



Vitra Marketing Information Systems Furnishing The Internet With New Solutions –Thanks To Intel® Processor Technology

Solution Summary

Industry

Interior furnishing and design

Company Profile

Vitra* is a leading European furniture company based in Germany with a reputation for high quality products. In addition to the design and manufacture of desks, chairs and other items of office furniture, it provides a professional office design service.

Challenge

The company wanted to create an innovative marketing information system that would exploit the opportunities of internet technology. The aim was to keep all marketing and sales information up-to-date and enable its rapid and widespread dissemination. The system should prove an invaluable tool for sales representatives and business partners.

Solution

The Vitra Marketing Information System (VMIS), launched in May 1999, enables all marketing and sales information from Vitra to be accessed by sales staff via the internet and used online or offline. In addition, it allows users to produce customised configurations, accurate price lists, and to run visually stunning multimedia presentations showing the furniture in real-life situations with three-dimensional imaging.

Products

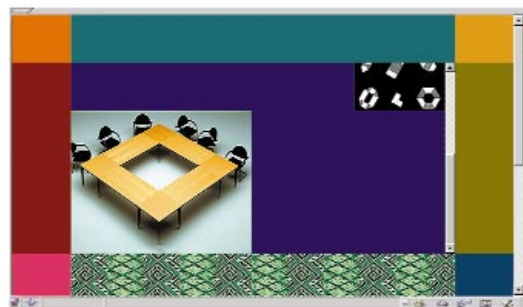
- Servers: Intel® Pentium® III Xeon™ processor-based systems
- Microsoft® IIS 4.0
- Microsoft® NT 4.0
- Microsoft® SQL 7.0
- java® based E-Commerce Solution
- Microsoft® ASP, SSI, Active X, DCOM, COM
- Microsoft® XML
- IIP based Image-Server

Solution Provider

The system was built by Virtual Identity*, an award-winning agency for interactive media based in Freiburg, Germany. Virtual Identity provides a full service in multimedia technology. It specialises in the implementation of innovative and cost-effective Web-based systems on behalf of its clients.

Benefits

Vitra now has a powerful and effective way of communicating sales and marketing information within the company and with its vast network of business partners and professional associates. The information is far easier to keep accurate and up-to-date. Facilities such as configuration and presentation autoplay allow sales staff to provide a more effective service to customers, thereby enhancing Vitra's market appeal. They can also customise their approach for individual clients. The use of the Intel® platform ensures reliability, investment protection and price/performance.



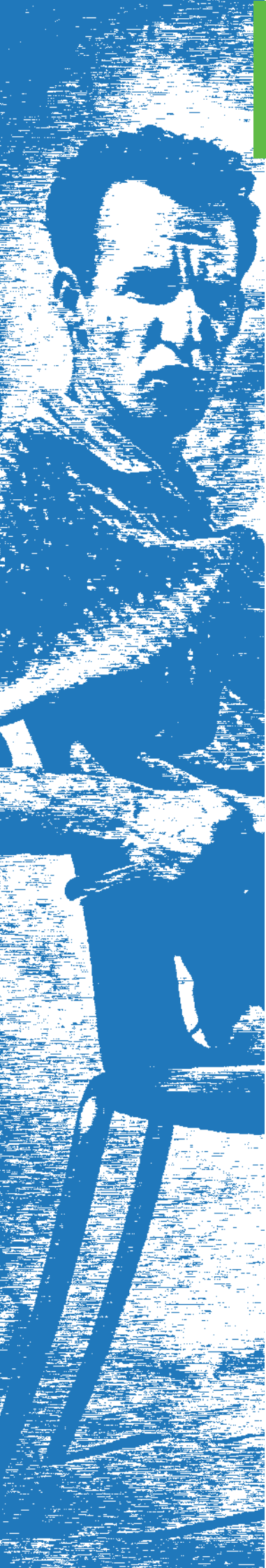
Introduction

The Internet is offering powerful new ways for companies to communicate with their business partners, dealers, customers and other professional associates. But it is more than simply a communications tool.

Harnessed effectively, the Internet and its surrounding Web technologies provides the opportunity to act as a hub for a wide range of business activities. Successfully deployed, it can provide companies with a powerful tool to store, process, and disseminate information.

