Build-a-Bear Workshop

Overview

- **The Challenge**

  Build-a-Bear Workshop is an international children's toy company. They launched their first retail stores in Australia in 2005 and needed a robust online shopping infrastructure to support to its nationwide retail operations. The system needed to integrate easily with the company's existing technology infrastructure.

- **The Solution**

  Working with Synergy, an IBM® Premier Business Partner†, Build-a-Bear Workshop constructed an online store based on IBM WebSphere® Commerce – Express, a complete e-commerce system aimed at meeting the needs of smaller businesses.

- **The Benefits**

  IBM WebSphere Commerce – Express provided a solid and scalable foundation for Build-a-Bear's online store. It is also easy for company staff to update and administer. The solution allowed Build-a-Bear to make best use of its existing skills base in the WebSphere and Java™ development platforms.

About Build-a-Bear Workshop

The first Build-a-Bear Workshop opened at the St Louis Galleria shopping centre in St Louis, Missouri. It offers a teddy bear-themed retail experience that combines the universal appeal of plush animals with an interactive process that allows children from 3 to 103 to create their own huggable companions. Each Workshop location features a wide variety of new best friends to choose from as well as a vast assortment of clothes and accessories that are regularly updated to reflect current fashion trends.

An online store for the new bear in town

Build-a-Bear Workshop provides a fun, interactive retail experience that allows customers to customise and create their own furry companions. Customers can choose from a wide variety of toys, sounds, clothes, shoes and accessories. Spawned from a single shop in the United States, Build-a-Bear Workshop is now a global brand, found in over 200 cities around the world.

To coincide with the launch of its first Australian outlet, in Sydney's Bondi Junction, Build-a-Bear wanted to create a website that would replicate the enjoyable and highly interactive experience customers receive in-store.

SYNERGY

"There's a lot of theatre that goes on in the retail store. We wanted a website that would provide the same experience online for returning customers and to allow customers in other cities to experience the magic of attending a Build-a-Bear Workshop."

Kathryn Valk, Group Business Director at Build-a-Bear Workshop

One way Build-a-Bear Workshop keeps customers coming back is by providing clothes and accessories that follow current human fashions. The company also creates special animals and fashions for special events such as Valentines Day. Customers who can't easily get to the store can conveniently pick up the latest fashion items online.

"Build-a-Bear workshop toys have become collectors items around the world, so many of our initial orders in Australia came from the United States," Valk explained. "People were looking for our kangaroos and Aussie-themed products. Some people have been collecting since 1997 when the first store was launched."

While Build-a-Bear HQ in the United States provided templates and technology to create a local version of the website, this didn't suit the needs of the Australian organisation.

"The Build-a-Bear Workshop web store developed in the US was based on Microsoft® Commerce Server. However, our existing technology investments here were based on IBM WebSphere. We needed something that could easily integrate and align with our existing technology such as our point-of-sale system. That was more important than getting a 'quick win' by adopting the US commerce site," said Valk.

IBM WebSphere Commerce – Express provides power without the fluff

After looking at a range of lower-cost options, Build-a-Bear Workshop chose IBM WebSphere Commerce – Express as the basis for its website.

IBM WebSphere Commerce – Express is a complete solution designed to help growing small and midsize companies do business on the web. It provides 'all-in-one' licensing that addresses production, staging and site development needs. It can be quickly and easily installed and it helps to provide the capabilities midsize organisations need to get started immediately. It also offers many advanced features to grow into.

IBM Express middleware – covering its WebSphere, DB2® and Lotus® product ranges – aims to meet the needs of midsize companies. It provides high functionality in an integrated package, backed by ease of use, competitive pricing and flexibility. It is designed to be deployed quickly and to grow with customers' needs.

After consulting with Synergy, an IBM Premier Business Partner[†], Build-a-Bear Workshop constructed the pilot for its online store in 10 weeks, in line with expectations. Since the launch, the company has continued to make improvements and additions, as well as adding new products as its range expands.

"IBM and Synergy were very responsive throughout the development process, answering our product modification requests quickly and providing patches and fixes to correct minor problems," said Valk. "We were very impressed."

A price that was easy to bear

"IBM WebSphere Commerce gave us a scalable, flexible and robust foundation on which to build our commerce site," said Valk. "Across the company, we are focused on developing skills in WebSphere and other Java 2 Enterprise Edition (J2EE) products. This meant it was a better long-term investment to implement the commerce site using a standard skill set that we are using for other application needs."

IBM's WebSphere technology provided the basis for a robust and responsive online store that is easy to update and administer. With this foundation in place, Build-a-Bear Workshop is now confident the website can support its plans to roll out additional franchises across Australia.

"Looking at the bigger picture, this investment will pay for itself as we launch new stores and expand our reach around the country," said Valk. "It provides a great base to build for the future."

For more information

Please call **132 426** in Australia or
0800 801 800 in New Zealand.