



INFORMATION

Location: Toronto, Ontario
 Web site: www.indigo.ca
 Industry: Retail

CHALLENGE

Design and implement an application server with search, browsing and online purchase capabilities.

SOLUTION

Affinity Systems was able to design, implement and continue developing the Indigo site using Microsoft SQL Server. The design included flexible capabilities for updating and changing site information. Features such as a bibliographic search engine and promotional tools were also included.

TECHNOLOGIES

- C++
- JavaScript
- HTML
- CGI
- XML
- Net Perceptions
- ODBC
- Bowker Books in Print
- Windows Server
- Apache
- Linux
- Microsoft SQL Server

Indigo enhances online presence to stay the primary Canadian Web-based bookstore

In early 1998, the race was on to create Canada's first Web-based bookstore. The Bookshelf, an enterprising independent bookstore based in Guelph, Ontario, and Sympatico, Canada's largest ISP, created a joint venture to produce such a site. The goal was to excel in providing Canadian content and launch a service before any of the major booksellers.

Affinity Systems was approached to develop this site in a timeframe of just three short months. When completed, the online bookstore was quickly recognized as an innovative leader in the industry. When Indigo decided to launch its online book business, it acquired the Web-based bookstore from the joint venture as a way to jump-start its entry into the Internet marketplace. Affinity Systems was retained by Indigo as the technical lead, to continue to provide enhancements to maintain its prominence as the primary Canadian online bookstore.



OUR SOLUTION

Affinity Systems designed and implemented the complete solution. The initial version of the application server provided browsing, search, and online purchase capabilities, and made use of a custom templating system that supported easy integration of artist designs into dynamically generated Web pages. A custom site manager provided a page content verification component, and automatic creation of a large part of the site (thousands of static pages), using HTML templates populated with data from a Microsoft SQL Server database. The simplicity in creating large portions of the site allowed the ability to change this content on a daily basis.

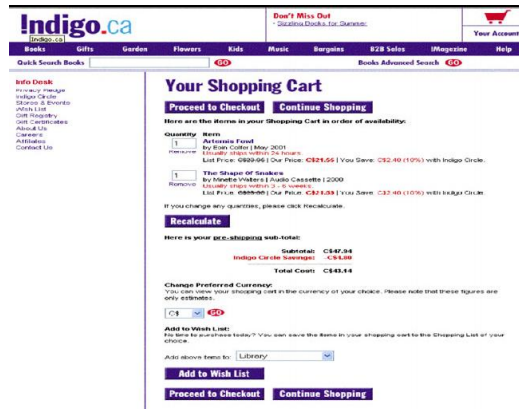
Affinity Systems continued development of the site after the acquisition by Indigo. This included a major branding overhaul to the system, though with the template architecture we designed, this was a fairly easy task. We developed a proprietary bibliographic search engine to make book searches faster and more accurate than any of the site's competitors. Capabilities were implemented to allow editors to pre-publish the site for special events many days in advance.





BENEFITS

- Able to change site content on a daily basis.
- Bibliographic search engine makes book searches faster and more accurate than competitor sites'.
- Editors can pre-publish the site for special events days in advance.
- Wish lists, scheduled promotions, online gift certificates, and frequent purchaser cards help to encourage users to buy books online.



Features were developed to encourage users to buy from the site, including wish lists, scheduled promotions, generation and reimbursement of online gift certificates, and support for the use of frequent purchaser cards at the online bookstore. Finally, a recommendation engine was evaluated to help users find interesting or relevant books.

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