform for e-business because we value IBM's complete e-business solution over any one product."

Hitplay also chose IBM DB2 Universal Database over Oracle and Microsoft SQL Server. "The features and power of DB2 as well as its performance and scalability were the best fit for Hitplay's streaming video ad insertion needs," says Lee.

Users of Hitplay's Cupid AD place millions of requests for in-stream video messages each month. Those millions of requests for five-to-ten second digital video ads are anticipated to grow rapidly. Hitplay has a scalable e-business infrastructure to support this growth. Already, the company has progressed from delivering 27,000 video streams in March, 2000 to more than 300,000 streams per month by July, 2000. Hitplay will soon serve more than five million ad-supported video streams per month. "We think the market for in-stream video advertising is worth $200 million at this point and we're on track to become the market leader," Harris comments.

Todd Harris, Hitplay president and CEO, is establishing Hitplay as a market leader.

"The relationship with IBM starts at the technical level and moves all the way up to the strategic. They've provided us with strategic consulting, debt financing, hardware and introductions to other strategic partners, such as DSS and Epoch Internet."

– Todd Harris, President and CEO, Hitplay Media

WebSphere solution creates video dollars

Hitplay provides companies with its Cupid Targeted Technology solutions and the value-added services that distinguish Hitplay as a one-stop shop for targeted video messaging. Cupid AD is the first application that dynamically inserts user-targeted advertisements with any streaming video content. Users can be profiled by demographic or psychographic information, providing new opportunities for its network of advertisers who seek "one-to-one" targeted messages. Hitplay's "All-Blue" technology solution is central to equipping Cupid-enabled customers with targeted video ad insertions and the ArrowTrack reporting tools and services that make it a revenue-generating proposition for Web sites.

Click on a video Web site, and if it is Cupid-enabled, the URL will be redirected to the Hitplay system. WebSphere Application Server handles the request and draws from Cupid components residing on WebSphere Application Server at Hitplay's end. These manage the selected Web-site content and seamlessly deliver an ad-supported video stream back to the customer's Web site for the end-user to enjoy. Ads appear either before or after the user's content selection. The Web-site owner receives revenue associated with the ad insertions, as well as detailed reporting.

The company's targeted video insertion service was available following only four months of development. "Thanks to the object-oriented development environment of WebSphere Application Server, we cut our development time in half," says Lee. Supporting industry standards like Java technology and XML, WebSphere Application Server shortens the development cycle and makes it possible to deliver enterprise applications to the Web in the time the market demands.

Behind the dazzle

To implement its solution, Hitplay forged strategic relationships with IBM Premier Business Partners Direct Systems Support (DSS) and Epoch Internet. San Diego, California-based DSS helped to create the application infrastructure for the Web site, leveraging its expertise in configuring large-scale, multi-tier environments. Costa Mesa, California-based Epoch Internet hosts the Hitplay site and provides technical support to Hitplay's personnel.

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– Cheryl Lee

Cupid targeted video ad insertions provide a seamless content experience.

With the help of DSS, Hitplay created the architecture for deploying Cupid that utilizes WebSphere Application Server, Advanced Edition. WebSphere Application Server performs centralized administration and load balancing and provides session information, as well as managing the Java servlets that make up the Hitplay Web site. Notes DSS' technical staff, "The WebSphere Application Server architecture allowed us to create a load-balanced and highly available infrastructure for the Hitplay application without adding excessive complexity in administration." Hitplay's engineers used another component of the WebSphere software platform for e-business—IBM VisualAge for Java—to develop the Java servlets. Hitplay used the Java toolkit included with WebSphere Application Server to debug the servlets.

WebSphere Application Server, along with the Cupid components, sits on IBM Netfinity 7000 servers. Three Netfinity 4000R servers running IBM HTTP Server make up the front end. DB2 Universal Database for AIX, Enterprise Edition, residing on cluster of IBM RS/6000 servers, manages ads, video content, customer information and other data related to the business of billing advertisers and reimbursing Web site owners.

Choosing IBM for the future

An important factor for Hitplay in choosing IBM was its support for large-scale digital video applications. Says Harris, "As streaming becomes a mass market, as it moves from your PC to the set-top box, IBM's stature in the digital video network space is extremely important to us." Another important factor was IBM's leading e-business and wireless platform solutions, which Hitplay plans to integrate in the near future as it develops matching streaming-video technology for the wireless market.

WebSphere Application Server, a component recommended under the IBM Application Framework for e-business, has enabled Hitplay to reach the market quickly with a scalable, stable and robust next-generation solution that differentiates Hitplay in the streaming marketplace. Hitplay and its partners, DSS and Epoch Internet, agree that the benefits of a relationship with IBM have also been important factors in Hitplay's quick evolution from start-up to a leading ASP.

As Harris explains, "The relationship with IBM starts at the technical level and moves all the way up to the strategic. They've provided us with strategic consulting, debt financing, hardware and introductions to other strategic partners, such as DSS and Epoch Internet. IBM is the only company that can understand our vision of the future and match it with resources to help us grow."