Consistency and accuracy of date along with the ability to keep it continually up-to-date are among the benefits of this approach.

<http://www.vitra.ch>



Customisation and personalisation

There is also the opportunity to customise information for individual recipients. This might depend on their access device, their level of expertise or their individual interests and requirements. Companies that can respond to this challenge can gain competitive advantage by offering a more personalised, targeted service than their rivals.

Meanwhile, they can also improve their own business efficiency by avoiding duplication and streamlining business processes within their own organisations.

The company profile

Vitra is a leading European furniture company based in Basel, Germany. The company sells through its sales force and through a network of independent dealers. In addition to the design and manufacture of desks, chairs and other items of office furniture, it also provides an office design service. Among its broad range of skills in this area, is an expertise in office designs for desk-sharing and hot desking facilities.

Vitra is very well-known for the excellent quality of its products. It has a high reputation in the business, especially in Germany and Switzerland, and works with a host of leading designers and architects. It is crucial for Vitra to foster the best possible relationships with these business partners and professional associates, and to support them in any way it can.

For some time the company has run a corporate web site and has built up links with other related sites for

use in marketing. It has also been making use of extranets for communicating with dealers and seeking corporate partners. However, by 1998 it wanted to exploit the opportunities of new technology in a more radical way.

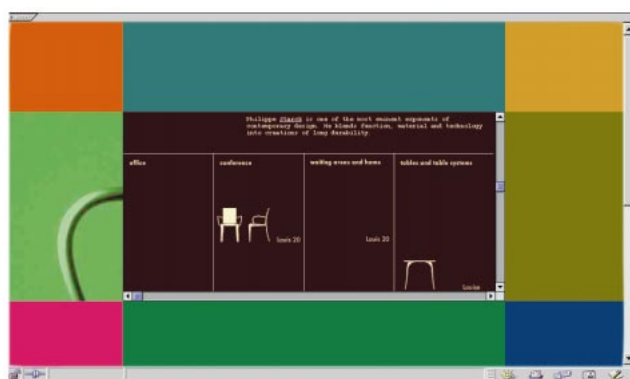
The challenge

The global spread of Vitra's in-house sales force, not to mention the vast network of architects, dealers and business partners, makes it difficult for the company to keep in close touch with everyone. Hence the decision to use the internet.

Vitra wanted an e-business solution that would communicate its culture and philosophy along with the latest details of its product lines. The system should support the direct sales process ensuring that information was up-to-date, complete and explained in the best possible way.

From a technical point of view, Vitra wanted to avoid the need for a client to be permanently online. This could be inhibiting for sales people on the move or architects and designers working on location. So the challenge was to create a system that would be capable of working offline without the need to be online to a server. The client should be able to have a laptop and download the database at a convenient time, then consult it while on the move.

This was the aim of the Vitra Marketing Information System (VMIS).



The process

Vitra decided it would need a customised business solution, so it approached Virtual Identity, an award-winning European multimedia agency. Virtual Identity offers a full service covering the design, development and production of digital communications solutions and strategies.

Working closely with its clients and their corporate cultures, Virtual Identity has a reputation for achieving innovative and cost-effective solutions. Another advantage for Vitra was Virtual Identity's location within easy reach in Freiburg. Further information on Virtual Identity and its projects can be found at

<http://www.identity.de/press> .

Phased implementation

Virtual Identity began work on the VMIS project in the summer of 1998, completing the first phase by May the following year. Following the completion of phase one, some 200 Vitra sales employees gained access to VMIS.

The second phase of implementation will incorporate furniture dealers, architects, business partners, showrooms, consumers, the press and other professionals world-wide, with the aim of making as wide an audience as possible for Vitra products and expertise. The graphical user interface makes VMIS accessible and interesting and enjoyable to each of these groups. The system, which is initially in English, will also be accessible in other languages in the future.

The solution

Reliable stable platform

The VMIS is based on a client-server solution, utilising powerful Intel® architecture servers and the latest software technologies. Developed as a user-friendly application, the VMIS provides Vitra's sales network with one flexible and innovative tool to communicate efficiently and consistently with furniture dealers and large project customers world-wide.

