

Leveraging the Legacy Link — A Good Business Decision

Is your company's Web site going to be an independent entity or should it connect to and interrelate with your existing databases and computer systems? This is a significant question indeed when your company has large dollars invested in its inventory, ordering, and back office programming. Increasingly, the answer is to leverage the existing databases and applications as integral parts of the Web site.

This approach takes advantage of the money and time already invested in existing systems. It allows for dynamic

and interactive Web pages which are easier to maintain since information is coming into the pages directly from the company's database. Training time is reduced since company personnel are already familiar with the company's programming. Global and remote access to information is more efficient and costs are kept to a minimum since the programming is platform neutral.

In order to integrate legacy systems into a Web site, an interface needs to be created between the company's database and the Web servers. The interfaces can

Internet Access by Provider's Marketshare

(Includes Multiple Subscriptions)



Source: Find/SVP 1995 American Information User Survey

be a Common Gateway Interface (CGI) or the server's proprietary Applications Program Interface (API) — Netscape and Microsoft both have APIs built into their servers.

Dynamic Catalogs

Software tool sets that allow existing enterprise applications to be moved to the Web are being developed by many companies. NeXT Software, Inc. has developed WebObjects, a powerful tool set that can bridge the gap between corporate data sources (such as mainframes and relational databases) and real-time data feeds and HTTP servers (like Netscape's Commerce Server). Reebok and Sharper Image are using WebObjects to create dynamic Web sites and to cut down on the constant updating required of static Web pages. Now, information on the Web pages is automatically updated when new products are added to the database management system.

<http://www.next.com>
<http://www.reebok.com>
<http://www.sharperimage.com>

Decision Support Management

Online Analytical Processing (OLAP) can be facilitated by using the Web and existing data warehouses. For example, Hannaford Bros. Co., a \$2.5 billion grocery chain wanted to implement a corporate and store management decision support system (DSS) by providing decision makers with access to relevant sales, cost, inventory, and budget data. The problems that had to be overcome were software maintenance controls, staff training, low-bandwidth satellite connections, and the fact that the system had to be easy to use for the store managers. Microstrategy's DSS Web helped Hannaford Bros. develop a system that is fast, easy to support, and easy to use.

Sales

Windermere Real Estate Services has 35% of the market share in the Puget Sound area of Washington State and is the sixth largest real estate company in the USA. Its 150 offices are linked by a database that can be accessed by each office. Using WebDBC created by Nomad Development Corporation, both consumers and agents can search the database by zip code, city, state, etc. for information about properties.

The Future

New programs and solutions come online every day as the demand for programs that link existing databases and enterprise applications increases. Most programs can interface with a number of existing databases — Oracle, Sybase, Informix, Access, Paradox, dBase, Foxpro, etc. No doubt, given the large numbers of corporate databases already in existence and the rapid migration of businesses to the Web, interface programs will be hot for the foreseeable future. ■

<http://www.strategy.com>
<http://www.ndex.com>
<http://www.windermere.com>

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