

Pursuing efficiency and revenue with commerce-enabled portals.

IBM WebSphere Commerce and IBM WebSphere Portal

January 2002

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Contents

2 Executive overview
4 A commerce-enabled portal in action
5 Creating a commerce-enabled portal
6 Ease of integration
6 Taking personalized e-commerce to the next level
7 A single face for your customers
7 Mobile access
8 B2C benefits
8 Summary: the right choice for confident e-commerce
9 For more information

Executive overview

Doing business online is no longer a novelty – it’s become the norm. And it’s no longer enough just to have a Web site that enables users to conduct e-commerce transactions. Next-generation e-commerce demands that you deliver customer value beyond the transaction – while you lower your costs and accelerate your return on investment. Establishing and managing close relationships with your buyers, suppliers and trading partners is paramount to achieving online success. You must make it easy to do business with you – while making it easy for your company to provide better customer service.

Increasingly, business leaders find that to improve profitability and strengthen relationships with their customers, they need to change the way they do business online. To interact more directly with customers and provide them with more relevant information. A large enterprise with several divisions or brands typically has a separate e-commerce Web site for each. Often, opportunities to increase revenue or reduce expenses are missed because customer information is not being shared among divisions. Frustrations cited include:

- *Total cost of operating multiple sites*
- *Missed sales opportunities because of a lack of cross-selling throughout divisions*
- *Inefficiencies resulting in multiple stores of specific (sometimes redundant) customer information that do not provide comprehensive profiles*
- *Dissatisfied customers who want to be able to conduct all their business with a company from a single page, instead of being forced to surf from site to site to view catalogs, shipping information and product descriptions*
- *Inability to have all the decision-making information customers want available to them when they need it*

This paper describes how creating a commerce-enabled portal environment, in which all the information and applications your customers need to make informed, efficient buying decisions are aggregated and integrated within one environment, can help solve these problems.

A commerce-enabled portal, integrating IBM WebSphere® Commerce software with IBM WebSphere Portal family, can help you reduce costs and increase efficiency because it:

- *Provides a common infrastructure for managing customers and personalized content*
- *Allows you to use a single set of tools and skills for commerce and other applications*
- *Helps reduce the total cost of administration by minimizing engineering, development and maintenance expenses*
- *Uses a common integration framework to link your commerce functions to back-end applications and trading partners*

A commerce-enabled portal can help you increase customer satisfaction and loyalty by presenting:

- *A single point of access to commerce, content and other business applications*
- *Simultaneous access to multiple commerce functions and to other applications*
- *A single face to users for all applications and a consistent user interface and service for all divisions and brands*
- *Efficient access to multiple applications and divisions; anywhere, anytime access by Web browser, cell phone or wireless PDA*
- *Profile- and role-based personalized information and services*

A commerce-enabled portal can also help boost your revenue because it:

- *Increases opportunities for cross-selling throughout divisions and brands*
- *Enables sophisticated targeted marketing campaigns for multiple brands and trading partners*

These benefits, along with the solid e-business infrastructure, extensibility, customizability, scalability and reliability of the WebSphere software platform, can help your business gain a competitive e-business advantage.

A commerce-enabled portal in action

Harrison-Smith Manufacturing, a fictional business-to-business (B2B) manufacturer, is an example of how a commerce-enabled portal can help your business gain advantages over Web competitors.

The CFO of Harrison-Smith needs to improve company profitability. Until now, each division of Harrison-Smith had a commerce Web site, so customers had only a view of the company from a narrow perspective. As part of their efforts to increase company profitability, Harrison-Smith has deployed a commerce-enabled portal built using WebSphere Portal and WebSphere Commerce. The new portal gives Harrison-Smith customers personalized access to all the applications and information they need for commerce and other end-to-end business interactions with Harrison-Smith from a single Web site. For the customers, this site is an “e-commerce dashboard,” with everything they need to conduct business with Harrison-Smith. The customers can even customize the site to display only applications and information relevant to them.

