

# Spire Technology

Established in 1990, Spire Technology has seen steady growth in the field of trade only computer distribution. Through unrivalled commitment to their customers within the I.T. channel Spire has become one of the UK's leading distributors of computer components, peripherals and consumer electronics products. A privately owned and ISO9001: 2000 accredited company, Spire operates from 28,000 sq.ft. premises in Verwood, Dorset.



## The Challenge

In December 2006 a meeting was arranged between Spire and Solweb to discuss how to build on the success of their existing website which utilised Version One of Solweb's WebPortal E-Commerce Solution. James Guyan, Spire's Marketing Manager commented "We continually strive to provide genuine value added services to our resellers. WebPortal enabled us to integrate our website with Access Dimensions, our core accountancy package, providing us with a totally automated online sales order processing system."

He added "Using an external data fulfilment company gave us a quick and easy route into the e-commerce arena. However, we have learned a lot over the last eighteen months and with new products arriving on a daily basis we felt it was time to have a greater degree of control over our own data."

**Spire had a clear idea of what they wanted to achieve with their new site:**

- 1. Increase the search options, to satisfy their customers varying preferences.**
- 2. Move the maintenance of product specifications in house, instead of paying a third party.**
- 3. Increase revenue from targeted advertising.**
- 4. Improve the user experience by offering direct contact with account managers via the website.**
- 5. Provide customer with a facility to have enquiries answered directly by the appropriate brand managers online.**
- 6. Add RSS feeds and press releases to keep the customers informed about industry news.**

With an increasing number of customers requiring a similar level of advanced functionality and with the guidelines in place Solweb began the redevelopment of their WebPortal product.

## The Solution

The key to the success of any e-commerce web site is to deliver detailed and accurate information quickly, easily and consistently to the online buyer. To achieve this there must be seamless integration between the site and the backend database providing both the content and inventory management.

WebPortal provided Spire with a comprehensive set of tools to manage their vast range of products enabling them to create attribute driven product specification sheets to enhance the sites advanced product search. James Guyan stated "With such a diverse range of products it's challenging to produce comparable documentation when the products are so different but WebPortal provides us with a flexible yet structured solution to this very complex problem."

As a trade only IT distributor the only thing more diverse than Spire's product range is their customer base. Combine this with the volatile nature of this highly competitive industry and you are faced with a logistical nightmare. Products fluctuate in price from days to day and very few customers share the same price structure. This is where WebPortal's ability to integrate directly with Access accounting software really comes into its own by updating changes in stock availability, pricing and customer account information on the website as soon as they are detected in Dimensions.

When designing e-commerce sites, significant effort is invested in making a site user-friendly and presentable but an often overlooked but vital component is that of shipping charges. With orders ranging from single items to pallet loads of goods, shipping is an area where IT distributors incur significant costs. WebPortal's rule based shipping manager offers the flexibility to calculate carriage charges for any combination of destination, weight and order value. John Appleton, Spire's Sales and Marketing Director comments. "Unrealistic carriage charges often inhibit online purchasing but the WebPortal

Shipping Manager enables us to quickly calculate competitive rates to both small and volume customers alike."

In addition to the comprehensive e-commerce functions, Spire required their website to be an informative resource for the IT channel in general thus generating more traffic to the site and increasing their customer base. WebPortal's extensive range of marketing tools has enabled Spire to deploy and manage RSS feeds from some of the industries top news providers. Spire can also create and publish its own news articles with current articles accessible from a scroller on the homepage and older articles added to a searchable archive.

WebPortal has fulfilled Spire's need for targeted marketing in order to increase their web site's advertising revenue. The ad manager facility has the ability to upload adverts and target the search criteria or pages upon which they are served. James Guyan comments on the importance of targeted marketing, "Web Advertising is an excellent revenue source and helps to drive sales but only if the adverts are correctly targeted. For example, if a customer uses the keyword search to find a particular laptop then you want the adverts on the page to be promoting your best laptop deals and not a digital camera or LCD TV. WebPortal allows us to do this quickly and efficiently with just a few clicks of the mouse."

## Conclusion

Spire Technology is without doubt a company with vision. Sales and Marketing Director John Appleton is constantly looking for new ways to get ahead of the competition in this highly competitive industry. He believes the WebPortal will continue to become an increasingly

important part of their business. "As soon as the site went live the feedback we received was outstanding. By enabling our customers to manage their accounts and print invoices and statements online we have greatly reduced the load on the credit control department and the integrated sales order processing has released time for the sales team to utilise in more productive ways than before."

Summing up his thoughts he concludes. "It is refreshing to work with a company that takes the time to understand what we want and has the expertise to deliver real solutions to the challenges we face rather than try to fit our issues round their solution."

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**John Appleton, Sales & Marketing Director. Spire Technology Ltd.**

