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<p>GENERAL INFORMATION</p>	<p>Ameranth Wireless Ameranth Wireless's Improv Comedy Club Solution Carmel, Ny USA</p> <p>Year: 2001 Status: Laureate Category: Media Arts & Entertainment Nominating Company: Microsoft Corporation</p>
<p>SUMMARY</p>	<p>LONG SUMMARY</p>
<p>R →</p> <p>I →</p> <p>M →</p> <p>C →</p> <p>A, B, H, O →</p>	<p>The Improv solution integrates Ameranth's software for Windows CE 3.0 wireless handheld computers, Windows NT Server, and SQL 7.0 Server with Ameranth's 21st Century Communications Middleware and a Symbol 802.11 FH Wireless LAN. The solution, based on Ameranth's 21st Century Restaurant vision, provides Internet ticketing and payment processing, traffic school reservations, food ordering, phone-based ticketing and payment processing, and wireless handheld ticket authorization and seating assignments. By integrating the Web, the Wired, and the Wireless, the Improv Comedy Clubs are able to take full advantage of the benefits of cutting edge technology.</p> <p>Immediate improvements in efficiency and speed of service have increased revenue and dramatically enhanced the customer experience at the Dallas Improv. A new interactive Web site allows customers to pre-order and pre-pay for food and tickets for faster service at the theater since staff can quickly process their reservations and assign tables using a wireless handheld computer. When the customers arrive for the show, the kitchen has already prepped their food and it comes to the table on time.</p> <p>The Ameranth Advantage Tom Castillo, owner of the Improv Comedy Clubs, first came across Ameranth in Chicago at the National Restaurant Association's annual tradeshow. At that point he told Ameranth that, "the Improv needs to move its systems into 21st Century technology," and he was "won over by the company's demonstration." Looking for a total solution, Castillo was particularly impressed with the fact that Ameranth could develop and install the entire Web, PC, and wireless system—something no other company could match. Because Castillo was basically starting from scratch, this provided a great advantage.</p> <p>"At the time, the Improv was a very low-tech and inefficient operation, where phone-based reservations were noted with pencil and paper and the table management was done with a grease pencil and a laminated seating chart," Castillo recalls. The company did have a Macintosh for accounting and running an antiquated POS system, as well as a promotional Web site with no interactive capabilities. And there was no database housing customer information.</p>

Castillo immediately saw Ameranth as a way to increase sales by ramping up the company's efficiency and speed of service throughout the entire customer cycle and e-commerce enabled the Web site. The solution would also provide a way to create a customer database. "Using Ameranth's 21st Century Restaurant, I believe the Improv will be able to increase sales and increase both the efficiency and speed of service," he says. "We are predicting costs will be recovered within a year."

Ameranth's core technology is the 21st Century Communications™ middleware, which routes data, regardless of programming language, across a variety of platforms, facilitating the data synchronization required for integrating different systems, including Web-based, Wireless LAN and PC-based client/server systems. The Improv solution integrates Ameranth's software for Windows CE wireless handheld computers, Microsoft back office servers, and an interactive web site with Ameranth's 21st Century Communications middleware over an 802.11 FH Wireless LAN. This total solution provides Internet ticketing and payment processing, traffic school reservation and food ordering, phone-based ticketing and payment processing with instant database input, and wireless handheld ticket authorization and seating assignments. A new self-service Web site enables customers to pre-order and pre-pay for tickets and food.

Show Biz. Benefits
The best seat in the house is where everyone likes to sit, but it's not the only thing that contributes to a great evening out. Patrons at the Dallas Improv benefit from the Ameranth solution from the moment they pick up the phone, or log on to the Web site to book their tickets. Over the phone, the Ameranth desktop ticketing/reservations software enables staff to process orders more efficiently with automated table seating assignments. Now that agents can also enter customer information directly into the SQL Server database, and management can track sales, implement a frequent customer program and produce mass e-mails.

Both on-line and phone orders are the first step in speeding up table management at the theater. Using wireless computers and the Symbol Spectrum 24 Wireless LAN Access Point, staff can wirelessly process each customer either through scanning the bar code on tickets they printed out when purchasing online, or by inputting the authorization code they received over the phone. Using the handheld computer to access the database, table assignments are quickly and efficiently given to customers. Internet-ordered food expedites the wait staff's job as orders can be started upon the customer's arrival, leaving them more time to sell revenue-generating drinks and desserts. Theater management also benefits from the use of Ameranth's 21st Century Database Wizard for updating the Web site prices, menus show listing and comedian bios and photos - without any knowledge of HTML.

"Thanks to the database system, we now know who our customers are. Thanks to the wireless integration, the ticketing system, and the Web site, we now have a few minutes to get to know our customers"
-Tom Castillo, Owner

BENEFITS
The Improv project has helped customers receive better service, has helped the Improv managers to run their clubs more efficiently, and has helped club staff members to better handle the busy periods of the night. The Improv Comedy Clubs differ from restaurants in that all their customers arrive and place food orders at the same time. This places a huge burden on the club's staff. Now, reservations and food orders can be placed online, allowing the kitchen to prepare the food in advance. Ticketing is automated and done faster at the door with a handheld computer, and the manager is able to change menu items or show schedules and arrange seating intuitive back office software, which communicates with the Web site and the handhelds computers in real time.

