Marketing Software Provider Uses DNN to Speed Web Development 600%
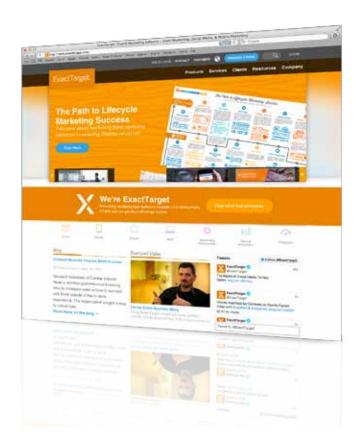
ExactTarget had just three months to develop what would become a network for its more than 7,000 customers. It met that goal with a fully functional debut release thanks to DNN Evoq Content[1] management system and application development platform for Microsoft® .NET. The DNN Platform facilitated the use of prebuilt modules which jumpstarted development, cut .NET Web development time by a factor of six, and helped ensure reliability, scalability, and customization.

Business Needs

It was three months before ExactTarget wanted to release a revolutionary social media solution to connect its customers with one another and ExactTarget's team of experts. It named the site 3sixty for the role it would play in connecting digital marketers to one another and to ExactTarget. The only problem: 3sixty didn't exist yet. Could ExactTarget develop the product in time to meet its deadline and be the first to market, extending its reputation and market share?

SUMMARY

CUSTOMER	ExactTarget
WEBSITE	www.exacttarget.com
COUNTRY	USA
CUSTOMER SIZE	497 employees
INDUSTRY	Professional services–Information technology

CUSTOMER PROFILE

ExactTarget, based in Indianapolis, IN, is a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner providing on-demand and one-to-one marketing solutions.

TECHNOLOGY

Microsoft .NET Framework 3.5

PARTNERS

Microsoft

PRODUCT IMPLEMENTED

evoq | CONTENT

ExactTarget provides on-demand and one-to-one marketing solutions that enable clients to send business-critical and event-triggered communications, which increase sales, optimize marketing investments, and strengthen customer relationships. The company's proposed 3sixty community would represent a major advance: a creation of a single source for ExactTarget customers to access the resources and online training they need to succeed, combined with the opportunity to network and share success strategies with other ExactTarget users. 3sixty would even include an "iLab" where users could test ExactTarget offerings before they became available to the general marketplace.

Getting it done right was as important as getting it done fast. "We couldn't put out just a skeleton of a site and add features later," says Stephanie Zircher, Director of Product Enablement Operations, ExactTarget. "We had to get it right the first time."

That put pressure on ExactTarget to choose the right development environment. It considered some options—both open source and proprietary—but developers at the company thought the tools were too abstract and lacked the application programming interfaces to enable them to produce the Microsoft® .NET Framework code they required for the project. The development team was modest in size—averaging three developers—so there was no interest in learning a new development environment. ExactTarget developers wanted to produce native .NET code, but they wanted a highly expedited way to do so.

Solution

The company had already gained experience with an open source platform it found promising for software development: DNN, a leading web content management system (CMS) and application development framework for Microsoft .NET-based development.

The DNN Platform runs hundreds of thousands of production websites worldwide. ExactTarget used the software to jumpstart development of

internal tools to manage the company's products. The experience was positive, according to Micah Squires, Principal Engineer in Corporate Information Systems, Exact Target. "Our internal management tools were built up to six times faster with DNN," he says.

"Because Evoq Content sits on top of the .NET Framework and takes advantage of our clients' existing resources and knowledge of .NET and the Microsoft application platform, it can cut development time dramatically," says Shaun Walker, Co-Founder and Chief Architect at DNN Corporation.

ExactTarget wanted this fast development, plus security, and reliability, for 3sixty. To gain that higher level of reliability, the company upgraded from the DNN Platform to Evoq Content. ExactTarget also chose Evoq Content for the security and scalability it sought in its new product.

Squires and his colleagues took advantage of the built-in provider model design pattern in Evoq Content, and available third-party modules, rather than having to build their application from scratch. For example, they created a custom plug-in authentication provider to meet ExactTarget's requirement for single sign on to the solution.

Another factor that led ExactTarget to DNN was the software's same day, unlimited technical support. "We opened two support incidents while developing 3sixty," says Squires. "Both of them were answered and resolved within two hours."

Benefits

ExactTarget wanted to develop an enterprise-class, mission-critical solution in three months. That's what it accomplished with the help of Evoq Content. Development was up to six times faster than with traditional tools, enabling ExactTarget to meet its tradeshow deadline. "We could not have launched the product otherwise," says Zircher.

Nor was the product a "skeleton" to which features were added later. "DNN Evoq Content helped us quickly deliver a feature-rich 1.0 product with user discussions, private messaging, group functionality, and much more," says Zircher. "This was a truly awesome first release with all major functionality in place."

That functionality was highly customized. "Although we jumpstarted development with available functionality, we weren't locked into using that functionality as-is," says Squires. "There are instances in which we acquired modules and only used the back-end functionality, so from the interface it's impossible to tell you're not in our custom-built software."

Scalability was another key concern. "We were encouraging everyone at the conference to use 3sixty and it was crucial that the software performed without error as those users came online," says Zircher. "The software ran perfectly."

The ease of use of the DNN software extends beyond development to the continuing maintenance of the site. ExactTarget maintains 3sixty with a single, non-technical business administrator.

ExactTarget now plans to use DNN in a revamp of its corporate website. "Evoq Content has become a standard part of our toolkit," says Squires.

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[1] Evoq Content was previously known as DNN Professional and Enterprise Editions.

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Stephanie Zircher
Director of Product Enablement Operations
ExactTarget

DNN

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