

Gill Studios designs success through e-business.

Overview

■ Application

B2B Web-based, self-service order management system

■ Business Benefits

15% increase in new distributors within first month; doubled average hits per day since launch, 132% increase in number of unique visitors; increased upload of artwork; reduced internal costs; increased customer satisfaction; increased productivity within customer service department; strong e-business platform to build future e-commerce capabilities

■ Software

IBM WebSphere® Application Server, Standard Edition; Lotus® Domino™; Lotus Notes®; IBM DB2® Universal Database™ for AS/400® and Windows NT®; IBM DB2 Connect™

■ Servers

IBM AS/400

■ Business Partner

Integro

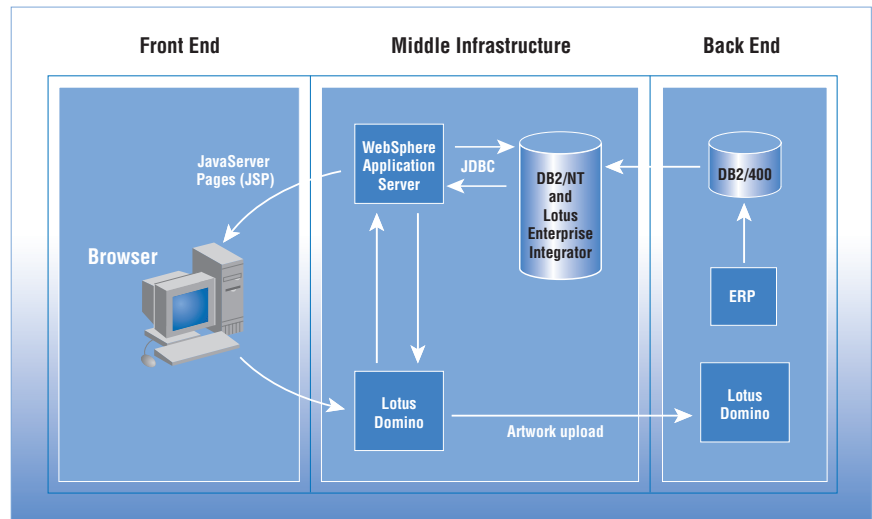


Figure 1. Each hour, data managed by the ERP system and DB2, both running on an AS/400 server, is replicated to Gill Studios' Web system. Artwork uploaded into the system is automatically routed to an order file within Lotus Domino, which is accessible to the art department that needs to retrieve these files for review.

Amidst the thousands of custom bumper stickers, mouse pads and decals it produces every year, Gill Studios knows the value of a strong image and a memorable slogan. Founded in 1934, the Shawnee Mission, Kansas-based family-owned business is one of the biggest commercial printing firms in the country. Because Gill distributes its goods exclusively through a network of 15,000 ad-specialty companies, keeping these distributors happy has become as critical to Gill as enhancing its printing processes.

“Some of our distributors say the site is the most efficient and useful one they have ever seen. With testimony like that, we’re excited about our future in e-business, and IBM will indeed be there to take us the rest of the way.”

—Carl Gerlach, Director of Marketing and e-business, Gill Studios

e-business—accelerating the pace of business and the pace of change



Gill Studios has come a long way since Forest P. Gill founded the company in 1934, handling silk-screen printing in his basement.

For Gill Studios, the most loyal distributors are those who find that it's easy to do business with the company—and Gill Studios wanted to maintain those solid customer relationships. Gill Studios had long used a phone- and fax-based system to manage orders, and maintained a largely static Web site. But over time, distributors began asking for online order management, so they could log on at their convenience to upload artwork for their print jobs and check on project status. Gill Studios recognized that integrating its legacy IT architecture—built in-house for workflow and enterprise resource planning (ERP) processes—with a secure e-business front end would be a challenging endeavor.

Without strong Java™ technology skills in-house, Gill Studios needed a solution vendor that could design and implement a Web-based order management solution that would integrate with its backend systems. And do it in three months, since the company wanted to promote its revamped Web site with its soon-to-be-printed annual catalog.

