

Telecom Leader Automates and Expedites Customer Buying Process via the Web

Industry

This telecom industry leader and Netformx® customer is one of the world's leading data, voice, and Internet services providers. The company currently serves nearly 60 million access lines and 21 million wireless customers nationwide, and holds investments in telecommunications businesses in 28 other countries. The corporation's networking subsidiary provides network integration for companies around the globe.

Challenge

The company was looking to improve responsiveness to customers by offering on-line selection, quoting, and ordering of network integration products. They needed a Web-based guided selling system to cost-effectively extend the reach of the sales organization by handling smaller or repetitive transactions. By reducing the number of customer interactions per order, they could shorten the buying cycle, reduce the cost of sales, and increase sales volume for differentiated product offerings.

Solution

Netformx's Guided Selling System (GSS) enables this telecom industry leader to offer customers a comprehensive integrated on-line buying application that enables them to create solutions from products in an electronic catalog, configure and validate their designs, prepare a Bill of Material, and purchase the products on-line — guaranteeing accurate orders and customer satisfaction.

Overview

A telecom industry leader with a network integration unit delivers proven end-to-end network solutions to clients worldwide. Many customers do not need an entire network, however — just a few components or a product upgrade. These customers had the option to order products over the phone, but they wanted even faster service. Facing customer demands for a Web-based buying option, the company realized that an on-line shopping cart application would not do the job. The complexities of network integration required a comprehensive solution to ensure customers were selecting compatible products that would best meet their needs — it required Netformx's Guided Selling System.

Customers Demand On-line Access

Before deploying GSS from Netformx, the customer's only option was to order products by phone. Even when a customer only needed a few components, this process involved talking to an operator, finding the right person, and having an in-depth conversation about the customer's current network and additional needs.

“We would then process an order based on the phone call — but we might have to make some assumptions, and send the order back to the customer, so they could make changes and send it back to us,” said the Project Director with the company's business mechanization unit. “There was a lot of going back and forth.”

“Our customers demanded that we give them the ability to order through the Web, otherwise they would go to competitors who were already offering this capability,” the Project Director continued.

“The Netformx Guided Selling System (GSS) provides our customers with the ability — right at their fingertips — to select, configure, validate, and purchase network integration equipment. All they need is a Web browser and they have access to all our products, and the tools to put them together correctly.”

Project Director

Business Mechanization Division

“Our customers not only required the ability to order products and services on-line, but they also required the network configuration capability. Ordering network integration equipment is a challenge, because there are so many variables that go into it. But on-line buying applications do not provide capabilities to configure or validate a network. The GSS product from Netformx was the best fit for our needs.”

The company’s network integration unit was already having great success with the desktop version of DesignXpert® from Netformx. The business mechanization unit chose to deploy the Netformx Guided Selling System (GSS), which is built on the same Netformx DesignXpert technology already utilized by and proven successful in the network integration unit.

Delivering Fingertip Configuration with GSS

Netformx’s Guided Selling System is an interactive application that allows the customer to select, configure, and validate networking products via the Internet. The built-in validation engine is optimized for the Web and specifically designed to validate voice, data, and video products. Each product is validated based on the customer’s networking requirements and a set of logical rules supplied directly by the manufacturer.

The company integrated GSS with an on-line catalog of more than 200,000 products from 18 Tier 1 vendors to create a buying application much like an on-line shopping cart. This system allows external customers to access the application from any Web browser and shop for products and services. Not only can customers select desired items and add them to the shopping cart, but they can also use GSS to configure the products and validate their configuration to ensure that they meet both ordering and technical requirements. To help with visualizing the network topology, GSS allows users to graphically place components through a drag-and-drop interface. Once the components are validated, the customer can submit the order on-line for fulfillment and the full Bill of Materials (BOM) can be transferred to the company’s purchasing system.

“The GSS System gives our customers a whole new way to interact with us,” said the Project Director. “Instead of making a phone call and relaying a lot of information, GSS gives the customer the ability at their fingertips to submit that request for a quote. The customer knows their network best, and now they can go on-line themselves, browse an electronic catalog for products and services, select those products, configure them, validate them, and purchase them.”

“One important customer was ready to go to a competitor that provided an on-line buying capability — they had already made their decision,” the Project Director continued. “But we had a chance to show them what we could offer with GSS. This critical customer was very impressed with the Netformx system and decided to keep the business with us. So you see how GSS can make a big difference.”

Netformx GSS Delivers the Following Advantages:

- **Reduced Buying Cycle:** “It would be conservative to say the cycle was shortened from days to hours,” the Project Director confirmed. “While a phone order might be sent back and forth more than a day, the Netformx technology enables our customers to do it on their own, and complete the quote and submit it to us within an hour. It’s a huge time saving for the customer.”
- **Easy Configuration and Reduced Selling Costs:** Through its configuration capability, GSS gives customers the ability to quickly identify and order the right components for their network. Customers can manually configure network devices by selecting from lists of compatible components or use on-line wizards that guide the user through each step of the configuration process.

“Without GSS, our customers would have to know every specific component that they want ahead of time, or they would have to browse the electronic catalog and find the parts themselves,” said the Project Director. “Searching through an electronic catalog with 200,000 items is just too time consuming. The fact that customers can go on-line through GSS; search on a parent router; find all the components that are compatible with that router; and choose the right product for their needs — that’s a big advantage.”

- **Accurate Design Validation:** “Once the customer has configured the network, they validate that configuration based on the parts vendors’ rules,” the Project Director explained. “If it’s not valid, GSS makes a recommendation for modifications that will make the configuration valid. Many of our customers have been very impressed with that capability.”

When a configuration is not validated, an order will be rejected down the line by order administration, resulting in time-consuming manual correction processes, delayed shipments, and increased costs. The GSS on-line validation feature assures proper configuration without requiring technical resources to review every order. GSS features an extensive knowledge base of manufacturer rules to verify the accuracy of device configurations and their interoperability. The knowledge base covers details on tens of thousands of products from more than 70 vendors and over 100,000 distinct configuration and validation rules. Due to Netformx’s strong industry relationships, the vendor rules are always current, complete, and accurate. GSS references this comprehensive database to verify features such as card slot assignments, component and software compatibility, memory and power capacities, IP address completeness, and connectivity integrity. Robust error-checking and suggestion messages are presented to the user to guide them through the validation process and produce error-free orders.

- **Seamless Integration:** The Netformx solution seamlessly integrates with existing eCommerce tools, such as electronic catalogs, enabling GSS to provide a complete on-line buying solution. The integration was completed through a joint effort between experienced Netformx consultants, third party software representatives, and the company’s internal IT organization and delivered in less than 3 months from GSS purchase to finish.
- **Sustainable Differentiation:** GSS allows the company to combine industry standard products with custom services — such as installation, maintenance, and telecom — to create unique solutions that meet customer needs. They can create new product offerings, and make them immediately available in GSS through the electronic catalog, so customers can take advantage of these new technologies right away.

The Bottom Line: Fast and Accurate Ordering Assures Customer Satisfaction

Currently, the company’s GSS installation features data products, but they are already planning to expand the use of the system. “We want to add as many of the products and services we sell onto this tool for voice, video and data,” the Project Director said. “GSS enables us to offer a service that a lot of customers want because they are trying to gain efficiencies in processes, to save time and money — and they see that performing tasks on-line can deliver that advantage.”



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