

CIO

INSPIRING MINDS

Award-winning innovation tips 48

BIG IDEAS ON A SHOESTRING

High-impact projects on the cheap 42

CLEAN SWEEP

Smile for the IT camera 23

THE SCOOP ON E-READERS

Lighten up your briefcase 18

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PLUS

Ringin' Up Baby

Stork Craft relies on technology to revamp its Wal-Mart relationship 15

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CIO 100 Awards

Value Added This year's class focused on customers, collaboration and cost control to deliver business success **BY CIO STAFF 30**

The 2009 Winners 34



6

Start

From the Editor in Chief **6**
From the CEO **8**
News Scan **10**
What We're Reading **12**

Grow

INNOVATION & BUSINESS VALUE

CIO 100 WINNER Stork Craft and Wal-Mart partner online **15**
Microsoft's Mundie on future computers **16**
Can e-readers live up to the hype? **18**
Why you should stop provisioning end users **20**



15



23

Run

LEADERSHIP & OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

CIO 100 WINNER Using IT to curb parking violations **23**
Advice on mainframe modernization **24**
CIO 100 WINNER How UPS saved money and paper with handheld printers **26**



42

Connect

PEER ADVICE

CIO 100 WINNERS Big ideas on a shoestring **42**
Score your contractor's performance **44**
What mid-market CIOs want from vendors **46**

Thrive

YOUR LIFE & CAREER PATH

CIO 100 WINNERS Strategies to inspire innovative thinking **48**
Break your addiction to PowerPoint **50**
Help your staff overcome economic anxiety **51**
Get an outside mentor **52**



48



56

Finish

CIO 100 WINNER JetBlue's Smart Terminal at JFK **56**
Index **54**



Irene Jeremic, Stork Craft's corporate executive advisor and CIO, reexamined her company's relationship with Wal-Mart Canada to increase online sales.

CIO
100

15

Ringling Up Baby

An online partnership with Wal-Mart Canada increased sales and sped delivery for furniture maker Stork Craft Manufacturing **BY MATT VILLANO**

An old adage tells us that the best things come in small packages, but an e-commerce partnership between Stork Craft Manufacturing and Wal-Mart Canada has proven a big deal.

The collaboration revolved around a website that Stork Craft, which makes baby furniture, designed for Wal-Mart Canada customers. The site increased sales and reduced order fulfillment from up to four weeks to as little as two days compared to store or catalogue purchases.

The proud mother of this endeavor is Irene Jeremic, Stork Craft corporate executive advisor and CIO. Her goal: to boost revenue by making Wal-Mart Canada competitive on the Web and cater to its online customers. "It's not often that you have a business-to-business partner trying to cater to the general public," she notes. "The fact that Wal-Mart was open to this was perhaps the biggest factor in getting the site to work."

Stork Craft had a retail and distribution partnership with Wal-Mart in the United States >>>

.....85% Senior execs who say trust in business has declined McKinsey ↑15% U.S. homes with broadband Pew Internet & American Life Project ↓1% Construction spending in June U.S. Commerce Department

▶▶▶ **Stork Craft** Continued from Page 15

and Canada since 2005, and the two companies partnered to build an e-commerce site for U.S. customers in 2006. As a result, Stork Craft grew so quickly that it was able to acquire three competitors within 18 months: Ragazzi Fine Furniture, Canwood Furniture and Status Office Furniture.

By early 2008, Stork Craft was eager to develop a similar partnership with Wal-Mart in Canada. "Anytime there's a supplier whose brand is becoming more widespread, it's beneficial for them to figure out a way to sell products online, says Steve Rowen, managing partner with RSR Research.

The only problem: Customers could browse but not purchase anything through Wal-Mart Canada's website. So Jeremic assembled a team of Stork Craft and Wal-Mart developers to pilot a new site. Stork Craft's executive team and representatives from Wal-Mart Canada's buying office conceptualized the project. Wal-Mart then defined regulatory, legal and functional requirements. Finally, Stork Craft's IT department built the technology platform, a system composed of a website on which Wal-Mart Canada customers can shop, a management console and a payment and administration unit.

The two companies also devised a strategy to eliminate the inefficiencies inherent in the traditional model of furniture sales—where the consumer contacts the retailer for service.

Instead, Stork Craft agreed to ship items directly to Wal-Mart Canada customers and to provide direct-sale support—handling customer returns and post-sale inquiries. Jeremic says that by providing an alternative to in-store purchasing, Stork Craft was able to trim delivery time by up to 85 percent. And because Stork Craft has better control over how deliveries are handled, consumers experience fewer slip ups and they're happier.

The cobranded site went live in April 2008, enabling Wal-Mart Canada shoppers to purchase as many as 200 different cribs, dressing tables and toddler beds. Since then, Jeremic says, nearly 350,000 customers have visited the site. She declines to divulge sales figures, but cites "great value" to both Stork Craft and Wal-Mart Canada, which gets a cut of the sales.

Matt Villano is a freelance writer based in California.

Stork Craft was able to trim delivery time by up to 85 percent.

crunch

Most Valuable IT

TOP FIVE technologies used in 2009 CIO 100 projects



The Future of Computing?

Microsoft's head of research and strategy Craig Mundie says he believes future computers will require less human input to function, doing more work automatically.

"I've taken to talking about computing more as going from a world where they work at our command to where they work on our behalf," says Mundie.

As an example of what he envisions, Mundie demoed the latest version of a digital personal assistant, a virtual "secretary" displayed as a face on a monitor that can greet office visitors and schedule appointments. When idle, such an application uses 40 percent of the compute power of the machine because it is constantly aware of its context. "That makes it so clear to me that this will have to be built on a hybridized client plus cloud architecture," Mundie says.

Microsoft often talks about combining local computing with Internet-based computing. But running an application like the assistant remotely would produce an unusable service, Mundie says. The assistant must respond to people relatively quickly. "That's not likely to be computed in real time if you interpose the latency of a wide-area network in the middle of it," he says.

—Nancy Gohring

..... ↓ **16%** Companies with CEO turnover *Challenger, Gray & Christmas* **10%** Twitter users accounting for 90 percent of all tweets *Harvard Business School* **29%** Americans driving less this year *DataMonitor*