



Customer Success Story:

Charming Shoppes, Inc.

Overview

Charming Shoppes is a leading multi-channel specialty apparel retailer primarily focused on women's plus-size apparel. The company is the parent company of four district store brands – Lane Bryant, Fashion Bug, Catherines Plus Sizes and Petite Sophisticate – as well as Crosstown Traders, Inc., a direct marketer of women's apparel.

The ongoing mission of Charming Shoppes is to serve the lifestyle apparel needs of women wearing plus sizes with the very best service, fashion selection, value and fit. In order to achieve this mission and continue to meet new business requirements, the company also needs to run a smooth technology infrastructure.

Challenge

The core IT application infrastructure at Charming Shoppes consisted of homegrown systems that were complemented by best-of-breed software packages. In the past, the company had taken a best-of-breed approach when implementing its systems, but when shifting to a multi-channel sales environment – moving from just retail sales to catalog and e-commerce sales as well – the infrastructure had become cumbersome and inflexible.

Charming Shoppes recognized that real-time integration would be needed to allow IT to support the business (most importantly its multi-channel growth strategy) while at the same time leveraging its existing infrastructure. One key struggle for the company was real-time data integration and synchronization across its many different platforms and sales channels.

The company's infrastructure consisted of multiple runtime environments, including IBM mainframe-based COBOL code using a Virtual Storage Access Method (VSAM) file

Highlights

Manufacturing, Retail,
Distribution

Processes Enabled:

- Support multi-channel sales environment
- Integrate data across the enterprise

Customer Benefits & Results:

- Created an SOA environment that ties together legacy mainframe applications and new .NET applications for multi-channel process execution
- Achieved seamless process execution across a variety of platforms and sales channels
- Extended the value and capabilities of its heterogeneous legacy environment in support of current business initiatives

management system and an IBM DB2 database; UNIX environments running Oracle database instances; and Microsoft Windows environments running Microsoft SQL server.

The company had looked into acquiring an EAI tool to enable the development of near real-time interfaces but at that point it could not find a solution that would provide the same ease-of-use, low risk, and low administrative overhead as overnight batch interfaces. The IT team was not willing to move to real-time interfaces unless it could find an application that would make real-time (or near real-time) updates as easy to manage as batch updates. In addition the company needed a solution that would allow it to completely integrate with its mainframe and leverage its existing legacy systems while at the same time deploying new Microsoft .NET applications.

In order to meet its new business requirements, the company selected Metastorm Integration Manager (MIM) – the system-based process management component of the Metastorm BPM® suite. Metastorm Integration Manager would allow Charming Shoppes to not only integrate all of its legacy mainframe applications and enable real-time data transfer, but also to expose legacy applications as services and to manage the execution of those services in key business processes under a single SOA.

Solution

The company selected Metastorm Integration Manager because it provided the functionality it needed to integrate all of its existing systems together and leverage the software it had

deployed over the previous years. Charming later discovered that it got a lot more capability and value from the solution than anticipated. The company was intrigued when it discovered that the MIM product also enabled it to take its existing mainframe programs and expose them as web services that could be consumed beyond the mainframe environment. In addition, being able to service-enable applications on the mainframe to interface with new .NET development was a key factor in Charming Shoppes' selection of the Metastorm solution.

Combining the strengths of Metastorm Integration Manager and IBM WebSphere, Charming Shoppes has deployed a solution that has enabled it to streamline and accelerate the way in which it handles real-time data across the enterprise. The company has service-enabled some of its key processes allowing them to combine both legacy applications and new applications into single executable, auditable process flows.

A few business examples of projects the company has completed using Metastorm Integration Manager include:

E-Commerce Distribution Center Receiving – the company's e-commerce distribution center is set up in its systems as a 'store' which enables its brands to seamlessly manage its inventory. However, based on the way it was initially implemented, the e-commerce distribution center was unable to receive shipments directly from vendors, so the only way for it to receive merchandise was via a shipment from one of the company's retail distribution centers. This meant that the vendor shipped to the retail distribution center who would then have to pick, pack and ship to the e-commerce distribution center which would arrive with many SKUs in a single carton and/or a single SKU across many cartons – a very difficult and cumbersome receiving process as opposed to when merchandise is received directly from the vendor with just one SKU in a carton, making it much easier to receive and stock.

Charming Shoppes was able to develop a new application to enable the e-commerce distribution center to receive and process direct from vendor shipments. The new applications conformed to Charming Shoppes' current application development standards which require new development to be browser-based applications built on .NET. Using MIM to deploy this new application saved the company months of effort by allowing them to reuse logic and "modernize" existing mainframe programs for use in the SOA, rather than the alternative, which was to completely reinvent the wheel from both a business requirements and software development perspective.

Crosstown Traders' E-Commerce Integration – Charming Shoppes had acquired Crosstown Traders to enter the catalog

business and support the expansion of catalog and e-commerce businesses for its brick and mortar brands (Lane Bryant, Catherines and Fashion Bug). To meet these business goals, the company decided to launch a project to move its brick and mortar e-commerce business to the newly acquired Crosstown platform. This included a complete replacement of the systems used by the brick and mortar e-commerce business and many interfaces between the e-commerce system and the retail system. It was important for the company to have this project completed in 9 months in order to avoid supporting holiday volume on the existing system.


Charming Shoppes met its needs and related timeline by deploying Metastorm's event management processing capabilities on its VSAM and MVS DB2 systems to capture changes in data as they occurred. It also deployed Metastorm Integration Manager on Crosstown's AS400 system to enable the company to access and update the Crosstown data stores.

E-Commerce Linking – Product thumbnails and sizes seen on apparel websites are not presented in the same way that Buyers create the styles, colors, and sizes for Inventory Management. This resulted in a need to combine data for some styles as well separate colors from other styles for website presentation purposes. Charming Shoppes had other functions that had similar requirements and decided its existing applications could not be enhanced to handle the new requirements. As a result, Charming developed a new application that would allow links to be shared across functions. Using Metastorm Integration manager to implement EAI interfaces to its Crosstown platform and to tie in its existing CICS application that created links, the company is able to display product on its websites in a manner that makes sense to its customers.

Results

By extending the functionality of its legacy environment, Charming Shoppes now has an infrastructure foundation for future growth and has realized a number of benefits since implementation. The company reports it can now more effectively develop real-time, reliable interfaces which in turn has allowed the IT department to deliver more effective solutions. It has also been able to deliver new functionality with fewer issues than in the past and it has been able to use the Metastorm solution to help "modernize" and reuse existing mainframe and legacy applications.

By allowing its IT department to efficiently develop real-time interfaces to expose mainframe legacy code as a service



gives the department the ability to also support its multi-channel corporate strategy while continuing to focus on its IT strategy – using its homegrown ERP with best-of-breed strategic applications. And most importantly, the Charming Shoppes IT team is now able to do things more quickly and cost-effectively with increased agility to react to changing business requirements.

Charming Shoppes is a great example of how a customer can leverage Metastorm Integration Manager to create an SOA environment that ties together legacy mainframe applications with new .NET development for seamless process execution across a variety of platforms and sales channels.

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