process one
INSTANT MESSAGES | CREATIVE BUSINESSES

MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL CASE STUDY

MLB.com scores a home run with instant messaging from ProcessOne

GOALS

- Implement an innovative online chat facility that will encourage fans to stay longer on MLB.com

- Ensure that the instant messaging service is stable and scalable enough to support large numbers of users

SOLUTION

- Build a creative chat facility around the concept of a virtual stadium

- Deploy a robust and scalable instant messaging platform from ProcessOne based on ejabberd

BENEFITS

- Positive feedback from fans

- Growing numbers of fans using the chat facility, increasing the opportunities for cross-selling and up-selling

- A very reliable platform, which can be easily adapted and extended to meet future requirements

For fans around the globe, MLB.com is the home of Major League Baseball (MLB). The site offers a wealth of information and services, including Game Day, a flash-based audio application that enables fans to follow every pitch as it happens. MLB.com wanted to make its web site as 'sticky' as possible so that fans would want to come to the site, get involved and stay for a long period of time. It therefore decided to develop a new instant messaging facility to enhance the features of Game Day.

At first, the organisation had some concerns about the project. A previous attempt to develop instant messaging had been unsuccessful because the solution implemented had been neither sufficiently scalable to meet demand nor visually exciting enough. MLB.com therefore knew that the success of the new venture would depend heavily on its choice of platform. The organisation had to find an instant messaging server that would give it both the flexibility to innovate and the confidence to grow.

In the previous year, MLB.com's Game Day application had attracted over 85 million users. MLB.com knew how many concurrent visitors it attracted to its site on game days and it knew what its average year-on-year growth was. It also knew how many fans had used its earlier instant messaging service. Using these figures as the basis for some solid statistical analysis, it anticipated that demand for its new chat facility would not only be huge – but would also grow steadily over time.

PROVIDING QUALITY SUPPORT

MLB.com interviewed a lot of potential partners for the project and carried out practical product evaluations. However, the solutions that it initially tested failed to provide the flexibility and scalability that it needed. Then, MLB.com met ProcessOne at a conference in California. "We were immediately impressed by ProcessOne's offering," says Joe Choti, CTO of MLB.com. "ProcessOne was head and shoulders above everyone else."

ProcessOne provides high performance instant messaging servers that are based on ejabberd, an open source technology that is mainly written in the Erlang programming language. As it runs in a cluster mode, ejabberd is highly robust and can be easily expanded in size, making it ideal for large-scale deployments. MLB.com was familiar with ejabberd and quickly identified that the ProcessOne Instant Messaging Server could meet all of its requirements.

"ejabberd is a full featured jabber server compared to the other products that are in the market," explains Christian Gough, system administrator at MLB.com. "The ProcessOne Instant Messaging Server offered every feature that we desired. By leveraging the scalability of Erlang, the solution allows us to easily expand and adapt the server whenever we want to in the future."

The CEO of ProcessOne travelled to New York to work directly with MLB.com's internal team and specify the precise requirements of the solution. "His help was extremely timely and useful," says Gough. "The quality of support that we have received from ProcessOne has been very, very good."

"The ProcessOne Instant Messaging Server has met our requirements 110 per cent."

Joe Choti
CTO
MLB.com

CREATING AN INNOVATIVE SERVICE

For MLB.com, the visual concept of the solution was just as important as the underlying technology. The organisation wanted to create a Game Day chat facility that would give fans the look and feel of experiencing a live game with other fans. It therefore based its new instant messaging service on a virtual ballpark. Fans can visit different sections of the online ballpark during a game to join different chat sessions on different topics with different groups of people.

In one part of the virtual ballpark, fans of the home team can be discussing the state of the pitch or the decisions of the coach. In other parts of the ballpark, fans from opposing teams can get together to argue the merits of different players. "This is by-appointment chat," explains Choti. "The ballpark opens when the game begins and closes when the game ends. An automated session manager feature manages the chat rooms and ushers users out at the end of a game, just as they would be ushered out of a real ballpark."

As part of the project, ProcessOne developed a customised module for MLB.com to allow its ejabberd-based instant messaging server to interact with the company's existing web services and authenticate users against its user database. "Users can now log in once to MLB.com and use a range of different services, including the chat facility, without having to log in again to a separate system," explains Gough.

The entire instant messaging solution, including the customised module, was deployed in a very short timeframe. "ProcessOne took us from conception to deployment in just three weeks," recalls Choti.

MEETING REQUIREMENTS BY 110%

MLB.com is delighted with its new chat service. Over the course of each season, it now facilitates different instant messaging sessions at as many as 25,000 venues. This Game Day chat facility is helping to attract more users to the site and is encouraging visitors to stay on the site longer. This gives the company more opportunities to cross-sell and up-sell from its range of merchandise and services. In addition, MLB.com anticipates that the chat service will also help it to attract higher value advertisers to its site.

The feedback from users has been very positive. "Users absolutely love it," says Choti. "We believe that we now offer one of the most exciting chat facilities available today."

The ProcessOne Instant Messaging Server is performing very strongly. "The use of Erlang and clustering in the solution architecture not only ensures scalability, but also adds to the solution's stability and flexibility," says Gough. "The ProcessOne Instant Messaging Server offers a plethora of features and we have been able to easily extend it to meet our unique requirements."

"The ProcessOne Instant Messaging Server has met our requirements 110 per cent," adds Choti. "From the very first day that we brought the server online, we have not had a single problem with it. It's a champ!"

Now that its Game Day chat facility is up and running, MLB.com doesn't plan to stand still. Every year it tweaks and enhances its web site with new features. "We are very confident that the ProcessOne platform is scalable and robust enough to support us in whatever direction we go," says Choti.

He concludes: "Our success has been based, not only on the technical solution provided by ProcessOne, but also on the personal support provided by ProcessOne. ProcessOne is not a vendor; it's a partner and that's a very important distinction."

ProcessOne, a Global Instant Messaging Software Provider

ProcessOne delivers scalable and robust systems to support creative Instant Messaging applications. Its cost-effective, packaged solutions and customised services are designed to help businesses deploy Instant Messaging to improve employee productivity, encourage customer loyalty and increase their revenues.

All of ProcessOne's Instant Messaging products are based on the ejabberd platform, an open-source technology that is renowned for its stability in large-scale deployments. More than 20 million people around the world send and receive Instant Messages via ProcessOne systems.

ProcessOne is based in Paris, but operates all over the world. Founded in 1999, it is part of the privately owned business Groupe JMP Consulting SARL.