WIRED.COM SIMPLIFIES AND ACCELERATES DEVELOPMENT WITH GRAILS

Wired.com, the online arm of Wired Magazine, is a cutting edge guide covering how technology is changing the world. Not simply an online version of the print publication, however, Wired.com delivers a unique online experience to 12 million readers around the world. Wired.com is part of Condé Nast Digital, the Internet unit of Condé Nast Publications.

CHALLENGE

Wired.com recently introduced a new standalone section of the website, called Product Reviews, allowing readers to search, explore and compare new technology products on the market. Because the Product Reviews section provides a more interactive experience than other parts of Wired.com, the website's development team needed a flexible approach to building the related applications, which included the user-facing site and a dynamic administration tool for editors.

The speed of the development cycle is a critical factor for Wired.com, because the website often faces tight deadlines that correspond with the publication of the print magazine. For example, if the magazine references a specific URL or feature on the site, the web pages or functionality must be operable at the time of printing.

Application performance is another vital concern for Wired.com, a large high traffic site that gets millions of hits every day. "Performance is one of our greatest considerations," explains Paul Fisher Manager of Technology, Wired.com. "One of the biggest downfalls to rapid development frameworks, such as Ruby on Rails and Django for example, is that the performance just isn't there."

SOLUTION

While the main Wired.com website is a Spring MVC application, Wired.com chose to develop Product Reviews in Grails for an even more rapid and flexible development process. Grails is an advanced and innovative Web application framework based on Groovy, and built on proven open source technologies such as Spring, Hibernate and SiteMesh. Groovy is a dynamic language for the Java Virtual Machine that offers a flexible Java-like syntax that developers can learn in a matter of hours.

"Our Wired.com applications use Spring, Hibernate and SiteMesh, the exact same stack Grails is based on," says Fisher. "We intimately know and trust those technologies, so we are sure that the foundation of Grails is solid."

Wired.com even utilizes functionality via Spring such as Java Content Repository (JCR) and Spring transactional support, and easily pulls that functionality into Grails, leveraging the Spring-JCR integration that is part of the Spring Modules project. "The fact that we can use Grails and Spring together has been really powerful for us," Fisher notes. "We can leverage all our existing Spring and Java experience and code base in Grails without any downside, and also benefit from the plug-ins available from the rich Grails community."

WIRED

SPRINGSOURCE RESULTS

Spring delivers the following business results to Wired.com:

- Rapid Project Ramp Up
- Fast Project Delivery
- Streamlined Maintenance and Support
- More Application Functionality
- Higher Application Performance
- Greater Application Quality
- Focus on Business Objectives

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BENEFITS

Spring delivers the following business results to Wired.com:

Rapid Project Ramp Up

"Grails makes it easier and saves time bringing new developers onto a project, because it provides a simpler, clearer, more intuitive development workflow and process," Fisher explains. "Someone with no Java or Grails experience can learn Grails quickly, get up to speed in a matter of days and become very productive. Grails can be useful for both the novice developer, who is new to any kind of web development, and the seasoned Java developer." Fisher notes that Grails is simpler than other development options, requiring significantly less code, which makes it easier for developers to understand exactly what the code is trying to achieve. This simplicity has enabled Wired.com to streamline a process that previously involved redundant work between back-end and front-end developers.

Fast Project Delivery

Grails made it very easy to develop versions of Product Reviews quickly, because some basic functionality is already provided through Grails scaffolding and persistence features, and there is significantly less code to write. In fact, Fisher built the first administration tool himself in just a couple days. The ability to turn that around quickly solidified Wired.com's intention to use Grails for the live site. "One of the biggest advantages of Grails is the speed," says Fisher. "In Grails, it takes fewer steps to get anything done. Our developers are much happier developing in Grails because they can accomplish tasks so much faster."

Streamlined Maintenance and Support

"From a maintenance perspective, Grails simplifies debugging and reduces debugging time," Fisher explains. "Grails applications typically require less code, which makes supporting and fixing the application much easier, and requires substantially less time. For example, it is much simpler to find solutions to a problem or support an application when we only have to go through one or two files with 50 lines of code, instead of searching through 300 lines of code in 18 different files."

More Application Functionality

Grails enables Wired.com developers to deliver components of the Product Reviews application quickly, which provides the team with extra time to add more functionality in new releases. Consequently, the Product Reviews section has grown significantly from the first release, in terms of features and functionality.

Higher Application Performance

"Application performance is a huge consideration," Fisher explains. "Because we were comfortable with the stack Grails is based on, we were confident in the performance we could get out of the platform. The performance we have seen from Grails has been extremely encouraging, especially against other rapid development frameworks, such as Ruby on Rails and Django. In my experience Grails runs much faster – and to speed up performance, we can always optimize the application by bringing functionality into Java."

Greater Application Quality

Grails makes it much easier for Wired.com to test the Product Review application. Consequently, developers are encouraged to write tests for everything, strengthening application quality.

Focus on Business Objectives

"When there is so much boilerplate code that we have to write, it's easy to lose sight of the business logic," Fisher concludes. "Grails makes it easier to focus on what we are trying to accomplish, in terms of business objectives, without having to think too much about all the wiring or boilerplate code typical of many Java-based web applications. Grails' reliance on 'convention over configuration,' coupled with closures and dynamic features afforded by Groovy, really go a long way to cut down on redundancy."

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