The backbone of the application is the electronic, media-neutral database containing information on all Vitra products, systems, solutions and services. This information is presented in a highly visual, graphical and intelligible way. For example, there are interactive simulations of office environments allowing the user to experiment with how the environment might look at different times of day. You can compare the relatively efficient and tidy look of 9.00am with the rather more chaotic and unstructured look of 2.30pm.

In addition to providing users with details of the complete Vitra range, the VMIS offers:

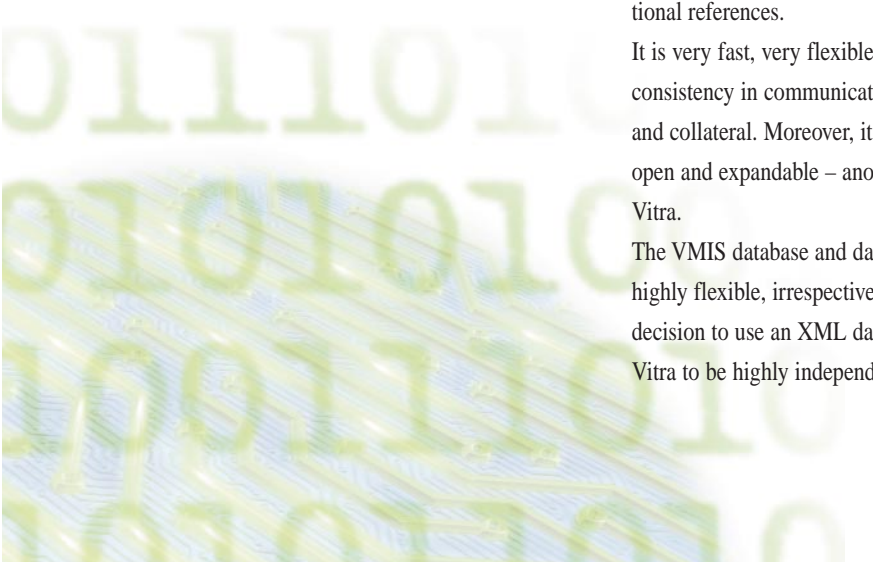
- a variation configurator which enables products to be customised according to thousands of combinations of colour and design features
- an application for compiling a piece list and determining the item costs
- a presentation generator with autoplay features to develop presentations to meet specific needs.

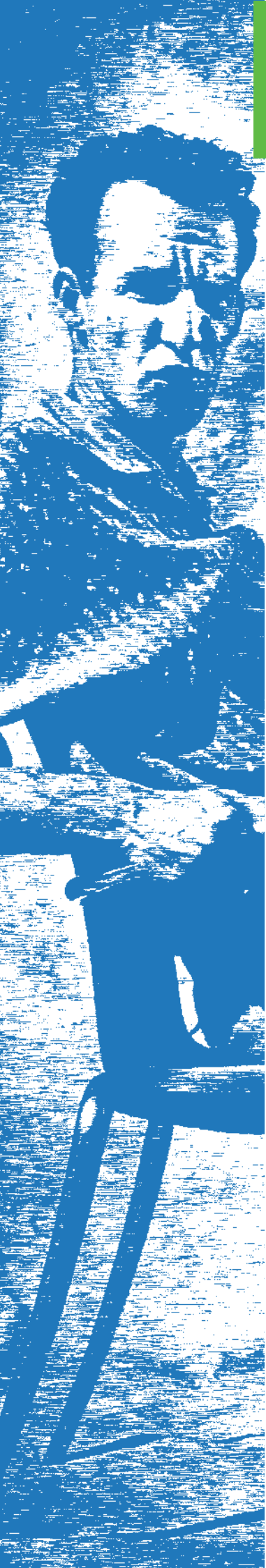
Price/performance and investment protection

This combination of facilities makes it possible to develop visually compelling and interactive presentations. They combine technical and design information with photographic images, flash animations, realistic three-dimensional imaging and real and virtual situational references.

It is very fast, very flexible and has a high level of consistency in communication of product information and collateral. Moreover, it has been designed to be open and expandable – another key requirement for Vitra.

