IBM

Thomas Nelson inspires bookseller loyalty with B-to-B Web site.

Growing up in a modest Scottish farmhouse in the late 1700s, Thomas Nelson was enveloped by the strong, passionate faith of his parents and his grandparents. So, in his teens—penniless and searching the streets of London for his true calling—it might have been destiny that led Nelson to a job as a publisher's apprentice. Little did he know that 200 years later, a $260 million global leader in Christian book publishing would still bear his name and

realize his dream of providing affordable Christian works and classic literature to the "common folk."

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—Rick Proctor, Assistant Vice President of Information Systems, Thomas Nelson

Today, Thomas Nelson's 1,400 employees serve resellers ranging from large retailers such as Wal-Mart and Amazon.com to smaller businesses such as the Cornerstone Good Newsstand in San Francisco. Growing its business by building strong relationships with each of its customers has always been a driving force in the company. For its sales representatives, however, the hardest part of the job had been balancing their time between small customers and larger retailers and ensuring that international customers were getting speedy responses to their inquiries.

Already a pioneering force in the Christian booksellers market for adopting

Application	Business-to-business online catalog and account information Web site
Business Benefits	100% ROI within a few months of site launch; 200% increase in page hits and 50% increase in user sessions over one month; enhanced customer satisfaction
Software	IBM DB2® for OS/390® IBM Net.Data® IBM HTTP Server
Hardware	IBM S/390® Parallel Enterprise Server™

Thomas Nelson provides its resellers the convenience of online access to account, order and catalog information.

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electronic data interchange (EDI) in its ordering process, Thomas Nelson didn't hesitate to launch an informational business-to-business (B-to-B) reseller Web site, *www.tnelson.com*. Leveraging existing data in IBM DB2 and its use of an IBM S/390 Model 9672 R24 server, the publishing giant deployed IBM Net.Data and IBM HTTP Server to deliver catalog, order and account information to its Web site. By transforming itself into an e-business, Thomas Nelson now provides all of its resellers the same high level of service in locating products and tracking their orders.

"We know the site is valuable to our resellers," says Rick Proctor, assistant vice president of information systems for Thomas Nelson. "Page hits have increased 200 percent and user sessions 50 percent over the past month. Since we're getting fewer calls for information now available on the Web, we're going to achieve 100 percent return on investment within a few months of the site launch."

Web self-service—a higher level of service

A significant portion of Thomas Nelson's resellers are already using the Web site. "Empowered to find answers to many of their questions on the Web, our customers can devote less time to supply chain issues and more time to their businesses," notes Proctor. Thomas Nelson's customer service representatives, he adds, should have more time to devote to complex customer issues, while directing routine queries to the Web site.

A testament to the Web site's around-the-clock convenience is the fact that 30 percent of the site's visitors are international customers, who make up 9 percent of total sales. "Since we aren't staffed 24-hours-a-day, international customers had to leave voice mail messages for customer service. Using our 24-hour-a-day, 7-day-a-week, S/390-based Internet solution has enabled us to be much more responsive to resellers located abroad, so they can better serve their customers," says Nick vanMaarth, manager of corporate Internet development for the publisher.

IBM DB2: a critical player

Catalog, account and order information stored in DB2 for OS/390 is delivered to the Web site using Net.Data macros, which proved to be easier to use and had higher performance than the common gateway interface (CGI) scripts initially used to deliver catalog information to the Web site. IBM HTTP Server delivers the Web pages to users.

Thomas Nelson also evaluated solutions from Microsoft and Attachmate. "The deciding factors for going with IBM were the ease of use of Net.Data and the ability to leverage our expertise in S/390 and DB2—a workhorse that is the core of our system," says Proctor.

With this foundation in place, Thomas Nelson has big plans for its growth as an e-business. By the spring of 2000, the company plans to offer online ordering to resellers. It also plans to develop an intranet, giving customer service representatives faster access to more comprehensive business information, thus enhancing their ability to assist resellers.

"We're not a company that shifts with the technological winds of change," says Proctor. "But in DB2 and Net.Data, we saw significant long-term benefits like scalability and reliability. I think we've just scratched the surface of what we can accomplish."

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