



Game Developer Switches from Linux, Improves Time-to-Market and Lowers Costs

Overview

Country or Region: United States

Industry: Entertainment

Customer Profile

In just six years, Glu Mobile has grown from start-up status to a global leader in the video-game industry. Based in San Mateo, California, it employs 220 people.

Business Situation

Glu Mobile wanted a more powerful and flexible Web site that it could personalize easily, to help it sell directly to customers as well as through traditional channels. But rebuilding the site with the Linux and Java technologies on which it was based posed potential problems in terms of time-to-market, cost, and functionality.

Solution

Using the services of Microsoft® Gold Certified Partner Allin Consulting, Glu Mobile rebuilt the site using Microsoft Office SharePoint® Server 2007 and other Microsoft technologies.

Benefits

- Easier site enhancements
- Increased competitiveness
- Higher IT productivity
- Faster development
- Potential for improved reliability

“When everyone saw what SharePoint Server 2007 could do ... they agreed it was an ideal tool for faster Web-site development, deployment, and enhancement.”

Ron Sha, Chief Information Officer, Glu Mobile

Glu Mobile, a global leader in the fiercely competitive market of video games, needed a more appealing and functional Web site as well as a far easier way to update, localize, and personalize the site's content. Facing the functionality and flexibility limitations of the Linux and Java technology on which the site was built, executives decided to rebuild it using Microsoft® Office SharePoint® Server 2007 and other Microsoft technologies. Developers built the new site in an impressive four months' time by taking advantage of the technologies' scalability and built-in tools for dynamic localization and enhancing security. The result is a Web site that can be enhanced to accommodate new products and markets within hours instead of days.



“Because we no longer need to wait for IT professionals to be available to make site updates, new content can be posted in a matter of hours rather than days, with all the time-to-market and competitive advantages that such efficiency implies.”

Ron Sha, Chief Information Officer, Glu Mobile

Situation

Glu Mobile, based in San Mateo, California, is a developer and publisher of video games. After its founding in 2001, the start-up company grew rapidly with such titles as Super K.O. Boxing, Stranded, and Brain Genius, which run on platforms from Atari, Harrah's, Hasbro, Microsoft, PlayFirst, PopCap Games, Sega, and Sony. By 2006, the company had offices in England, France, Germany, China, and Brazil and distribution agreements with the major device manufacturers and wireless carriers.

It also had a Web site that was based on Linux and Java technologies and lagged behind the company's success. “We felt the site had grown stale and was ready for a rewrite, not only of its presentation, but also of its infrastructure,” says Ron Sha, Chief Information Officer, Glu Mobile. “We wanted to enhance the site to make it more effective for direct sales and provide more information on our games. We also wanted to make future enhancements faster and easier.”

Central to that initiative, Sha explains, was rebuilding the infrastructure so that the site could be repurposed both “on the fly” and on a regular basis by technical and nontechnical staff, at the home office as well as at the branches.

“Considering not only our different games, but also the more than 20 countries and audiences we market to, as well as different carriers, network types, handsets, screen dimensions, and languages, we have 100,000 potential content combinations that must be created, published, and maintained on our Web site,” Sha says. “We needed dynamic localization, so the site would present the games and languages suitable to a region, based on the location of the Web visitor. We also needed the ability to easily personalize and repurpose the site. But we

struggled because the underlying technology lacked built-in tools for these tasks.”

At first the company evaluated the proposals offered by 10 LAMP (Linux-Apache-MySQL-PHP) vendors and consultants. This was because the Glu Mobile site was based on Linux and Java, and because the company was a longtime adherent of products such as the Apache Tomcat application server; the PostgreSQL database management system; and the Ruby on Rails and PHP programming/scripting languages.

But Sha, who had recently joined Glu Mobile and whose mission it was to develop the new Web site, had another idea. Drawing on his own extensive experience with Microsoft® technologies, Sha urged members of the project team to consider Microsoft Office SharePoint® Server 2007. At first, Sha faced resistance from individuals who considered the Office SharePoint Server technology they knew—SharePoint Portal Server 2003—to be a foundation more suitable for intranets and extranets than for external Web sites.