Gill Studios evaluated three vendors before selecting Integro, an IBM and Lotus Business Partner specializing in complete e-business and workflow solutions. Integro proposed a robust infrastructure based on IBM WebSphere Application Server to run the Java servlets providing the business logic, IBM DB2 Universal Database for managing customer data, and Lotus Domino as the Web server.

Thanks to Integro, Gill Studios now has a secure, password-protected B2B Web site where distributors can check order status and upload artwork any time they need. Within the first month, the number of passwords requested by distributors increased by 15 percent over those requested in the last four years—translating into an increase in new distributors.

“All of the data our distributors needed was locked away in legacy technology and we knew that Web-enabling this architecture would be difficult. But WebSphere and DB2 software allowed us to breathe new life into these applications and expand customer service to 24 hours a day.”

—Carl Gerlach

Says Carl Gerlach, director of marketing and e-business at Gill Studios, "All of the data our distributors needed was locked away in legacy technology and we knew that Web-enabling this architecture would be difficult. But WebSphere and DB2 software allowed us to breathe new life into these applications and expand customer service to 24 hours a day—not just the nine hours we're in the office."

A secure, flexible solution

Gill Studios provides distributor-access passwords with two levels of security—one for the distributor principal to view all orders in process and another for salespeople to view specific orders. The Web system was built on a separate tier outside of a firewall—protecting Gill Studio's backend systems and their sensitive data. Every hour, order data managed by Gill Studios' proprietary ERP system and by DB2 Universal Database, both running on an AS/400 server, is replicated to the Web system.

On the front end, DB2 stores customer numbers and associates them with orders, making querying fast and easy. The integration between Domino and WebSphere Application Server ensures that no user gets direct access to the backend ERP system, which handles all of the accounting and financial data associated with orders. (See Figure 1 for details.)

Distributors can now upload up to six different pieces of artwork simultaneously—a considerably faster and connected way to send art to Gill Studios than by intermittent e-mail, as was done previously. Integro integrated the uploading function with the company's legacy Lotus Notes-based workflow capability. Once artwork enters the system, the system automatically routes it to an order file within Lotus Notes—consolidating all order data and content. Domino workflow functionality enables Gill Studios to easily route order files to the appropriate individuals to complete the project.

“[DB2 Connect] allows us to extend our backend without ever having to configure the front-end logic. Even if one of our servers failed, within minutes DB2 Connect can point to another database and we're back up and running.”

– Carl Gerlach



Commercial printing may be its specialty, but Gill Studios is also proving to be an expert e-business.

One pleased distributor, Jim Priester, says of Gill Studios' order management system, "Pages come up fast, navigation is effortless and easy to follow, information is complete and the overall look is just as clean and sharp as your products."

DB2 Connect for future growth

As with all e-business initiatives, Gill Studios needed to consider future needs. Integro knew that as business grows and servers need to be upgraded, its database should migrate seamlessly along. Integro and Gill Studios considered both Microsoft® SQL Server and Oracle, but decided that DB2 Universal Database, coupled with IBM DB2 Connect, would provide the best migration path for the future. Through a Java Database Connectivity (JDBC™) driver, DB2 Connect provides a seamless interface between DB2 Universal Database and almost any other data source on the network.

"Our Web server's database never directly communicates with any other data source—DB2 Connect provides the connection," says Gerlach. "This allows us to extend our backend without ever having to configure the front-end logic. Even if one of our servers failed, within minutes DB2 Connect can point to another database and we're back up and running."

Setting the stage

With its strong and scalable infrastructure in place, Gill Studios has set the stage for a rapid evolution on whatever path its e-business will take. Concludes Gerlach, "When we began this project, customer service was our number one goal. Some of our distributors say the site is the most efficient and useful one they have ever seen. With testimony like that, we're excited about our future in e-business, and IBM will indeed be there to take us the rest of the way."

For more information

Please contact your IBM marketing representative or IBM Business Partner.

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