



1-800-FLOWERS blossoms on the Web with Progress® SonicMQ®.

CHALLENGE

1-800-FLOWERS needed to implement a more scalable, centralized e-commerce platform to support its rapid business growth.

SOLUTION

Expand Web site order capacity through a global server load-balancing system that uses Progress® SonicMQ® to foster real-time, standards-based replication of customer information at multiple hosting facilities.

WHY PROGRESS® SOFTWARE

It surpassed the competition from a feature, pricing, and performance perspective.

BENEFIT

1-800-Flowers can now scale to handle almost double the volume of Web traffic. It can also divert traffic to alternate host sites during peak holidays while maintaining a uniform customer experience.

CASE STUDY

A decade ago, 1-800-Flowers was a business waiting eagerly for the Internet to take off. Today, the company has an e-commerce platform that can grow along with its business.

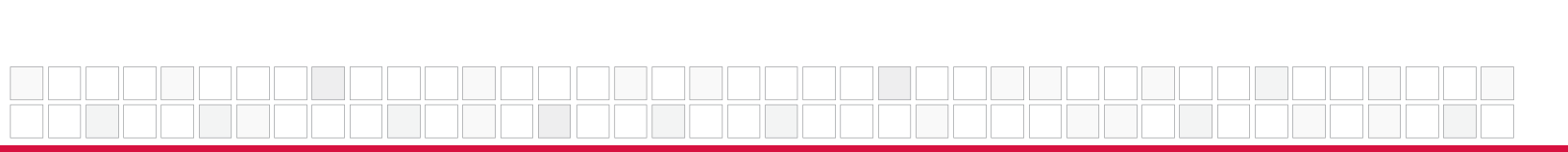
LEADING E-COMMERCE GROWTH

As the Internet started to become commercial in the 1990s, the early adopters were primarily tech-savvy males. So it only made sense that the first e-commerce business that launched on America Online was something that many men desperately needed: a 24-hour flower shop. 1-800-Flowers, a retailer that started with one flower shop in New York in 1976—and went national, thanks to its popular phone number—was in fact the first e-tailer on AOL in 1994. Today, more than half of the company's orders are placed over the Web.

1-800-Flowers has come a long way from arranging bouquets in a small corner store. The underpinnings of the 1-800-Flowers business is now a network called BloomNet, which consists of more than 3,000 florists who fulfill orders placed through the company's consumer and corporate Web sites, affiliate network, partners, or toll-free number. When a consumer places an order with 1-800-Flowers, the order is forwarded to a centralized transaction system that validates product availability, delivery date, and other details. Then the order is routed to BloomNet florists through an extranet called BloomLink. The distribution system allows 1-800-Flowers to fulfill orders quickly and locally, with same-day delivery options.

By 2000, the company was growing so rapidly that it decided to bring Web development and hosting in-house so it could establish a more scalable, centralized e-commerce platform. "There's no shortage of creative business ideas here at 1-800-Flowers," says Enzo Micali, 1-800-Flowers CTO. "We brought Web development and hosting in-house because it was such a core part of our business, and we needed the ability to implement new plans quickly and be as nimble as possible."

For starters, 1-800-Flowers built a tier-1 Web hosting center in one of its large warehouses in Madison, Virginia and signed a co-location agreement with AT&T for hosting facilities in New York and Dallas. As with any full-scale e-commerce operation, 1-800-Flowers needed to ensure that it could shift loads—transparently—to different



hosting sites during peak periods so customers would see no difference in the virtual storefronts. To make sure that customer shopping carts and address books were always available, 1-800-Flowers picked Progress Software to complete its backup and recovery, and business continuity architecture. For reliable, standards-based data exchange, SonicMQ was deployed to replicate 1-800-Flowers customer information across the company's three Web hosting sites.

Mother's Day 2004 is a perfect example of why 1-800-Flowers needed an extremely robust, scalable, and flexible e-commerce platform. From late April until the May 11 holiday—historically the busiest time of the year for floral retailers—the total orders for flowers, candy, and gift baskets exceeded 970,000. More than 70 percent of the orders were placed online. With such high order volumes, a single hosting site could become overloaded. In such cases, for business continuity, 1-800-Flowers wanted the turnkey ability to divert traffic from its primary hosting center in New York to its replicated site hosted in Dallas or its third site in Madison—a so-called global server load-balancing (GSLB) system.

With GSLB in place, the company was able to double its capacity and have a third site for failover if needed. "When you're dealing with millions of orders, you need the ability to scale very quickly to handle the volume—especially during major holidays like Valentine's Day," Micali says. "GSLB is great for risk mitigation and capacity planning."

The critical piece of the GSLB strategy was to ensure that customers' would never be affected when the Web site was experiencing heavy traffic—even if they had to be serviced by another hosting site. 1-800-Flowers developed a system to replicate customer information in real time so the address book, shopping cart, and account history would always be available to customers, regardless of which hosting site they were accessing. For example, a consumer can log on to 1-800-Flowers in the morning to buy flowers for her mom and load up her shopping cart via a server in New York. When she comes back in the afternoon to input mom's shipping address and complete the order, her shopping cart looks the same, even though she landed at the Dallas hosting site—she's none the wiser and shouldn't have to be.

CULTIVATING MORE CAPACITY

"We felt the best way to provide the necessary level of synchronization was through a message bus," Micali says. Now when customers enter new data into their account profiles, such as saving an item to their shopping cart or changing the credit card they have on file, the data is securely transferred to the Madison and Dallas sites for backup. 1-800-Flowers tested the system this Mother's Day for a subset of orders; with SonicMQ in place, data was synchronized perfectly without any data loss. The customer-replication system and GSLB also allow 1-800-Flowers to speed up application and Web site development by routing traffic to other host sites during testing so as not to affect daily e-commerce operations.

"When it came to evaluating vendors, Progress was the 'we try harder' company," Micali says. "From features, competitive pricing, and performance perspectives, Progress was the best in the bunch."

"Sonic offers a high-level of quality and that's what we offer to our customers—so it's a good fit."

— Enzo Micali
CTO

Next, the company plans to migrate to a Linux® operating system environment and revamp its retail store infrastructure. Currently, the company transmits data from retail stores to its transaction centers via FTP. But 1-800-Flowers plans to build a service-oriented architecture and is evaluating Progress Sonic ESB® for application integration based on the success the company has experienced with SonicMQ.

“Progress has always been very responsive and its product does everything the company said it would do—which is not often the case these days,” Micali says. “Progress offers a high level of quality and that’s what we offer to our customers—so it’s a good fit.”

Worldwide Headquarters

Progress Software Corporation, 14 Oak Park, Bedford, MA 01730 USA
Tel: +1 781 280-4000 Fax: +1 781 280-4095
On the Web at: www.progress.com

For regional international office locations and contact information, please refer to the Web page below:

<http://www.progress.com/worldwide>

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ABOUT PROGRESS SOFTWARE

Progress Software Corporation (Nasdaq: PRGS) provides application infrastructure software for the development, deployment, integration and management of business applications. Our goal is to maximize the benefits of information technology while minimizing its complexity and total cost of ownership.

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