Solution

In response, Sha demonstrated how Office SharePoint Server 2007 excelled in terms of scalability and functionality. First, he formed a team that conducted a successful stress test with 10,000 concurrent users (far more than would be expected in a normal production environment). The team demonstrated the comprehensive integration between SharePoint Server 2007 and the functionality formerly provided by Microsoft Content Management Server 2002, a product that was known and liked at Glu Mobile. The team also pointed out the price advantages of SharePoint Server 2007 over a traditional, proprietary, content-management solution such as Documentum.

In addition, Sha's team showed that Office SharePoint Server 2007 compared favorably

“By avoiding having to hire consultants to tackle [update] projects, we will reduce costs over the life of the site.”

Ron Sha, Chief Information Officer, Glu Mobile

to open-source solutions with respect to support for back-end content processing and localization management. “Such functionality was essential for enabling regional managers and other nontechnical staff to do their own localization and personalization,” Sha explains. “Although some of the other solutions had that type of functionality, it wasn’t nearly as capable as what SharePoint Server 2007 offered.”

Finally, Sha’s team emphasized that Office SharePoint Server 2007 had all these capabilities built into a single product, whereas the open-source technologies would require complex add-ins. “Built-in capabilities are central to reducing time-to-market when you are repurposing to support new games, new wireless technologies, and especially new types of handsets—which our target audiences tend to purchase just as soon as the new products come to market,” Sha says.

And that was the argument that sealed the deal. Sha recalls, “When everyone saw what SharePoint Server 2007 could do and how well it would fit our needs, they agreed it was an ideal tool for faster Web-site development, deployment, and enhancement.”

Once the decision was made to rebuild the Glu Mobile Web site in Office SharePoint Server 2007, the company selected Allin Consulting, a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner, to do the job, largely because that firm had built hundreds of intranets, extranets, and Web sites using Content Management Server and other Microsoft technologies. Moreover, at the time Allin Consulting was working closely with several companies that were implementing Office SharePoint Server 2007 and other technologies in the 2007 Microsoft Office system.

Over a four-month period, two developers and one project manager designed, developed, tested, and deployed the new Glu Mobile Web

site. In addition to Office SharePoint Server 2007, they used Microsoft Office SharePoint Designer 2007, Microsoft ASP.NET version 2.0, the Visual Studio® 2005 development system, and SQL Server™ 2005 database software. Developers also employed the Microsoft .NET Framework, which they used to integrate the flow of Java, Flash, and rich-media code into the site’s content-management modules on the back end and to build a process to enable nontechnical people to manage and maintain the site’s content.

Sha considers the new site to be “pioneering, with a comprehensive set of Web-application features and a cutting-edge user experience.” For example, the site:

- Highlights popular games automatically, according to current traffic patterns and a given visitor’s profile.
- Tracks usage and buying patterns with the help of custom Web analytics.
- Combines Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007 for Search, Enterprise Edition, (for finding corporate information) and a customized search feature (for finding games).
- Features a set of custom Web Parts, which provide the visualization and layout mechanism for many of these features.
- Supports single-byte and double-byte (Asian) character sets and delivers personalized content, according to a given user’s language, country, carrier, handset, and other profile elements.

Benefits

Over the long term, Sha and his colleagues anticipate an array of benefits from having the company’s Web site based on Office SharePoint Server 2007. These benefits include faster updates and enhancements, potentially lower costs, and scalability and reliability equal to or surpassing that of the prior site.

“Going from conceptual design to completion in just four months was remarkable, considering that we estimated it would take roughly twice that long to do the job using open-source technologies.”

Ron Sha, Chief Information Officer, Glu Mobile

Easier Upgrades, Increased Productivity and Competitiveness

Unlike the prior Glu Mobile Web site, which required that IT professionals rewrite code for updates and enhancements, the new SharePoint site enables nontechnical users to accomplish the same tasks with just a few mouse clicks. This means that as new games are developed or new devices emerge, a marketing professional, product manager, or other nontechnical staff member can update the content for the entire site or any regional site for which the new content is applicable.

“Because we no longer need to wait for IT professionals to be available to make site updates, new content can be posted in a matter of hours rather than days, with all the time-to-market and competitive advantages that such efficiency implies,” Sha points out. “In addition, those IT professionals can use their talents more productively on keeping the infrastructure running smoothly.”

