

Peg-Perego Pilots Web-Based Customer Service Site

An increase in sales is a direct result of an iSeries and WebSmart-based eCommerce and B2B site.

Americans acquire a passion for cars at an early age. When our early thoughts shift to wheels of desire, the marvelous machines from Peg-Perego USA often appear clearly in the mind's eye. If they don't, then you are probably not a five year old.

Peg-Perego manufactures scaled down battery-powered ride-on replica Jeeps, Beetles, utility vehicles and ATVs for children who range in age from three to seven. Along with these four wheeled dream machines, they also make high chairs, strollers, and car seats, which are sold through popular retailers nationwide.

Although Peg-Perego products are built with durability in mind, it's a well-known fact that kids can break anything. In the past, when something broke, a parent's best recourse was to call the Peg-Perego customer service department to order a replacement part. Now, with a new web-based customer service application, they can simply visit the company's customer service page and order the part online.



"Our goal in IT was to make service and repair information available to customers so they could resolve their problems more quickly, and also make it easier for sales people to do their job."

Mike Palmer, IT Manager, Peg-Perego

In addition to enjoying more convenience, customers have more choices too. Site users can view a selection of 11 different styles of replacement high chair upholstery for example. In the past, when ordering over the phone, callers would not even inquire about other styles of upholstery. By making it easier for them to obtain product information and place orders, Peg-Perego has seen a welcomed 30 percent increase in part sales.



Streamlining Customer Service and Sales Order Entry

Last spring Peg Perego's web strategy committee started talking seriously about extending the functionality of their web site to accommodate a customer service application. Prior to that, field sales reps had asked for a system that would enable them to check inventory, prices, and order status on line. According to Mike Palmer, IT Manager at Peg-Perego, "Our goal in IT was to make service and repair information available to customers so they could resolve their problems more quickly, and also make it easier for sales people to do their job."

Peg-Perego's in-house hosted Microsoft NT-based web site has been around since 1995, and initially it only displayed contact information for the company. Later, it had evolved to include product descriptions, company information and dealer contacts. Palmer and other who managed the site decided that a complete rework would represent a significant investment in money and time, so they focused on the best and easiest way to accommodate the new functionality.

Palmer's web committee explored different ways to accommodate the new functionality and the one that showed the most promise involved a link from the existing NT site to another one that resided on their host IBM iSeries computer. Hosting the eCommerce and B2B extranets on the iSeries would permit easy access to production part number and inventory data in MAPICS. By pursuing this strategy, virtually nothing had to be done to their existing site.

A Learning Experience

Initially, to satisfy sales people, they began testing an off-the-shelf solution that facilitated order entry. This solution was limited though; it did not allow sales people to do lookups on inventory, order status and other matters pertaining to their sales activities. Furthermore, it provided no customer order entry mechanism for parts. Nevertheless, sales reps approved of the online system even though it had limitations. Even with its shortcomings, this approach proved to Palmer that Peg-Perego had use for the web beyond its brochure style website.

At this point Palmer decided to contact Custom Systems Corporation (www.cussys.com), an iSeries Professional Services organization based in Sparta, New Jersey. CSC had already done several B2B and shopping cart extranet applications linked to MAPICS and had the ability to get Peg-Perego's site online quickly. CSC is an APICS Certified ERP Applications Solution Provider and Implementation Specialist for MAPICS.



Palmer says the cost of the new site was far less than he anticipated. In fact, the fees associated with CSC's development work and the WebSmart application development tool were less than the cost of one year of maintenance on the other solutions they considered.

CSC uses WebSmart from Business Computer Design (www.bcdsoftware.com) to build web based applications. WebSmart includes an Interactive Development Environment and the Web Application Server. The IDE is a Windows application with an iSeries code generation. It is used to design web pages and integrate iSeries data elements. The IDE includes wizards and templates for building off-the-shelf applications with little or no coding. It also includes a code editor that allows developers to extend the logic of programs, and an interactive HTML editor to customize the look of the output pages. The iSeries side WAS runs these ILE-RPG programs.

WebSmart's IDE also includes a tool that allows developers to write freehand code that controls the entire flow of the program. The ProGen Macro Language Editor gives developers unlimited flexibility relative to the way they want the program to appear and function. PML is similar to RPG in that it has functions for direct record level access. With PML, CSC's developers can access the iSeries database in a way that RPG programmers are familiar with. PML also includes several program aids. For example, it prompts for values as you type function names, has pop-up info boxes that display the names of valid objects that can be specified for various parameters, online help, and a syntax checker.

Next, CSC showed Palmer and his team some live examples of WebSmart-developed B2B and eCommerce sites. General objectives were discussed highlighting the need for a flexible solution that Peg-Perego could maintain and modify themselves. With Peg-Perego's wish list in hand, Nathan Quinones, CSC's lead consultant, began to prototype a shopping cart application that displayed illustrations of parts with detailed descriptions, pricing information and payment options. To accelerate productivity, Quinones used a WebSmart template to handle most of the work. WebSmart templates are ASCII text files that contain generic program descriptions. When someone wants to build a new program, WebSmart offers prompts to make choosing a template easier. The template program definitions have plug-in values that determine, among other things, which database files and fields are to be processed by the program. Templates automatically define the output of HTML segments that are presented by the final program, and profile the PML logic that is used to control the presentation.

With a working shopping cart application ready, CSC started to work on Peg-Perego's B2B requirement enabling field sales people to check inventory and prices on a real-time basis. Quinones employed a solution developed by CSC called Enterprise Access (EAX). EAX is a series of B2B plug-ins for MAPICS and other software packages that extend an application's functionality to the Web. EAX enables sales people and distributors to check customer order status, pricing, product availability, sales history or bookings, purchase orders or other pertinent details of commerce. CSC used WebSmart to develop EAX so new modules could be written to fit customer requirements.

The Security Issue

Security is an important consideration when you invite customers onto your production system. Outside users shouldn't need iSeries user profiles and shouldn't be permitted to view data that is not pertinent to their job. EAX addresses this issue by securing extranet access to production services through a sign in sequence.

When Quinones returned to Peg-Perego a month later he brought with him working prototypes. Palmer admits he didn't expect CSC to respond as quickly as they did. "We were pleasantly surprised," he says. Members of Peg-Perego's web committee explored the functionality of these prototypes for two weeks and refined their thoughts.

Sales Increase

By summer the pilot customer service site was online. Customers could now see all of the options available to them and an easy way to order whatever they needed. Palmer and others expected the total number of orders to stay the same and telephone activity to shift to web activity, but customers actually ordered more Peg-Perego products and sales increased.

Palmer says he also plans to place online detailed parts diagrams for all of their products. Customers will be able to identify a part in a diagram; click on it and the correct part number will become a line item in an order. A product troubleshooting application is also in the works for the near future.

Palmer says the cost of the new site was far less than anticipated. In fact, the fees associated with CSC's development work and the WebSmart application development tool were less than the cost of one year of maintenance on the other solutions they considered.

This case study was updated from the original published version and retains all of the facts.



Winner of 35+ Industry Awards • 10,000+ Customers • 30,000+ Software Products Sold
WebSmart is distributed by IBM with i5/05 upgrades and new system sales on IBM's Try & Buy CD
WebSmart is included on IBM's iSeries Developer Roadmap and is IBM ServerProven