

## DataMirror Helps Debenhams Gear Up for Busiest Wedding Season Yet.

Commentary by Bill McGinn,  
e-Commerce Production and Development Controller, Debenhams

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### INDUSTRY

RETAIL

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### BUSINESS APPLICATION

E-COMMERCE  
HIGH AVAILABILITY

With 96 department stores throughout the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, as well as in Bahrain, Kuwait, Dubai, Qatar and Budapest, Debenhams is globally recognised as a market leader in the retail industry. Debenhams also operates the UK's largest wedding service, with over 700,000 guests purchasing gifts from Debenhams last year and over 35,000 lists forecast to be completed during 2001.

large, established companies by enabling a host of nimble new "dot.com" competitors to enter the market at minimal cost. Big companies were hampered by the complications of legacy infrastructure; they needed to formulate clear and tangible strategies in order to succeed.

Debenhams quickly realised that e-commerce brought a significant business opportunity to extend its customer base and strengthen its market position. It evaluated the options and decided to begin with its wedding service and offer customers an online gift registry.

Bill Maginn, e-Commerce Production and Development Controller comments, "Our wedding service was an ideal place to begin to roll out of an e-commerce strategy across the company. Since the bride and groom have already chosen the gifts, people have the confidence to buy products remotely without actually needing to see them. This enabled us to avoid some of the obvious e-commerce difficulties, in particular that customer apprehension about the products might inhibit uptake."

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Debenhams' fully transactional web site ([www.debenhams.com](http://www.debenhams.com)) gives customers the opportunity to make use of the online wedding list service and purchase from a range of merchandise including flowers, lingerie and electrical goods. Debenhams also produces a home shopping catalogue, Debenhams Direct, featuring over 500 pages and distributed to over 350,000 UK households.

"What's more, ours was the first online wedding list service in the UK. We had a substantial opportunity to establish an online brand and presence before any new entrants to the market," says Maginn.

However, to extend the service to the web, information needed to be integrated in real-time. This was especially important to avoid duplication of wedding purchases. Information about different customers, items and invoicing data needed to be shared across three different purchasing channels: 96 department store sites, the call centre and the web. In addition, the wedding service was designed to be easy and convenient to use, so the back-end processing had to be seamless to users.

### The Problem

The advent of the Internet gave birth to a wealth of opportunities to exploit new business models and achieve global reach. However, it was also widely believed that the Internet posed a particular threat to

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This was a difficult technology challenge, as it required integration of critical data across a complex environment of different transactional systems across the enterprise. Information needed to be synchronised not only between three different purchasing channels, but also across two different server platforms and two different data environments. The different systems incorporated IBM's DB2 database running on a central iSeries (AS/400) platform and Microsoft's SQL Server database on Microsoft Windows NT.

Maginn continues, "We realised that we could not carry out our e-commerce strategy without integrating our information, but it was a complex technology challenge. We needed to find a solution that was iSeries focused, as that is our central platform and will continue to be so. However, our e-commerce solution was Microsoft-based, so we had to be able to integrate the two environments in real-time."

"In addition, we needed a future-proof solution that would allow us to extend our web capabilities and also expand to other purchasing channels, such as wireless or interactive digital TV. DataMirror Transformation Server stood out as the only solution that could handle all our needs," he continues.

## The Solution

Debenhams has implemented DataMirror Transformation Server to integrate and replenish transactional data in real-time between the online web site, call centre and its numerous store sites throughout the world. All transactional data is integrated instantaneously and inventories amended accordingly as soon as each purchase is completed.

Debenhams has also chosen DataMirror High Availability Suite to provide a disaster recovery and data resiliency solution for its iSeries business-critical data in the event of planned or unplanned system downtime.

Maginn comments, "The DataMirror solution continues to run regardless of any downtime, so that customers are not aware of any issues with our operations. This is vital for the success of our 24/7 service."

The implementation ran to schedule and the web site went live in October 1999.

## The Benefits

DataMirror Transformation Server allows real-time synchronisation between all three Debenhams purchasing channels to ensure that the list of available gifts is current and that there is no duplication of purchases.

The system is designed to be convenient, easy to use and transparent to the end user. The bride and groom use a handheld device in store to scan the bar code of the items they want on their list. This information is downloaded onto Debenhams central system, and using DataMirror Transformation Server, the list is flowed to all Debenhams stores, the call centre and the web site.

Guests can either make purchases in their local store, through a dedicated call centre or online. As soon as a guest buys an item, it is removed from the central system ensuring that purchases are not duplicated.

In addition, it allows the bride and groom to track the current status of what has been bought from their wedding list and to change their list online. The bride and groom can view their wedding list at their own convenience either on a touch screen in-store or through [www.debenhams.com](http://www.debenhams.com).

Maginn continues, "DataMirror has allowed us to extend our service to multiple channels. Our customer service is considerably advanced and now we also have global reach. This is a compelling proposition for people with an international guest list. People from around the world can buy their wedding gifts from Debenhams, knowing that they are the choice of the bride and groom and that there will be no mistakes. This adds up to a number of incremental sales for Debenhams."

## Conclusions

The DataMirror solution is a core part of Debenhams' e-commerce strategy, integrating critical information across the enterprise. Customer uptake of the wedding list service has been strong with about 15% of purchases now made online.

The success of the wedding Service has received widespread industry recognition. It has won the Queen's Award for Enterprise, given for innovation, and it has also won the Retail Week Customer Initiative of the Year Award in 2000 and The Retail Technology Award in 2001.

Maginn concludes, "DataMirror is fundamental to our e-commerce strategy. The new service has been a great success, seen in both increased turnover and industry awards. We are now extending our e-commerce services into other areas and will use DataMirror to support the entire site. DataMirror's powerful integration capabilities help us to provide quality customer service and to gain a competitive edge. We are now looking at additional ways that real-time data integration can be used to improve our business efficiency in the cut-throat retail market."



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