The VMIS database and data structure needed to be highly flexible, irrespective of media type. Hence the decision to use an XML data format which allows Vitra to be highly independent in its use of content.





Using VMIS

The system has been designed to be accessible from home, office or on the move. Wherever and whenever it is accessed, the information will be accurate, consistent and up-to-date. However, its format will vary depending on the access device and the profile of the viewer. Convenience and appropriateness for the task in hand are the deciding factors.

For example, a user at home on a PC might want to view animations, video or detailed graphic designs whereas if he were working from a mobile hand-held on a building site this level of information would be inappropriate. In the latter situation, the viewer might just see price data, measurement specifications, or a list of availability dates.

Compelling presentations

The presentation facilities are intended to provide a powerful tool for salespeople when visiting clients. Take a salesman putting together a presentation in his hotel room the night before meeting a client. He could go online, capture the latest relevant product news and content, access archive material, and put together a customised presentation for that individual client.

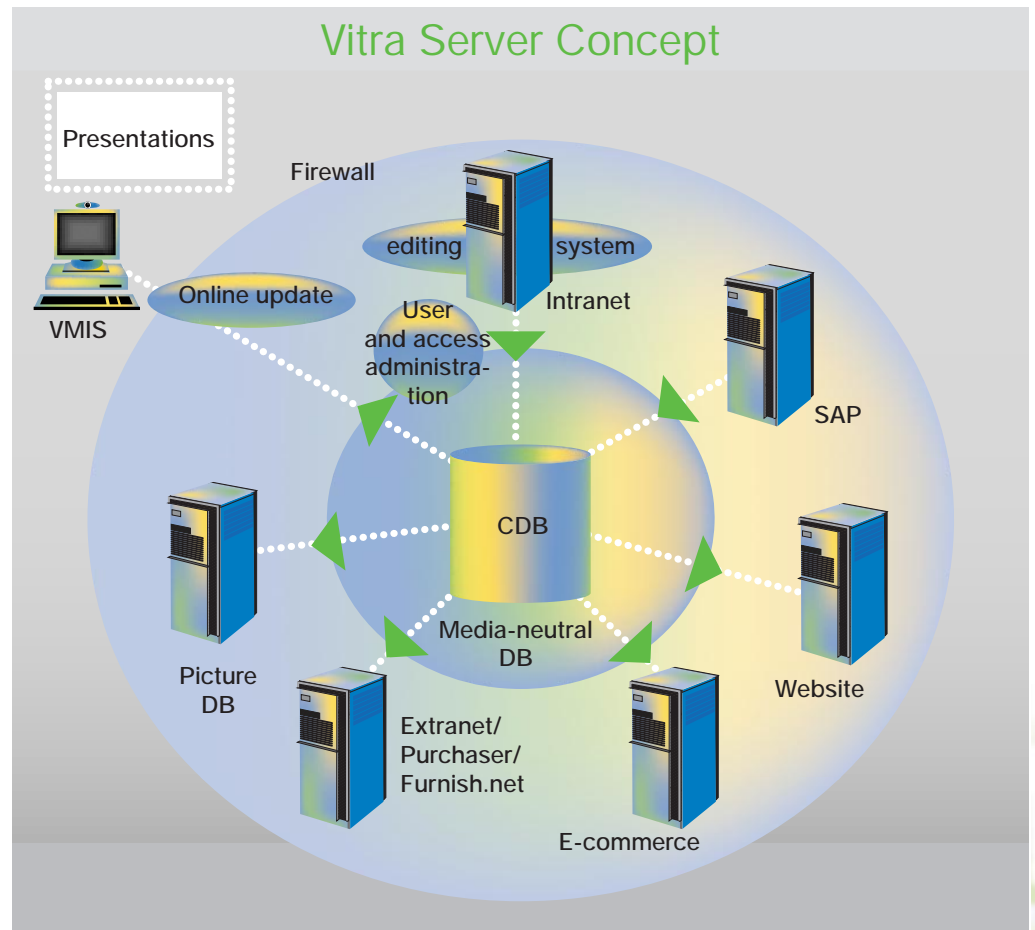
During the client meeting, the salesman would be able to run the presentation using the autoplay facility, changing details in real time, selecting items the client wanted and loading them into the shopping basket. The client would then have an immediate record of the proposal, including costs, dates and technical specifications.

