HP helps jewelry giant ring in a record-setting holiday season

Stuller, Inc.

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– John Joubert, Director of Technical Systems, Stuller, Inc.

Business need:
Stuller, Inc. is the largest manufacturer and distributor of jewelry products in the United States, serving thousands of jewelry retailers throughout North America. The company needed to upgrade its legacy business systems to keep pace with growth and provide a more flexible, integrated, and user-friendly application environment. Within two-and-a-half years, Stuller had completed the process of moving all their critical business applications to an Oracle® platform running on HP servers and HP StorageWorks storage systems. Then they faced their biggest challenge: The company needed to go live with their most critical application – order entry – in time for the 2004 holiday season. The year-end holidays are when the jeweler achieves a major portion of its business for the year, and Stuller needed to migrate flawlessly.

Solution overview:
To meet Stuller's critical deadline, HP consultants worked with Stuller staff and Oracle professionals to test the system at each stage of the implementation, analyze performance, suggest modifications, and implement changes. When it became apparent that Stuller needed additional hardware, the HP team expedited delivery and installed the appropriate systems to meet application needs. An HP tuning team made critical adjustments that allowed the system to achieve excellent performance and pass the test – a record-breaking holiday season – with flying colors.

Polishing critical business processes to radiance
Stuller sells its products to over 50,000 jewelry professionals in the U.S., Canada, and the Caribbean. The heart of Stuller's business is customer service, order entry, and fulfillment. Stuller ships 98 percent of their orders the day they receive them. The jewelry business is very seasonal, and Stuller achieves a large part of its business in the year-end holiday season, so its order-entry and shipping systems must be ready to meet the crunch.

In 1999, Stuller ran their business on a character-oriented legacy system. The company needed to upgrade to a more user-friendly system with a graphical user interface that would make training far easier. Stuller chose to build their new systems in an Oracle Applications database environment.

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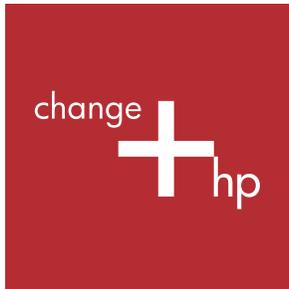
HP was involved in the upgrade from the beginning. John Joubert, Director of Technical Systems in Stuller's IT department, explains, "When we moved away from the legacy system, we wanted a hardware vendor with a strong association with Oracle and proven expertise in the Oracle world. We had a choice between HP, IBM, and Sun. The difference was that our team had excellent past experience with HP, so we selected HP."

Superdome server shines with high availability and scalability
Stuller built their new system infrastructure around the HP 9000 Superdome high-availability server and an HP StorageWorks storage area network (SAN). The SAN was based on the HP StorageWorks XP512 disk array, later upgraded to an XP1024. Also on the SAN are an HP StorageWorks ESL9000 tape library and a McData Enterprise SAN switch. Among the key reasons Stuller chose the HP solution were that the Superdome server works seamlessly with the SAN, and that it offers exceptional scalability – the Superdome configuration can start with as few as four processors and can increase to 128 processors.

"With the HP Superdome platform," says Joubert, "we know that if we need to expand, we can – without a lot of trauma or a forklift upgrade. We proved that this past year under pressure. With other platforms, we were afraid we'd hit the edges of the frame. Superdome technology has let us go as far as we want."

Middle-tier services – the web and Oracle forms services between the client PCs and the HP Superdome database server – run on a server farm of HP ProLiant DL380 servers and the Red Hat Linux operating system. The middle tier had been running on a pair of UNIX servers, but when tests showed the need for more horsepower, Joubert suggested a switch to Linux, and looked to HP to help make the change. He relates, "As always, the difference

with HP is in the level of support we get. When we decided to go to Linux, HP delivered a bank of DL380 test servers for evaluating this new alternative, analyzing performance and determining goodness-of-fit and sizing metrics. HP was there when we needed them to be. As a result, the cut-over to Linux went without a hitch."

Setting up for a flawless transition
Stuller took a staged approach to moving applications to Oracle, starting with Oracle Financials in 1999, including Accounts Payable, Accounts Receivable, and General Ledger packages. The challenge they faced in 2004 was to bring the last major pieces of the system into Oracle, including the most important piece – order entry – the heart of their business.