Buyers find it's easier to do business with Harrison-Smith than with its competitors. Their improved buying experience starts at a personalized portal screen that greets users when they log in with their passwords. Based on their roles as buyers and on their companies' contracts with Harrison-Smith, users can access specific sets of commerce functions, presented in individual sections on the screen, to:

- *See the status of pending orders with multiple divisions, which orders are pending approval and which have been delivered or are in transit.*
- *Receive targeted news, marketing information, campaigns and promotions based on individual profile, preferences and actions on the site.*
- *Review invoices, negotiate contract terms and search for products across multiple divisional catalogs – supported separately by each division – within one unified catalog interface.*
- *Place new orders that combine items from multiple divisions, which are automatically split and sent to the appropriate business units for fulfillment.*
- *Monitor how much they have purchased against their contracts so they know when they've reached a given threshold – for example, when certain shipping advantages apply, or when they're over the purchasing limit.*

Harrison-Smith has also significantly decreased costs and increased efficiency since their commerce-enabled portal became active. The company is now able to:

- *Eliminate the costs of maintaining multiple Web sites.*
- *Create and maintain a single view of each customer's information.*
- *Consolidate and integrate its data, reducing the instances of redundant data in its systems through comprehensive integration.*

By helping increase employee efficiency and customer satisfaction, Harrison Smith's commerce-enabled portal is important to meeting – and exceeding – the company's profitability goals.*

Creating a commerce-enabled portal

With a commerce-enabled portal you can easily integrate commerce with other business processes, information and services within a flexible and seamless portal environment. The result? A potential for reducing costs due to increased efficiency and growing revenue because of greater customer satisfaction and loyalty. And a faster return on investment.

WebSphere Commerce provides the core e-commerce functionality and supporting infrastructure for a commerce-enabled portal. The software provides an end-to-end e-commerce solution. WebSphere Commerce is a comprehensive set of integrated software components that helps site developers create and manage Internet stores and malls to sell goods and services on the Web to the global marketplace.

WebSphere Commerce can help you:

- *Conduct B2B or business-to-consumer (B2C) commerce transactions.*
- *Create dynamic marketing campaigns, target market segments and selectively offer personalized product promotions.*
- *Create anytime, anywhere access for mobile customers.*
- *Meet the needs of an international or culturally diverse customer base with sophisticated multicultural enablement and support.*

The IBM WebSphere Portal family, a set of offerings that can help you build highly scalable portals for B2B and B2C transactions, provides the underlying portal infrastructure. It provides secure access to information, applications and people.

WebSphere Commerce and WebSphere Portal are built on the WebSphere software platform, an expandable and customizable e-business infrastructure. Flexible and reliable, WebSphere software gives you a solid platform to get your e-business up and running quickly and cost-effectively, allowing you to conduct secure transactions worldwide. Built on Java™ technology and open, industry-standard architecture, your commerce-enabled portal can integrate smoothly with existing systems and processes. And it's a scalable solution, which can grow as your business grows.

Ease of integration

Scalability, reliability, extensibility and customizability make WebSphere software a solid platform on which to build your e-commerce site. These capabilities also mean that your commerce-enabled portal can be enhanced and expanded as your needs and your business grow. With WebSphere software, you can integrate your applications with other applications, either within the portal environment or on the backend – whichever is the most appropriate and efficient solution for your business.

Taking personalized e-commerce to the next level

Each of your customers is unique – with different contracts, preferences and behaviors – and each deserves a Web experience that leaves them confident about their relationship with your business. WebSphere Commerce allows you to create personalized customer interactions, such as highly targeted one-on-one promotions and personalized catalog views, pricing and discounts.

By personalizing a commerce-enabled portal, you and your customers determine which Web commerce functions (for example, auctions, catalog browsing and searching and requisition lists) appear in the portal. You can personalize your Web site on multiple levels, including:

- *Business rules that specify what information and business functions a customer can and cannot access within your Web site*
- *A customer's role within the company and the customer's contract status with your business*
- *Context – the setting in which your customer views the portal (a wireless device, for instance, can show a more select set of information than a complete Web page can)*
- *Personal preferences defined by the customer*

You can tailor a user experience specifically to the individual's needs, offering a positive experience and helping improve a business relationship.

