

Pirelli Group Drives Improved Communication with Interactive Web Presence



Pirelli Group
Milan, Italy
www.pirelli.com

Industry:

Automotive

Annual Revenue:

US\$5.84 billion

Employees:

30,980

Oracle Products & Services:

Oracle WebLogic Server

“We can genuinely say that, compared with our experiences with other application servers, Oracle WebLogic Server is a software product that can be installed without any problem whatsoever.” – Ilaria Doria, Head of Internet and New Media Sector, Information Systems, Pirelli Group

For more than 135 years, the Pirelli brand has been one of the most celebrated symbols of Italian industry, and its history is closely linked to the development of the car and the motorbike. A true multinational corporation with a presence in 160 countries, Pirelli is a leader in tire production and is also active in the real estate, particulate filters, photovoltaic, and broadband services markets.

In 2006, Pirelli Group decided to review its communication strategies with an eye toward enabling greater efficiency and effectiveness. The company focused on the development of a new network of sites—directed at consumers as well as the business community—that would deliver state-of-the-art content, performance, and technology.

To power the new portal, Pirelli selected Oracle WebLogic Server (previously known as BEA WebLogic Server). Today, Pirelli sites reach more than 34 million users in 40 countries, delivering timely and extensive company information. In addition, the portal ranks in the authoritative Web ranking published annually by the Swedish company Hallvarsson & Halvarsson.

Enabling Centralized Management and Interoperability

Pirelli’s internet portal had become outdated, according to Ilaria Doria, head of the Internet and New Media Sector at Pirelli’s Information Systems.

“We had reviewed the system in 2000, but it had become insufficient over the course of six years—which is a very long time in the world of the internet,” Doria said. “We now believe it

Key Benefits:

- Enabled uniformity between more than 40 Web sites in 160 countries
- Provided Java 2.0 interoperability
- Produced significant improvements in user satisfaction and performance among diverse user base
- Enabled the introduction of interactive tools

is necessary to review the structure of our site every three years. This way, we can bring not only the graphic layout up to date, but also the content, the navigation mode, and the services provided. In our case, we also had to improve the performance of the system, which had become insufficient. This was partly due to the increase in traffic, which the previous infrastructure could no longer manage appropriately.”

This obsolescence had also been brought to light by Web rankings. Hallvarsson & Halvarsson’s in-depth research, which evaluates up to 126 different parameters, studies online financial communication by major European companies. The Pirelli site had moved down in the Italian listing from first place in 2002 to 26th place in 2005.

“We wanted to make sure that our Web sites contained more than information directed at the financial community, media, analysts, or individuals who might be interested in working for us,” Doria explained. “Instead, we wanted to provide information to individuals regarding the business sectors in which we operate: the world of tires, particulate filters, photovoltaic, broadband, and real estate. This content can be as restricted as it is unstructured. For example, our tire catalog or our fitment chart, do not offer commercial transaction services. The online sale of a set of tires, as we have already had the opportunity to discover, has implications that are somewhat different from those of other consumer goods.”

Another challenge was making the content of the sites more uniform, while taking into account the inevitable differences arising from the different languages, cultures, and legislative environments in the countries Pirelli was reaching. With the evolution of the internet, these aspects became an integral part of a complete communication strategy.

Taking Action

At the end of 2005, Pirelli started to work on project definition. The team dedicated the first two months to developing specific functions, and then turned its attention to detailed technical planning for the application. These initial phases involved a review of procedures—including graphics, contents, and services.

It also included a review of the entire hardware and software infrastructure of the underlying system.

“As far as the software is concerned, we kept some components of the previous platform, while changing others,” Doria explained. “In particular, we approved the tool that we were already using to manage content, while selecting a new application server, going with Oracle WebLogic Server. We made this decision only after carefully considering a number of alternatives, including Open Source, and keeping in mind the need to maintain synergy with group standards. The most suitable application server in terms of functionality and standards was Oracle WebLogic Server.”

