

Levolor Seizes Window of Opportunity to Improve E-Business with Zend

LEVOLOR®

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Eric Long
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Customer: Levolor Window Fashions, a division of Newell Rubbermaid Inc., an S&P 500 company and global marketer of consumer and commercial products with 2009 sales of approximately \$5.6 billion.

Geography: Based in Atlanta, Georgia, with nationwide retail distribution.

Business: The most recognized name in the window coverings industry and manufacturer of window décor including custom, stock and sizable blinds and shades, basic and decorative drapery hardware and custom drapery.

Challenge:

- Support a high volume of complex custom orders
- Ensure an intuitive online ordering experience
- Provide a professional B2B solution for affiliated retailers
- Deliver availability and performance to meet SLAs

Solution: Levolor chose Zend PHP solutions for the development and management of a user-friendly, highly interactive and reliable e-commerce application for Levolor's affiliated retailers and consumers. Using Zend Server application monitoring and management capabilities, Levolor has established a robust, scalable multi-server environment with improved availability and performance to meet SLAs consistently. In addition, the brand's E-Business team is more responsive to changing business requirements while accelerating time-to-market with e-commerce updates. As a result, customers can expect snappy responses when shopping and ordering Levolor products, which come in more than 100 billion different combinations; and retailers can stay informed of promotions and conduct business efficiently through the Levolor dealer portal.

PHP – A Path to Exceptional Online Shopping

Levolor is the nation's most recognized name in window coverings, with an established reputation for aesthetic design, quality workmanship, and broad customizability. Levolor's challenge was to translate a complex system of customizable options into to an online shopping experience that is easy to understand and navigate for customers and consumers. One way the brand is meeting this challenge is by using proven Web-based technologies to build effective e-commerce applications. The technologies include the PHP programming language and PHP Web application development and management solutions from Zend Technologies.

According to Eric Long, Senior Manager, E-Business at Levolor, "Our goal is to create a user-friendly, highly interactive and reliable e-commerce experience with Levolor's products and services for our affiliated retailers and customers. Our products can be ordered in more than 100 billion different combinations, and our dealer portal supports several thousand stores with more coming online." What Long's team needed was a robust multi-server environment that could deliver availability and performance, including tools to monitor and manage that environment.

"We chose the PHP scripting language for its ease of use and flexibility for Web application development, and the Zend Web application platform to manage PHP application configuration, session management and error handling," said Long. Levolor's e-commerce system runs on Red Hat Enterprise Linux across multiple Apache Web servers and MySQL back-end database servers.

"Our breadth of product customization options introduces a lot of complexity into the management of the online ordering process, which is both application- and database-intensive," said Long. "Ordering is highly interactive, transactions may be in process (in configuration) for a long time, and



The PHP Company

testing every scenario is impractical. There's complex code behind the scenes, layered on top of load balancing. At the end of the day, we knew we either had to go back in and rewrite the code or address the problem in a new way."

More Visibility and Control

"Zend provided an integrated monitoring and management platform that allowed us to migrate code across Development and QA with confidence that our servers are identical," said Long. "We now have greater visibility, proactive problem alerts, and better error handling capabilities in our toolset. We can go to the Zend Web Console to review event logs, without having to write our own event notifications. Custom event firing is a real advantage. For example, if an event occurs during a credit card authorization, Zend automatically sends us an email notification with severity level indicated. We can quickly see if an issue needs immediate attention or if we can check the log later for analysis. There's no need to divert our team unnecessarily from coding. Problems can be prioritized and dealt with more effectively and we're no longer forced to work on first-in, first-out basis for troubleshooting."

Configuration and Session Management

"Synchronized configuration allows us to configure once for our entire e-commerce system," said Long. "Without Zend's configuration support, we would have to devote the same amount of time for each server. When we implemented session clustering, it was like flipping a switch. It was a huge benefit for us in terms of reducing the Web workload on our servers. We were able to develop in a single server environment, and then move seamlessly to the cluster environment. We have gained the ability to manage sessions regardless of which server the user was being served from, so data would not be lost."

Performance Optimization

"The Zend Web application server enables us to manage content more efficiently for production and staging across our affiliates' systems," said Long. "It's easier now to support continuous updates to Levolor's product customization options, which number in the billions, and connect Levolor affiliates through our MySQL back-end database servers to provide these updates in a timely manner. In addition, Zend's Job Queue feature gives us the ability to maximize our server resources, and run these processes efficiently in the background, without disrupting the flow of e-commerce activity during business hours."

"With Zend Server's code tracing and optimization capabilities, after we launch a site, we can dig in knowing we're well prepared to begin caching

and other performance optimizations. Zend is also highly scalable, so we don't have to touch our code; we can just add or take down a new server and keep going."

PHP Reliability and Intelligence

"Zend tests and delivers all hot fixes for PHP," said Long, "which frees us up to focus on development. The fixes are easy to run, and we have the confidence of knowing that we are always current with PHP, without having to spend time and divert resources to research it. Three of our developers have completed valuable Zend training programs at various levels. During a recent server migration, we availed ourselves of Zend professional consulting services. We didn't have the time or internal expertise to research the steps and do the full migration on our own. Having access to Zend experts was a huge help to us. They accessed our

servers remotely and guided us through the server migration, which accelerated the process and helped us avoid unnecessary trial and error while allowing us to focus on other aspects of the project."

Supporting Business Growth and Improved ROI with PHP and Zend

According to Long, "When it comes to ROI, we consider our investment in Zend technology to be a benefit on several fronts. It is easy to manage the PHP stack, and the strength of the error detection and reporting helps us reduce the time spent troubleshooting while increasing application availability and responsiveness. With session clustering alone, Zend more than paid for itself the moment we flipped the switch."

"We need to ensure that Levolor customers experience a flawless shopping and ordering experience, including use of our online website feedback tool and live chat," said Long. "In addition, our retailers need to know they can connect reliably and share information

with Levolor account managers via email. If application errors occur at any of these touch points, we know our E-Business team can deal with them quickly and minimize or eliminate impact to our users because they now have more visibility and control of the Web application platform. When they can resolve issues without having to try and reproduce them, we can avoid a lot of unnecessary downtime."

"We polled customers following the Zend implementation, and they reported an immediate and noticeable improvement in the overall quality of their online shopping experience," said Long. "Internally, we saw less load, even during peak use periods. Even with more users, more products and more sites to manage, we have gained the ability to maintain SLAs across our network of affiliates. We like the future-proof aspect of working with a company like Zend that can provide us with ongoing support of PHP as well as training and a certification program. In terms of overall satisfaction, we simply wouldn't run our sites without Zend."

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