

Ft.com

Business



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Company: Sopheon Customer: FT. com Submitted by: Roger Staton

Sopheon's expertise in content management technology played a part in building FT. com into the world's leading global business portal. For many business people throughout the world, the Financial Times is an indispensable source of global business news and information. As a growing number of people turn to the Internet for news, and depth of background on the news, the opportunity is there for publications to increase their reach, and become truly up-to-the-minute and interactive. This is an opportunity that FT. com, on-line arm of the Financial Times, has seized wholeheartedly – with the support of some expert technology partners. The Financial Times made its web debut in May 1995. Five stories a day were posted to a site that was primarily created to promote the new Los Angeles edition of the newspaper. Its potential was soon recognised, however, and the website was relaunched as FT. com, which focused on publishing content from the newspaper in an on-line format.

But it didn't stop there. FT. com had a greater vision in mind: of creating the world's leading global business portal, accessible by businesspeople everywhere." The aim was for FT. com to become an essential part of every executive's desktop," explains Paul Waddington, marketing services director of FT. com." We wanted to make the most of the well-respected Financial Times brand, and continue to provide first-rate business analysis – but also give people more than an on-line newspaper. For people to visit a website repeatedly, they need more compelling reasons to return than to read news which they can get in other ways. So the new FT. com is a complete, dynamic, content-rich business service, supporting its core news, analysis

and market information with tools such as a free comprehensive business archive, an online diary, and also providing information on leisure activities, such as travel reports and restaurant reviews. In the future, this would extend to advanced personalisation, with the portal being tailored to the individual user.

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A technology overhaul

These enhancements to FT. com were to result in a huge increase in the content being published on the site, the sheer scale of which called for extensive changes in the technology behind the website. For a start, a professional content management solution would be required, both to make the site easy to use, effectively unlocking the information for the user, and also to streamline the publishing process for FT. com. The web provides limitless space to a site enabling constant updates to be made, which creates a truly up-to-date news service.

But this was becoming unnecessarily time-consuming and difficult to manage as volume of content increased. It was also essential that the site be scalable, and based on open Internet standards. FT. com wanted the ability to rapidly grow, adding content and integrating new services to take advantage of new possibilities like advanced personalisation to users, and the scope to move into areas such as broadband and WAP.

Take your partners

With publishing as its core competency, FT. com needed to partner with external suppliers who had the e-consulting, technology and distribution

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capabilities it needed to build its site into the world's leading global business portal. These partners included Sopheon, which integrated the systems that make up the backbone of the website. The technical platform for the website was completely overhauled. Designed for growth, it is scalable and based upon an open application server rather than a proprietary technology. At its heart is OpenMarket's Internet Publishing System (IPS) content management software, which links together copy, creating templates, feeding databases, serving advertisements, managing the site and reporting on usage. It also separates page design and content, meaning that designers and writers can work independently and therefore more efficiently, streamlining the publishing process.

The OpenMarket IPS sits on top of an Oracle database, which is in turn above a Netscape Application Server. In addition, Razorfish and Mckinsey acted as strategic planning consultants, Logica built the system architecture, Digital Island is running the network, and other companies are providing supplementary content to the core material from the combined FT.com/Financial Times newsroom.

System integration – building the backbone to the site

The decision to choose technology from different suppliers, and involve experts in every stage of the project presented a particular challenge – combining the content management software, database, server and network infrastructure together to build the Internet publishing solution that would meet all of FT.com's requirements for flexibility, scalability and ease of use.

This task was undertaken by Sopheon, which worked with IXL to tailor the solution specifically to FT. com’s individual needs. Sopheon had previously worked with FT. com to provide a large web interface/search solution, and the success of this collaboration resulted in the former being chosen as a partner for this latest project.

Going live

The new FT. com portal went live in February 2000. Today, the site has more than two million registered users, generating over 26 million monthly page views, making it the most visited business news site in the UK and among the world’s most significant sources of business news on the Internet. FT. com can be more dynamic than its sister newspaper, providing news as it happens. The Financial Times is a once-a-day experience.

FT. com is updated 24 hours a day, seven days a week by writers in locations across the world. It can also contain a limitless amount of information, whereas the Financial Times is bound by the number of pages it can have. But FT. com is not a ‘ rival’ to the newspaper, according to Paul Waddington.

“ In fact, sales of Financial Times have increased by approximately 20 percent over the last year,” he says. “ The newspaper and the website complement each other. For example, when the story of Rover being bought byPhoenix broke it was 9. 30 in the morning, when newspapers had long since gone to press. We were able to publish the news on FT. com straight away, keeping the audience up to date throughout the day, and the newspaper featured a detailed report on the story the next morning.” As well as providing users with breaking news and critical business and industry

information services, the new FT. com has career, travel and leisure information, links to other business newspapers and publications. It also offers new features including personalised financial portfolios, office tools including personal email, file and storage, and an online diary, as well as discussion forums and shopping.

FT. com – your life on the web

“ We would like to see all 150 million of the world’s businesspeople using FT. com in the future,” says Paul Waddington. “ We will keep adding stories and rich content, and the advanced personalisation that will soon be possible will make FT. com an essential part of the business person’s life.”