A related advantage of making it so easy to update content is that users are simply more likely to make updates than they used to be. “In the past, product managers might have wanted to make a game demonstration ‘friendlier’ to a given audience, for example, but would have abandoned the idea because of the time and effort involved,” Sha says. “Now, they are making those changes without a second thought, thereby reaching more customers in our fiercely competitive industry.”

Built-in Tools for Faster Deployment, Reduced Costs

The same flexibility and functionality that enable nontechnical staff at Glu Mobile to update the site also enable technical staff to add features, enhance security, and make infrastructure changes without having to enlist outside consultants. “This is another advantage of the built-in functionalities of SharePoint Server 2007 as compared to some open-source technologies,” Sha points

out. “By avoiding having to hire consultants to tackle such projects, we will reduce costs over the life of the site.”

In fact, by basing the site on Office SharePoint Server 2007 instead of open-source technologies, Glu Mobile enjoyed a significant cost reduction starting the day of deployment, thanks to the unusually rapid development of the site. “Going from conceptual design to completion in just four months was remarkable, considering that we estimated it would take roughly twice that long to do the job using open-source technologies,” Sha says. “And that estimate came from one of the open-source vendors.”

One reason development went so quickly, Sha adds, is that customizing the user interface turned out to be far easier than his team originally anticipated. “The ability to customize easily meant that we were able to deliver an innovative user interface with a ‘Web 2.0’ look and feel,” he adds. “That sort of thing is important to the market we serve.”

A Scalable, Flexible, and Reliable Foundation

Sha and his colleagues will know more about the real-world scalability of the site over time. But for now they are confident, from the successful 10,000-concurrent-user stress test they conducted, that the site will scale to accommodate the market’s ever-growing combinations of locales, games, languages, approaches to provisioning, and so on.

Members of Sha’s team also are confident of the site’s continuing reliability, another advantage of using an Office SharePoint Server 2007 infrastructure. “Because the site includes almost none of the add-ins that would be necessary in a site based on open source, it is significantly less complex and therefore more reliable,” Sha explains.

For More Information

For more information about Microsoft products and services, call the Microsoft Sales Information Center at (800) 426-9400. In Canada, call the Microsoft Canada Information Centre at (877) 568-2495. Customers who are deaf or hard-of-hearing can reach Microsoft text telephone (TTY/TDD) services at (800) 892-5234 in the United States or (905) 568-9641 in Canada. Outside the 50 United States and Canada, please contact your local Microsoft subsidiary. To access information using the World Wide Web, go to: www.microsoft.com

For more information about Glu Mobile products and services, visit the Web site at: www.glu.com

For more information about Allin Consulting products and services, visit the Web site at: www.allin.com

Also, it is easier to update the site and post content to it, Sha notes, thanks to the close integration between Office SharePoint Server 2007 and other programs in the 2007 Office system such as Microsoft Office Word 2007, Office Excel® 2007 spreadsheet software, and the Office PowerPoint® 2007 presentation graphics program. And posting new content is something that Glu Mobile product and marketing professionals will be doing plenty of: The company has near-term plans to expand the number of supported languages from 5 up to 15 or 20, and longer-term plans to add discussion groups and other collaboration capabilities.

“Through discussion groups based on SharePoint Server 2007, we can make it easier for customers to find the games available for their particular handsets, to find the carriers that sell the games, and so on,” Sha says. “Making such groups easily available to customers can be yet another way of achieving higher revenues and a stronger bottom line.”

Microsoft Office System

The Microsoft Office system is the business world’s chosen environment for information work, providing the programs, servers, and services that help you succeed by transforming information into impact.

For more information about the Microsoft Office system, go to: www.microsoft.com/office

Software and Services

- Microsoft Office
 - Microsoft Office SharePoint Designer 2007
 - Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007
 - Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007 for Search, Enterprise Edition
- Microsoft Server Product Portfolio
 - Microsoft SQL Server 2005
- Microsoft Visual Studio 2005
 - Microsoft ASP.NET
 - Microsoft .NET Framework
- Technology