

XP2010 case study: book club system

A publishing house wants to replace a book club system. The existing system is very expensive to operate and was also built for much more complex book clubs than the publisher operates. The only interface is of the green screen type for employees. The publisher has a substantial number of different book clubs. These clubs have very different ways of handling customers. Some of the clubs have a fixed sequence of books so that every new customer gets the same first book (think of an encyclopedia). Other clubs continually add new books and change the ordering of the books already in the catalog. New members in these clubs will often receive the same book as existing members. Book clubs also vary in size from just a few hundred to many thousands of members. Another aspect of the book clubs that varies is how often members are sent new books.

The most complicated part of a club is the management of new members. It is important to be able to check whether a new membership is a known customer or not. Good customers are often members of more than one club. These memberships should be connected to a single customer account. The processing of new memberships also has to assist in the weeding out of bad customers. The clubs operate on credit with customers paying after they receive a book. Customers that do not pay their bills should not be allowed to join other clubs. In addition, many of the clubs have generous introductory offers that attract "bounty hunters" that leave the club immediately after receiving the offer. A customer that leaves a club after the introductory offer should not be allowed to join again until a "quarantine" period has elapsed.

Customer support plays a central part in these book clubs. The existing system does not have a web interface so communication with customers is primarily by telephone or email. One challenge customer support has to handle is that customers often do not know their customer id (they sometimes do not even know the name of the club they are members of). Customer support often has to search for members based on their name or address.

A second goal of the project is to integrate these book clubs into an Internet book shop in order to be able to increase cross selling between the two channels. The integration consists of making it possible for customers to manage their book club memberships in the bookshop and also giving book club customers discounts on purchases in the book shop.