Pirelli Group began roll out in September 2006, starting with three sites. The company has a range of international sites, including Pirelli.com, pirellityre.com, and pirellibroadband.com, as well as sites dedicated to the famous Pirelli calendar.

Measuring Impact

The project proceeded on spec, on time, and on budget, with the company rolling out 65 Web sites based on the new infrastructure and new solutions by the end of 2007. These included 7 international sites, as well as sites for all the countries where Pirelli produces or sells. The Web sites are recognizable by their home page, in which the dominant element is a large black fist, with the fingers morphing into four matching tires. Pirelli completed the project in 2007 and the new information infrastructure delivers between 14 million and 15 million visits.

“We have seen a perceptible improvement in the global performance of the system. The results obtained from all the tests that we’ve carried out and the feed-back we’ve received from our business partners confirm that we have achieved this objective.” Doria said.

“The new portal has also moved up 21 places in the Hallvarsson & Halvarsson Web ranking,” Doria said. “The Pirelli Web site has move from 26th place in 2005 to fifth place in 2008 in the classification of Italian Web sites—which includes the 83 largest companies in our country.”

The group continues to assess progress against other objectives. For example, measuring level of interest from non-institutional users requires more time.

“It is not easy to determine indicators capable of representing the success of a Web site in an unambiguous way,” Doria said. “On some occasions, we have seen that there is no direct relationship between improving the content of a Web site and increasing the number of people accessing the site, although it is clear that the number of people that visit it, the time dedicated to navigating through the site, the routes taken, and the quantity of pages visited during a session are all elements that could provide insight into its ability to attract the interest of anyone who accesses the site.”

“All of these indicators,” Doria said, “are available, and we can analyze them directly, as well as making them available to the marketing departments of the various Pirelli Group business units. This enables us to check which sites are performing best or are most visited. We can also compare data with data from the previous month, data from the same month of the previous year, or data from all the months of the year. We can then draw conclusions from these comparisons and eventually modify, as needed.”

Oracle WebLogic Server provides the flexibility needed to make modifications even after a site has been launched.

“The fact that we have tried to organize the system in such a way as to have templates, navigation modes, and layouts that are consistent across the different Web sites does not mean that the structure, content, or services provided are set in stone,” Doria explained. “Instead, Pirelli has set up structures that will allow us to continually improve the communication of the group over time.”

Why Oracle?

The Pirelli group carefully considered its requirements when selecting an application server. First, Pirelli wanted to manage its new infrastructure centrally, ensuring that it was open and could scale to cover both the number of sites and the type of content and services provided. It also wanted to ensure optimal

interoperability, above all within the Java 2 environment. Finally, it wanted to introduce dynamic Web sites that enabled it to easily develop core structure applications, such as the fitment chart, the dealer locator, and the product catalog, and all the applications concerning investor relations, such as the interactive calendar and Really Simple Syndication (RSS).

“Performance was also very important, and we paid a lot of attention to this in the selection process,” Doria said. “Oracle WebLogic Server, which is also used in other group projects, gave us the performance we needed. It was easy to use—a characteristic that has been particularly useful in the process of setting up the entire environment. We can genuinely say that, compared with our experiences with other application servers, Oracle WebLogic Server really is a software product that can be installed without any problem whatsoever.”

Implementation Process

To drive implementation, Doria’s organization created an extensive working group to execute the Web site project. It reports to a program manager and three project managers: one for content, one for graphics, and one for technology. The group includes representatives from various business sectors and units. Each country that has a Web site is also represented in the working group. While any activities connected with project definition, navigation mode, and structure were carried out internally, Pirelli called on external resources to work on graphics as well as to assist with implementation.

Pirelli Group is one of the most celebrated symbols of Italian industry. It is a leader in the tire manufacturing sector, as well as a key player in the broadband services and real estate markets. Pirelli Tyre is the fifth largest producer of tires in the world in terms of revenue.