Top 6 Winner: UK iSeries Web Site Developed with BCD's WebSmart named one of the Best

Now That's What I Call E-Commerce - Six of the Best

To round off 2005, Frank Booty examines six leading UK B2C E-commerce sites where the trusty iSeries plays a starring role and explains the underlying technologies that were used to make them web winners.

Draper Tools

Draper Tools (www.draper.co.uk) has retooled its B2C website to make browsing and ordering effortless for customers and routine site maintenance enjoyable for its technicians.

How? Draper-licensed iSeries web development tool WebSmart from Business Computer Design (BCD).

Colin Richmond, Draper's IT manager, was weary of the limitations of Draper's NT-based B2C web application. The company that wrote the system wasn't in business anymore, slow response times forced users to wait unnecessarily, and the three-to-four clicks it took customers to drill down to find a tool made viewing several different tools tedious. Replacing this system with WebSmart applications presented a cost-effective way for Draper to take maximum advantage of the iSeries, eliminate the NT box, and provide better user experiences for customers and business partners.

Before selecting WebSmart, Richmond looked at several web application development environments that would produce executables for Draper's iSeries Model 820 and found them to be expensive or too difficult to program in. Through SoftLanding Europe (BCD's UK and Ireland reseller), Richmond licensed WebSmart in February and his developers started using it in March.

With minimal formal training, four members of the six-person development team began developing code with WebSmart by sharing tips with each other. These programmers, with 10-20+ years of RPG coding and little PC or HTML development to their credit, quickly learned how to use WebSmart's templates, as well as how to customize them with ProGen Macro Language (PML).

The first objective was to replace Drapers' existing B2C online shopping cart. They wrote an iSeries-based catalogue and shopping cart application in under five months -- they moved the existing product catalogue containing 15,000 items from the NT machine to iSeries. This serves as the basis of the company's hard-copy mail-order print catalogue. Since the existing product catalogue was already written in HTML and had a collection of images for all products, they moved it from the PC to iSeries by importing product descriptions directly as HTML into the iSeries database.

The payment process is handled through a WebSmart API that connects with a web service that clears credit card transactions. Once the order is complete, Draper's shopping cart application sends an HTML-formatted email to the customer to confirm details. This is handled by WebSmart's native email functions.

Richmond's next project is to replace Draper's B2B site with one developed in WebSmart. BCD's Nexus Portal is being considered as a framework to bring a higher level of organization.