

FATHOM

Solution Overview

Industry

Interactive Learning

Microsoft Business Solutions Partner

Eclipse Computing
Woodcliff Lake, New Jersey, USA

Scenario

Fathom required a flexible, scalable financial solution that could manage a large number of daily transactions, integrate with the e-commerce server and keep pace with a growing company.

Company Profile

Fathom is the premier destination for authenticated knowledge and online learning.

Benefits

The adoption of Microsoft Business Solutions has supported Fathom's sustained growth to more than 1,000 online courses while improving processes throughout the company.

Software Used

Microsoft Business Solutions—Great Plains

- Financials, including
 - FRx Currency Translator
 - Multicurrency Management
- Field Service
- Project Management
- E-commerce

- Human Resource Management
- Microsoft SQL Server™
- Microsoft Windows ® 2000 and NT®

Demographic Information

Number of Employees: 26
Number of Sites: 1
Number of Users: 6

As a start-up company, Fathom required a flexible, scalable financial solution with the potential to manage to tens of thousands of daily transactions and integrate with their e-commerce server. Microsoft Business Solutions has successfully met those needs and more.

Fathom was founded in 2000 by Columbia University, in partnership with other leading educational and cultural institutions, to provide an interactive site that would enhance the online learning experience while upholding the highest professional and scholarly standards. Fathom offers online courses, seminars, supportive lectures, interviews, and articles, and suggestions for related learning resources, including books and relevant Web links.

Fathom's consortium members include Columbia University, London School of Economics and Political Science, Cambridge University Press, The British Library, The New York Public Library, The University of Chicago, The University of Michigan, American Film Institute, RAND, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, Victoria and Albert Museum, Science Museum, The Natural History Museum and The British Museum.

Unpredictable Growth

As a start-up organization in a completely new business realm, Fathom was aware of the uncertainty in predicting initial business volume. However, aggressive growth plans underlined the need for a robust financial software solution.

Monica Bonamego, controller at Fathom, explains, "In common with other Internet start-ups, Fathom had no guarantee of the initial transaction volumes or how quickly they would increase. We did, however, want to implement a solution from day one that had the scalability, flexibility and functionality to support the business as it expanded without requiring any significant IT overhead."

Additionally, Fathom needed a system that could be tightly integrated with the developing e-commerce site to automate the processing of orders and payments. "Fathom is a relatively small company with limited resources. We're primarily focused on course development and content creation. Administration has to be as automated as much as possible to support our business mode," Bonamego says.

Flexible Solution Found

Fathom turned to Microsoft Business Solutions reselling partner Eclipse Computing for support. After evaluating Fathom's business and IT requirements, Eclipse recommended Microsoft® Business Solutions—Great Plains®, a flexible solution that could easily manage Fathom's transaction volume, should it be 10 transactions a day or 10,000.

"There is so much flexibility in [Microsoft Business Solutions] and the knowledge that we can grow the business without hitting any performance crisis gives us great confidence."

Monica Bonamego
Controller
Fathom

By implementing the new solution on Microsoft SQL Server 2000 and NT, Eclipse was able to offer Fathom a solution that requires little support, allowing the company to concentrate their limited IT resources on the commerce server and Web site development.

Global support

Tight integration between Microsoft Business Solutions and Fathom's existing e-commerce server supported the automation of the sales process through an overnight batch update into the financial software. Additional functionality enables Fathom to handle royalty payments to providers of content sold through the site.

"Eclipse also advised Fathom to be prepared to handle a variety of payment types from day one, even though initially we only accepted credit cards," Bonamego says. This has been a benefit as Fathom now accepts gift certificates and offers promotional coupons and discounts for members of affiliate groups such as the AARP (American Association of Retired People).

Although the business is currently based in the U.S., Fathom can also utilize the multi-currency functionality of Microsoft Business Solutions, which is set up to handle a variety of currencies and taxation policies for future expansion.

Over the past 18 months, Eclipse has upgraded Fathom's system and added FRx Financial Reporter to support Fathom's evolving business requirements. Most recently, Fathom has begun to utilize Project Accounting, which enables the company to gain a deeper understanding and control of the cost of developing course material.

Return on Investment

Microsoft Business Solutions is scaling with Fathom as the organization grows and benefits of the solution continue to be realized:

- **Project accounting:** Working with Eclipse, Fathom is in the process of developing an additional reporting solution for Project Accounting to allow personnel to drill down through transactions to base-level details.
- **Payment options:** Fathom initially accepted only credit cards, but integration of the existing commerce server with the new software allows the company to handle all kinds of payment types and offer additional customer benefits for organizations like the AARP.
- **Scalability:** Recent research predicts that the worldwide online learning market will grow from \$2.2 billion in 2000 to \$18.5 billion in 2005. Fathom is following that trend, and Microsoft Business Solutions is supporting the organization every step of the way.

For more information about Microsoft Business Solutions, visit www.microsoft.com/BusinessSolutions

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