



American Automobile Association

One web application to be transformed into 94 individual club sites with WebObjects.

Summary

One application, almost one hundred variations. The American Automobile Association (AAA) has designed a web application that is a tool for each of its 94 clubs to use as they build their own, unique web sites. The application allows nonprofessionals to construct innovative graphics and content specifically geared for their own members, simply and easily. The application was developed with WebObjects application server software, chosen for its robust scalability and ability to work on a wide variety of platforms.

Key Benefits

- Ability to develop in CORBA/Java
- Compatibility with a wide variety of platforms—simultaneously
- Scalability—no problem handling AAA's 42 million members
- Ability to develop unique web content without HTML
- Superior enterprise-level technical support

With 42 million members nationwide, the American Automobile Association (AAA) has built a global reputation by serving the needs of drivers. Its services are world renowned—travel planning, safety education, maps, and insurance coverage. Yet when a business is based on years of customer service, entry into a new, untried communication channel can be daunting. Like a cross-country excursion, AAA's entry onto the Internet required foresight, intricate planning, and attention to detail.

Challenge

AAA is an association of 94 automobile clubs throughout the United States. When AAA decided to provide services for all its clubs over the World Wide Web, it wanted to offer its standard benefits to all members but wanted each separate club to have its own web site: each site developed specifically for its own members, offering its own unique services in addition to the services available nationwide. Each club would choose the graphics and content best suited for its members, but the functionality of each site would be the same. Further, AAA wanted each web site to be developed and maintained by current staff—not by programmers or professional web designers.

Solution

The result of AAA's effort is an online application that enables the clubs to develop, modify, and deploy their own web sites—all interconnected to the main AAA site and all online. The application is a tool that allows the clubs to modify content, choose unique graphics, and add links and other personal touches to each site. The application was developed and is deployed with the WebObjects application server from Apple Computer.

Developer Pete Eberley says, "When we were looking at application server options, we evaluated a lot of products. Two of our main criteria were that we wanted to use a CORBA/Java-compatible architecture, and that it had to be scalable enough to handle over forty million members. WebObjects was the clear solution to our needs." He continues, "One of the main selling points was the technical support that we got from Apple—it was very clear that Apple was used to dealing with enterprise-level projects, and was capable of supporting our needs completely."

The application is deployed in the newest version of WebObjects, WebObjects 4. Developer Dov Rosenberg says, "When we were doing load testing, we determined that we wanted the extra performance of version 4. That performance enables us to maintain a consistent level of functionality, no matter how many simultaneous users."



Apple Enterprise Software Customer Profile

American Automobile Association

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Each AAA web site includes features such as online travel reservations (air, hotel, car), online access to Triptick publications (including maps and premarked travel routes), and online-access tourbooks. Features such as car games for children, travel hints, safety recommendations, and road conditions are also included. Some clubs will offer online insurance, including web-based enrollment forms. But some of the most technically superior work on the site is not apparent to the casual viewer. “We are particularly pleased with the Content Manager part of the application,” says Eberley. “We have developed the application to the point that clubs can create their own pages by filling in blanks and pointing to images—they don’t even need to know HTML.”

Those pages can be consistently updated and modified. “Since all of the clubs will be using one application, they can make the changes they want and the pages will be updated and changed on a nightly basis.”

The application currently operates on a Windows NT server running a Microsoft SQL Server 6.5 database. The Java/CORBA development tools were VisiBroker and JBuilder by Inprise Corporation.

Benefits

One of the greatest benefits of using WebObjects was that the application is not tied to a particular platform. “WebObjects allows the widest possible platform selection,” says Eberley. “We had to have that freedom because our clubs each have their own choices for computers. All of our clubs can implement and modify their web sites, whether they use UNIX, Windows NT, or anything else.” But the greatest benefit of all, he says, is the flexibility. “It is amazing when you realize that one application can be presented as 100 applications—simultaneously.”

For More Information

For more information about WebObjects, contact
Apple Enterprise Software at 1-800-848-6398
or visit www.apple.com/webobjects.

For more information about the American Automobile
Association, visit www.aaa.com.

Apple Computer, Inc.

1 Infinite Loop
Cupertino, CA 95014
(408) 996-1010
www.apple.com

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