A single face for your customers

In a large enterprise, where customers purchase from several divisions – each maintaining separate Web sites – it is difficult to recognize or properly coordinate the total relationship with customers. Quality-of-service objectives may not be met for the company’s top customers. For example, if a company that is the top customer of one division makes a small purchase from a second division, that customer might not be treated as a top customer by the second division. In addition, valuable opportunities for cross-selling goods and services across divisions can be missed.

Through a commerce-enabled portal, your organization can present a single view, from a customer’s perspective, of your multiple divisions. The same capability facilitates a more unified view of each customer and the customer’s business activities across your entire enterprise. Customers can have access to your entire organization and be better served by a business that has a complete view of their activities, preferences and requirements across multiple divisions. Users enjoy a seamless environment with easy single sign-on support for authentication and content access.

Most e-commerce environments lead customers through a linear, step-by-step navigational scheme to conduct transactions. With a commerce-enabled portal, users can perform multiple activities from a single screen. Key functions, such as Web browsing through information or order initiation, are available concurrently, whenever they are required. For example, your customers can search one or more catalog sections while checking order status, and at the same time see their shopping carts, all instantaneously updated and sharing the same information. If customers have access to more information at the same time, they can also make smarter and more efficient buying decisions. They can order several items at one time from multiple divisions, save time and shipping costs and take advantage of available volume discounts. You get increased efficiency for you and your customers. Your customers are happy and come back again. And cross-selling across divisions drives revenue and can accelerate the return on your software investment.

Mobile access

Doing business over the Internet requires flexibility to sell to customers whenever and however they want to buy. In a commerce-enabled portal, users can access commerce functions with wireless application protocol (WAP) phones and PDAs. You can also use context personalization to specify a more concise view of information on wireless devices. Your customers get only the information relevant to them, whenever and however they want to receive it.

B2C benefits

Just as Harrison-Smith realized B2B benefits after implementing a commerce-enabled portal, the ability to access commerce functions in a portal environment can be just as beneficial in a B2C setting. As an example, consider an online retailer, currently supporting several brands and trading partners, that wants to expand to become a consumer destination Web site by adding service offerings and multichannel (including Web and wireless) customer access. Many of the benefits already described, such as multicatalog support and mobile access, are critical to supporting these objectives. Providing buyers with unified interactions and consistent purchasing experiences across all brands and channels is also important. And being able to offer the consumer a highly personalized shopping experience is key to customer retention.

Summary: the right choice for confident e-commerce

IBM defined and shaped e-business with vision, technological innovation and business knowledge. And as e-business has matured, it relies more on the collaborative nature of the Internet and the vast amount of decision-making information the Web makes available.

Scalable, reliable, expandable and customizable, WebSphere software is the most able platform for creating mission-critical commerce-enabled portals. Open, standards-based architecture gives you a full range of development capabilities, so your commerce-enabled portal can change and grow as your business does.

The WebSphere Portal family includes several offerings to help you improve your e-business return on investment:

- *IBM WebSphere Portal Enable allows e-businesses to build scalable portals that simplify a user's access to personalized information and transactions.*
- *IBM WebSphere Portal Extend provides portal users with the ability to act on information and applications accessed by collaborating with other portal users.*
- *IBM WebSphere Portal Experience is the complete IBM solution for developing, deploying and maintaining portals that provide a compelling experience for employees, trading partners and customers.*

The WebSphere Commerce platform also provides several options to deliver customer value while helping you lower costs and accelerate return on your investment:

- *IBM WebSphere Commerce Professional Edition helps businesses increase site functionality, accommodate high transaction volumes and leverage existing back-end systems.*
- *IBM WebSphere Commerce Business Edition allows you to strengthen business relationships with customers and suppliers, while reducing complexity and integrating detailed processes with your core business applications.*

A commerce-enabled portal powered by WebSphere Portal and WebSphere Commerce solutions helps you operate in transaction-intensive B2C and B2B environments. You can deliver value beyond online transactions with commerce-enabled portals to get the competitive advantage you need to survive in e-business today.

For more information

To learn more about IBM e-commerce and portal solutions, contact your IBM marketing representative, IBM Global Services or an IBM Business Partner, or visit:

ibm.com/software/commerce

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01-02
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* This scenario is a composite based upon typical customer requirements and is not intended to represent a specific customer engagement. Individual customers will have different requirements. Contact your IBM representative to discuss your specific needs.