We believe that the Improv system has significantly increased efficiency and improved the customer experience. At each stage of the customer's evening, from planning what show to see, to making reservations, to buying and presenting tickets, to ordering drinks and food, the process has become automated and less susceptible to errors. In addition, service is faster and the burden placed upon

Annotations: D & W, N, F, O, D & W, A, B, W, M, D, W, K, W, I, R, A, B, W, M, A, B, N, A, B, H, K, D & W, C, K & M, V, K, M, P, A, B, V, F, H, I, R, H, V, I, D & W, W, A, B, W, W, K & M, V, M, P

employees is lessened.

Let's walk through a typical experience using the Ameranth system:

1) Planning the evening: Previously, customers logged on to the Improv Web site to find outdated information and no method for making reservations. With Ameranth's integrated system in place, customers can not only see current scheduling (as it is integrated with the manager's own scheduler,) but they can also make online reservations, print tickets, and even pre-order and pay for their meal.

2) Arriving at the Improv: The night of the show is an exciting one, but previously it also meant waiting on a long line despite having purchased a ticket in advance. Now, thanks to Ameranth's software and the Symbol PPT 2740 handheld computer, attendants at the door can either scan customers' tickets or look up their reservation by name or code number and present the customer with their seating assignment. This efficient way of accessing the database gets people to their tables faster and "busts the line" at the front door.

3) Placing an order: With the whole restaurant sitting down to eat at one time, competition for a server's attention could be fierce. Savvy customers have already ordered their meal online and have gotten their order into the kitchen before others have even opened their menus.

From the owner's point of view, by increasing the efficiency of club operations, he is able to 1) decrease labor needs, 2) improve customer service, and 3) keep track of valuable customer data.

The Improv project helped seed Ameranth's new product, the 21st Century Restaurant®. The 21st Century Restaurant product integrates legacy point-of-sale systems in restaurants with wireless handheld software. This system, which will roll out in March 2001, will give restaurants the ability to use handhelds for tableside ordering and payment processing. This will revolutionize the way that data is recorded and communicated within restaurants. Typically, restaurant staff has to record each order twice—once at the table on paper, and then again at the computer touch screen terminal. This inefficiency leads to inputting errors (resulting in unhappy customers,) an unnecessarily long delay before the order reaches the kitchen, and a poor allocation of labor resources (servers should be on the restaurant floor, not standing in front of a computer.) Ameranth believes that wireless ordering and payment processing will be an inevitable improvement in restaurants across the world.

IMPORTANCE

As new technology continues to be developed, integration becomes an ever-growing concern. The Improv owner, Tom Castillo, had looked around for a company that could provide his clubs with online ticketing, reservations, and food ordering in such a way that the Web site would actually interact with his back office software. Furthermore, he wanted to incorporate some of the new handheld technology into the system. Ameranth was the only company that could accomplish such reasonable goals.

The integration of Web/Wireless/and Wired is a natural evolution of technology, which Ameranth has brought into the workplace. The Improv project is just the beginning...with the 21st Century Restaurant system, wireless, wired and Web integration will become accessible to virtually every restaurant in the nation.

The technology behind the Improv's innovative ticketing solution is a combination of e-commerce Web design, back office database management, and a wireless interface to the databased information. The project is unique in its ability to route and synchronize data across the three platforms—from the Web site (running on Microsoft Distributed InterNetwork Architecture) to the Windows CE handhelds to the back office server (Microsoft Windows NT Server or Microsoft SQL Server 7.0.)

ORIGINALITY

As stated above, Ameranth's Improv project is unique in its ability to route and synchronize data across the three Web/Wireless/Wired platforms—from the web site (running on Microsoft Distributed InterNetwork Architecture) to the Windows CE handhelds to the back office server (Microsoft Windows NT Server or Microsoft SQL Server 7.0.) This is the only application of its kind.

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	<p>The Improv project continues to evolve into Ameranth's vision of the 21st Century Restaurant. Ameranth now offers wireless ordering and payment processing through the wireless handheld computers. This system interfaces with a restaurant's legacy point-of-sale system, and is set for full-scale rollout in March 2001.</p>
<p>SUCCESS</p>	<p>Tom Castillo, owner and manager of the Dallas Improv Comedy Club, described the club's old way of doing business. "The Improv was a very low-tech and inefficient operation, where phone-based reservations were noted with pencil and paper and the table management was done with a grease pencil and a laminated seating chart." There was a promotional Web site, with no interactive capabilities. There was no database housing customer information, and the long lines at the door were indicative of the inefficiencies behind the greeting station.</p> <p>"Using Ameranth's 21st Century Restaurant, I believe the Improv will be able to increase sales and increase both the efficiency and speed of service," he goes on to say. "We are predicting costs will be recovered within a year." <u>The value of this integrated system goes beyond simply improving customer service. With orders placed ahead of time, the Improv is able to increase the capacity of the kitchen. Internet reservations provide access to a whole new customer market, and the increased knowledge of the Improv's customer base lets manager Castillo target his events and promotions.</u></p> <p>"Thanks to the database system, we now know who our customers are. Thanks to the wireless integration, the ticketing system, and the Web site, we now have a few minutes to get to know our customers." -Tom Castillo, Manager/Owner</p>
<p>DIFFICULTY</p>	<p>Working with emerging technologies always provides its share of difficulties. As the hardware and operating systems developed, not only did Ameranth have to keep up with the changes, but also we were placed in a position of testing, not only our software, but outside hardware as well. Plus, the system is dependant upon this emerging hardware, which places many of the difficulties outside of Ameranth's realm of control. This, in itself can be extremely frustrating. Luckily, Ameranth's strong partnerships and the excellent quality of the technology used, reduced these difficulties to a minimum.</p>

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