

BUILDING A WEB-BASED STOREFRONT



Congratulations! You recognize the value of offering your customers a Web site to connect to your business. Soon orders will be pouring in from your online “branch.” All you need to do is select who will build and host your new site.

While this may seem like a simple decision, in reality it is as important as choosing your enterprise software solution.

WHY YOUR BEST FRIEND’S NEIGHBOR’S BROTHER-IN-LAW WON’T DO

When it comes time to hiring someone to create your Web site, think carefully. These days, it seems like everyone knows someone who can design an attractive Web page. But, as they say, looks can be deceiving. Unless the technology behind the design can provide you with all the functionality – and security – you want to offer your customers, you could be headed for trouble.

You want a Web site that offers the functionality your customers need to do business with you. Anything less could not only chase them away from your site, but your business entirely. Choose a designer that not only knows your business, but distribution in general, and has the ability to develop the functionality that gives your customers the information they need in an expedient and secure manner.

Make sure whoever you choose to develop your site will be there for you as your business changes. Successful Web sites are not static. You must revise the content as you expand product lines, update pricing, etc. The relationship you have with your Web site developer will need to last as long as you plan to offer the site. You want a partner who views your site as more than a hobby or side job. You want a dedicated professional with a vested interest in the success of your site.

DECIDING WHAT GOES ONLINE

You know you want to offer your customers online access to your product catalog, but what else? A well-planned Web site can do a lot more for your business than you might initially expect.

Think about how much time your customer service representatives spend on the phone answering customers’ questions. Customers want to know the status of orders, the amount of their last invoice, what they ordered six months ago, etc. By providing this information online, in a secure setting, you can free your staff to focus on developing new business and allow your customers to save time by eliminating making phone calls for information they now have at their fingertips.

Your customers will also benefit from being able to create favorites lists, search by several different criteria, and receive suggestions for go-together items for products they add to their shopping cart.

Also, customers with special pricing programs with you will expect to get that same pricing when they logon to your site. If you only post standardized pricing on your Web site, customers who get price breaks won’t want to use it.

INTEGRATION

To offer your customers an effective Web site, you need one that is fully integrated with your enterprise software solution.

The reason is simple: At minimum, you want a site that enables your customers to place orders online. Unless your Web site is tied directly to your inventory management solution, your customers won’t be able to trust that you actually have in stock what your site says you do. After getting burned enough times, they are going to stop using your site and go back to calling in for service.

If you take the next step and offer customers account information online, that information should be as accurate as possible. Customers making business decisions based on the data you provide online expect that information to be up-to-date. Out-of-date invoices or order status records will cause confusion and frustration.

Of course, you could offer all of this without integrating your Web site with your enterprise software solution, but then you will need to commit additional staff and resources to constantly re-keying information and updating your Web site. Not only is this time-consuming, but it also leads to costly errors from accidental typos.

HOSTING

In addition to choosing someone to develop your Web site, you also need to choose a technology provider to host it.

Don't assume all Web hosting services are the same. Many cannot guarantee backup support if your site goes down. You want a host who will be there for you the same amount of time your site is open to your customers: 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Ideally, your design firm and host company should be one and the same. This ensures that your Web site is designed to the correct technology specifications. Also, any upgrades to the technology will not interfere with the functionality of your site.

ACTIVANT B2B SELLER

Activant® offers a Web-based storefront solution that meets all of these requirements: Activant B2B Seller.

B2B Seller provides you with a fully hosted and integrated Web-based storefront solution that services your existing and prospective customers, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

You choose the functionality your Web site offers customers and prospects -- from simple order entry to secure customer account information look-up to advanced search functionality and credit card processing. The site, as unique as your business, is developed with your customers' needs in mind.

Integrated with your Activant enterprise software solution, orders are received directly into your solution without intervention from your staff, saving time and avoiding costly re-keying errors. This not only increases sales and improves customer service, but also frees your customer service staff to focus on more profitable tasks, such as developing new customers.

This integration means you never have to worry about upgrades to your enterprise software solution disrupting the functionality on your site. Add to that Activant's hosting of your site from a secured location and you alleviate the stress of site maintenance and support.

Find out more about Activant B2B Seller at www.activant.com; e-mail distribution@activant.com; or call 1-800-776-7438, press 1.

ABOUT ACTIVANT'S WHOLESALE DISTRIBUTION SOLUTIONS

Activant provides technology solutions and services to more than 3,800 wholesale distributors throughout North America. A leading technology provider for the distribution industry, Activant develops comprehensive enterprise software solutions to help distributors improve customer service and maximize the return on their technology investment. In addition, the company offers an Internet trading network that expedites sourcing, expands geographic reach, and streamlines transactions between distributors and manufacturers. Activant solutions are backed by a host of professional services, including support, consulting, and educational programs.

Activant Solutions Inc. ("Activant") is a leading technology provider of vertical business management solutions serving small and medium-sized retail and wholesale distribution businesses. The company serves three primary vertical markets: automotive aftermarket, hardlines and lumber; and wholesale distribution. Founded in 1972, Activant provides customers with tailored proprietary software, professional services, content, supply chain connectivity, and analytics. More than 30,000 customer locations use an Activant solution to manage their day-to-day operations. Activant has operations in California, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, Canada, France, Ireland, and the United Kingdom.

For more information, please visit www.activant.com.

© 2006, Activant Solutions Inc. All rights reserved. Activant and the Activant logo are registered trademarks of Activant Solutions Inc. All other company or product names are the trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective companies.

6B2BWP-BUILD