In this way, a sales representative can show a client the entire line of chairs and office furniture solutions without having to bring the customer to the showroom and have all the furniture pieces available. Customers can see all features, learn about the specific functionality and advantages of individual items, configure them to individual needs and order them all through the sales representative on the spot.

Streamlining business efficiency

The fact that the actual order can be taken through the system results in significant efficiencies in terms of the actual sales process. Online document sharing is also possible.

The service should also soon be accessible to clients on an extranet. It is very much a client-focused system



The products

Vitra was keen to use the Intel® platform because of its high stability and availability. Scalability, performance and optimisation for Windows NT were other key attractions.

Blaxxun Contact has been used to create object movies of chairs in VRML – a format for the creation of three-dimensional virtual reality worlds on the Internet. This is ideal for situations where there is no showroom. Instead, the viewer can view a chair in three dimensions in very high resolution. Macromedia Flash Player is also deployed for vector graphics and simulations.

■ CDB:

Quad Intel® Pentium® III Xeon, 500MHz,
2 Giga RAM, RAID 5

■ Intranet Application and Project-Reference-DB Application Server:

Dual Intel® Pentium® III Xeon™, 500MHz,
1 Giga RAM, RAID 5

■ Website Application Server:

Dual Intel® Pentium® III Xeon, 500MHz,
1 Giga RAM, RAID 5

■ E-Commerce Server

Dual Intel® Pentium® III Xeon, 500MHz,
1 Giga RAM, RAID 5

■ Extranet and Purchase Application and Furnish.Net Application Server:

Dual Intel® Pentium® III Xeon, 500 MHz,
500 MB RAM, RAID 5

■ Image Server, Image-DB

Quad Intel® Pentium® III Xeon, 500MHz,
1,5 Giga RAM, RAID 5

■ VMIS Client

Intel® Pentium® III processor based desktop PC
Intel® Pentium® III 500 MHz, 128 MB RAM

■ Software, server-side

- Microsoft® IIS 4.0
- Microsoft® NT 4.0
- Microsoft® SQL 7.0
- java® based E-Commerce Solution
- Microsoft® ASP, SSI, Active X, DCOM, COM
- Microsoft® XML
- IIP based Image-Server



■ Server structure

- each server disposes of an emergency/ staging server to test and to guarantee the functionality in event of disaster.
- to provide development separate from the productive system, each server disposes of a development server.
- both of these additional servers are equipped with the same hard- and software-requirements to guarantee real mirrors.

■ Software:

- Windows® NT
- Internet Explorer® 5.x
- Macromedia Flash®
- LivePicture® Viewer
- Blaxxun Contact®
- Eastern Graphics® AFML
- Intel® Indeo™ Video Codec

The Benefits

The VMIS strategy focuses on internet technologies to ensure that Vitra is communicating effectively and consistently with its business network – the people directly responsible for spreading the Vitra message. This includes a huge range of dealers, architects, business partners, customers and other professional associates who are crucial to Vitra's future growth. VMIS provides a holistic approach to the culture of Vitra because everyone gets the same information on products, systems and services. Moreover, That information can much more easily be kept accurate and up-to-date. Gone is the need for bulky catalogues and the dilemma of how to stock showrooms.

The system is also extremely flexible, so that business partners can select whatever is most relevant and appropriate for their audience. This helps target indi-



vidual groups of customers with a more personalised service rather than bombarding everyone with identical and potentially overwhelming information

Confidence and trust

The fact that the actual order can be taken through the system results in significant efficiencies in terms of the actual sales process. The VMIS offers the best combination of increased turnover and efficiency

combined with cost-savings. At the same time, it offers an ideal vehicle to establish brand name recognition on an international scale.

The use of the Intel® platform, standard XML technology and the Web, rather than proprietary systems, protects Vitra's investment. "Virtual Identity has proved an excellent partner and has developed a highly innovative multimedia strategy," Vitra says.

