



Providence | Health System

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O.T. Millsap, Senior Communications Coordinator

Providence Health System
Portland, OR

Rapid development allows Providence to begin e-commerce

One of the largest health care systems in the U.S., Providence offers a wide range of health and fitness classes. The company wanted to offer courses via the Internet. CTR helped design and build the site, which allows browsing of the course catalog and online registration.

Situation

Providence Health System (PHS) is one of the largest integrated health care delivery systems in the U.S. It offers an array of products and, as part of its service to its customers and the community, it offers a wide range of health and fitness classes. To publicize the classes and to facilitate enrollment, Providence prints and mails more than 250,000 catalogs three times annually, at a cost of about \$250,000 per year. This approach has worked well in the past. “But,” says O.T. Millsap, Senior Communications Coordinator, “We recognize the importance of developing new methods of delivering our services and we’re aware that the Internet holds great possibilities for the future. So, as a first step in exploring the possibilities of the Internet, we decided to put our catalog of courses on the Web to allow consumers to register and pay for classes online.” To do this, the company turned to Microsoft Consulting Services (MCS). The two decided to define and build an electronic commerce site quickly and on a limited budget while keeping Providence personnel involved to gain experience. Microsoft Consulting Services brought in CTR Business Systems, Inc. — a Microsoft Solution Provider Partner — to oversee the development of the site.

Critical issues

Providence Health System wanted to provide its members increased services via the Internet to maintain a competitive edge in the market. “The Internet offers a great opportunity to understand and improve

customer service delivery,” Millsap said. “We want to use it to find out what customers are looking for in health care delivery today, and then, to invent better ways to provide the services.”

In addition, the company wanted:

- To gain experience in building e-commerce applications.
- Gradually reduce the cost of printing and mailing catalogs through steadily-increasing online registration.

Solution

One MCS consultant, one CTR consultant, and seven resources from Providence (representing IT, Marketing, and the Health Resource Center) formed a collaborative team to define the project, to design and build the site, and to deploy it to coincide with the release of a new catalog mailing. The new system:

- Allows browsing of available health and fitness courses.
- Allows registration and payment for selected classes.
- Provides an administrative interface for the management of the course catalog and registrations.

Technologies

- Microsoft Windows NT Server 4.0
- SQL Server 6.5
- Internet Information Server 4.0
- Site Server Commerce Edition 3.0
- Visual Studio 6 (Visual InterDev, Visual Source Safe)
- Design and Microsoft Office tools (ERwin/ERX, Visio Pro 5.0, Word, Excel, Project 98, PaintShop Pro)

Results

The site is up and running at www.providence.org/classes, and registrations began to occur on the site as soon as it became available. “On the first round, there weren’t a lot of online registrations,” said Erik Sargent, Lead Web Developer. “I think that’s because we didn’t do much PR and it came in the middle of a registration cycle. But now, in the next cycle, we’re getting 20 percent online registration. I’d say that’s a great return.” In addition, assuming online registration continues to increase, the company is projecting a substantial savings in catalog printing and mailing costs. “We’re hoping that, if we see a strong enough return in online registrations, we could cut the number of catalogs we print and mail by a third next year and maybe by another third the following year,” Sargent said. There’s where we’ll see our monetary return. At least in the first stage.”