e-business Solutions

IBM

Gulf Coast opens a window to new opportunity with customer extranet.

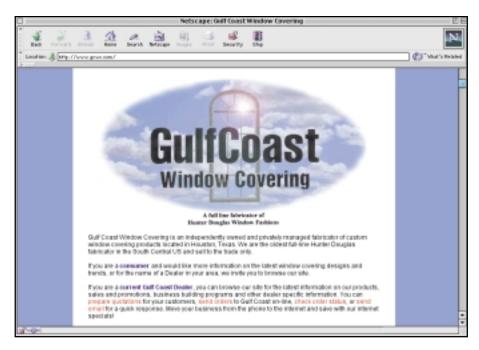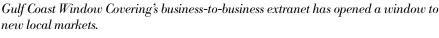|	
Application	Business-to-business extranet for window covering products
Business Benefits	100% ROI in six months; projected $20,000 annual savings in customer service costs; 15% of orders submitted online; enhanced customer service
Software	IBM DB2® Universal Database™ for AIX® IBM VisualAge® for Java™ IBM HTTP Server
Hardware	IBM RS/6000®
Business Partner	PIC Business Systems, Inc.

Houston, Texas-based Gulf Coast Window Covering recently took advantage of a window of opportunity to expand its business capacity. The company was so overwhelmed with orders for window coverings that it was unable to manage its business without shutting out potential sales growth. Wanting to meet the demand of its growing customer base, Gulf Coast deployed a business-to-business (B-to-B) extranet that allows customers to place orders for window coverings online 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

"Our extranet allows us to handle business growth with the staff we already have. It earned 100 percent return on investment within six months of deployment."

—Bill Gaul, President, Gulf Coast Window Covering

Gulf Coast Window Covering's business-to-business extranet has opened a window to new local markets.

The extranet—built with IBM DB2 Universal Database, IBM VisualAge for Java and IBM HTTP Server—is integrated with Gulf Coast's back-end order-processing systems. Currently handling 15 percent of its total order volume, Gulf Coast projects the extranet will save it nearly $20,000 annually in customer service costs. "Our extranet allows us to handle business growth with the staff we already have," says Gulf Coast President Bill Gaul. "It earned 100 percent return on investment within six months of deployment."

Extranet makes online ordering easy

Gulf Coast is a $30 million custom manufacturer of window coverings—blinds, shades and shutters from the Hunter Douglas line of products. Each product is custom-made to the specifications of its customers, which include home centers such as Home Depot, department stores such as Dillard's and a large base of independent interior decorators. As business has expanded, customer service representatives have been hard pressed to keep up. "An e-business Web site was the best means of solving our problem," says Gaul. "Not only does the Web site handle orders from existing customers, but it also helps us reach new local markets."

The extranet was developed by IBM Business Partner PIC Business Systems, Inc.—specialists in enterprise resource planning solutions for the window coverings industry, leveraging the IBM RS/6000 platform. Using it, customers can check order status, obtain product pricing and promotional information and generate price quotes for their clients.

PIC Business Systems used IBM VisualAge for Java to create Java applets that enable business customers to get product and order information from Gulf Coast's back-end RS/6000 system, powered by PIC-ULTRA. Allaire ColdFusion Web development software was used to design the user interface.

Because the site provides access to Gulf Coast's most valuable business assets—its product and customer account information—PIC Business Systems took special care in selecting a database to store this information. "We narrowed our selection down to DB2 Universal Database and Oracle," explains Stan Zwinggi, president of PIC Business Systems. "We chose DB2 over Oracle because it provides the level of scalability and performance that we need for this critical e-business application."

Customers say using Web site is a breeze

Judging by the enthusiastic reception from business customers, the Web site is a huge success. Karen Shodean, co-owner of Albuquerque, New Mexico-based Blind Express, places as many as three orders per day through the Web site. "I used to be limited to placing orders during Houston business hours," says Shodean. "Living in a different time zone, that was often inconvenient. Now, I place my orders any time of day."

With its B-to-B extranet, Gulf Coast has opened a window to new business opportunity, boosting customer satisfaction and gaining a competitive advantage. Says Gaul, "Our IBM e-business solution has made expanding our business easy."

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

Visit us at:
www.ibm.com/e-business

For more information about Gulf Coast Window Covering and PIC Business Systems, Inc., visit:
www.gcwc.com
www.picbusiness.com

IBM®

G325-6630-00