

Ebusiness

Web Commerce Gets Serious with Lotus Domino

The Internet, already the world's biggest library of information, has the potential to become the world's busiest marketplace as well. This statement may sound like hype you've heard before. The popular press is full of stories debunking the idea of web commerce, stories spelling out how much money is being invested and how little profit realized. Merchants are building electronic stores, but are customers buying?

Stephanie Hahn, Vice President of Software Marketing, IBM North America, often hears the assertion that web commerce "isn't happening yet." That's why, in conducting ebusiness conferences for IBM customers and business partners, Hahn focuses on real life examples, companies that are successfully conducting business over the Internet now. Many of these companies are using the Web for e-commerce, for selling products directly to consumers. Others are finding the Internet a great tool for finding new customers, for exchanging information with business partners, for reducing costs by more efficiently processing transactions. These companies are building their Internet business solutions with Lotus Domino.

Essentially, Domino is web-enabling technology for Lotus Notes. It integrates the industry-leading Lotus Notes groupware platform with the protocols of the Internet—allowing a Notes Server to also function as a web server. In addition, Domino provides a suite of optional packages that extend the basic web server capabilities. These include Domino Action, a set of tools for creating and managing web sites and Domino Merchant, an application framework for building e-commerce sites.

All of this makes Domino an ideal platform for ebusiness. Why? Because seriously doing business over the Internet requires more than web server and browser technology. It requires interfacing these components to the backbone systems that store business data, process transactions, and automate business processes. It requires the sophisticated computing features inherent in these systems, such as multi-level security, database replication, and workflow. Domino is the first and so far only web server that offers these features in a totally integrated and easy to implement package.

According to Hahn, "If you want a robust web server solution, the best place to go is Domino. With other vendors you have to integrate a lot of different pieces. Domino has capabilities right out of the box, like Domino Action that can get a simple web site up and running very quickly." A look at the impressive list of Domino success stories supports the view that ebusiness is "happening now:"

- Banc One, a major U.S. bank, uses a Domino system developed by Arthur Andersen Consulting to automate business communications with its customers. The Domino-based Advanced Customer Support (ACS) system gives customers 24-hour access to their financial account information, plus answers to questions through an online customer service knowledge base. The ACS automatically notifies and assigns tasks to Banc One personnel when appropriate. Key factors in the selection of Domino were its facilities for automating workflow and handling web-based security. Banc One credits the Domino ACS with increasing the productivity of customer service agents by roughly 25%.
- Millennium, a web design firm in Cambridge, Massachusetts, used Domino in developing www.harvard-square.com, a "town-square" site where more than 500 merchants, associations, and individuals promote their services and products. Millennium can keep maintenance costs at a minimum because Domino tools allow the clients to update their own pages on the site.
- Rage Systems, a multimedia company, uses Domino web servers to coordinate project development. Graphics artists, programmers and project managers can work together efficiently from different locations by exchanging files over the Web. Reviews are handled over the Web also, saving money on expensive full-color output, and giving customers immediate access to the work in progress. Rage also enjoys a profitable secondary business, selling T shirts and sweatshirts based on their graphics designs. So they used Domino Merchant to add e-commerce facilities to their web site, allowing visitors to browse the merchandise, preview selections in different colors, and place orders by credit card.

While companies such as these already have ebusiness systems up and running, there is still enormous potential in the market. Louis Reyes, Software Product Manager for Dickens Data Systems, describes the market for ebusiness solutions as "expected to grow exponentially over the next couple of years." He sees prospects for solutions providers as especially good in this area because Domino applications tend to proliferate. "Once customers get started, they soon recognize the Web as a new way to do business and a way to grow their businesses."

For companies that are just getting started in ebusiness, Hahn offers this advice: "Start very simply. Use the Web initially as a mechanism for communicating with potential customers." She notes that Domino offers an excellent environment for companies to start small and incrementally build their ebusinesses. "With a product like Domino you can keep adding capabilities."

Reyes notes that an important initial decision is whether to use Domino as the base of an ebusiness system, or IBM's alternative solution, Net.Commerce. He points out that Net.Commerce handles much larger databases, and may be the solution of choice for companies expecting to need high-volume transaction processing in their web stores. Reyes also suggests that "some customers may use both. Most will want to use Domino as their groupware solution, even if they are also using Net.Commerce."

As for the future of Domino and ebusiness, Hahn quotes an International Data Corporation study that says there are 40-50 million people on the Internet today, not including corporate Intranets. The study predicts \$100 billion in e-commerce by the year 2000 and one trillion by 2010. IBM expects to win a major share of this market. Says Hahn: "We are investing \$100 million in Internet technology research this year alone. And Domino is a cornerstone of IBM's Internet solutions strategy."

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