Previously, Stuller had a homegrown, character-based order-entry system written in COBOL. It was a very fast system, but it did not have features they wanted, and Stuller wanted to bring order entry into the Oracle world. "The old system was fast," acknowledges Joubert, "but it could not provide the information we needed to grow our business in an increasingly competitive environment."

HP team responds to the multi-faceted challenge
The challenge facing Stuller in the summer of 2004 was to make the switchover to the new order-entry system in time for the 2004 holiday buying season. The system was installed and running by July, but the goal was for it to be running flawlessly, not missing a beat, before the year-end holidays. "We must be able to take and ship thousands of orders the same day," explains Joubert. Anticipating a higher level of demand, Stuller upgraded the processors in the Superdome server to newer PA8800 RISC processors before they turned on the order-entry system in July for initial tests. "As we loaded more data on the database, by September it became apparent that the system was not giving us all the performance we would need by December," recalls Joubert.

Stuller consulted HP about their concerns, and HP responded by immediately putting together a performance team of HP consultants. The team came back to Stuller with recommendations on making increased use of processing and storage resources – and handling I/O more effectively. They also recommended that Stuller upgrade its disk array from an HP StorageWorks XP512 to an XP1024, and add processors and main memory to the Superdome server. "Time was running out," says Joubert, "so we did not hesitate. We placed the hardware order on a Wednesday in mid-November. The StorageWorks XP1024 showed up two days later, and we had it up and running the next week. The HP team who installed it did an amazing job."

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The addition of storage capacity was critical to the success of the project, says Joubert, and he credits the HP team for making the right recommendations. "They didn't just say, 'Oh, there's the problem, let's just fix it with hardware.' Their whole goal was to provide us with the most possible performance out of the system," maintains Joubert "HP first looked at every way to increase performance, and then looked at the hardware option."

Joubert also credits the contribution made by the "tuning team" of HP consultants who worked with Stuller and Oracle in one of the last steps before the final switchover. "The HP tuning team made the system run properly, implementing critical recommendations that resulted in enhanced utilization," recalls Joubert. "They looked at the configuration of the database as it related to the Superdome server, made key adjustments, and it really performed."

Enjoying a gem of a sales season
The payoff for all that work was that the system passed the test triumphantly. Stuller generated their most holiday sales ever – processing a record 14,000 orders in one day – and handled the rush without disrupting day-to-day operations. In previous years, in order to deal with the holiday workload, they had to kick everybody off the system who was not taking or filling orders. With the new system, everybody in the company was able to access the system normally, and keep doing their jobs.

"The HP solution met the deadline," says Joubert, "and provided the right-sized solution. We now have the horsepower we need, and we're set up for the future."

Joubert concludes, "To make this success a reality, a whole team of HP people played a critical role. HP professionals from every direction responded to our needs. HP came through with fast equipment deliveries, fast installs, fast response to critical technical issues, and offers to help – really pulling out all the stops to make us successful."

About Stuller, Inc.
Stuller (www.stuller.com) is one of the world's leading manufacturers and distributors of fine jewelry and jewelry-related products. From nearly 600,000 square feet of manufacturing and administrative facilities in Lafayette, Louisiana, Stuller provides just-in-time delivery for nearly 300,000 different items to 50,000+ jewelry professionals throughout North America and the world.

Stuller, Inc.

Challenges

- Inability of legacy infrastructure to support change and rising business volume

- Need for a robust information systems environment to ensure continuation of mission-critical applications

- Requirement to go live with critical order-entry system in time for the year-end holiday rush

- Call for integrated custom applications, databases, and servers to deliver maximum performance

- Upgraded storage system within tight deadlines

Solution

HP Services

- System design
- Configuration and integration
- Performance analysis
- Hardware and process recommendations
- Expedited equipment deliveries and installation
- System tuning
- HP Critical Systems Support service

Hardware

- HP 9000 Superdome high-availability server with PA8800 RISC processors
- HP ProLiant DL380 servers
- HP StorageWorks XP1024 Disk Array
- HP StorageWorks ESL9000 tape library with 6 LTO2 drives and 220 media slots
- McData Enterprise SAN switch

Software

- HP-UX 11.11 mission-critical operating system
- Red Hat Linux Advanced Server operating system
- Oracle eBusiness Suite 11i (Oracle Financials, Manufacturing, Inventory, and Order Entry packages)
- HP OpenView Data Protector for backup and recovery
- HP StorageWorks Secure LUN Manager for storage management
- HP OpenView Glance Plus performance monitor software
- HP-UX C and C++ compilers

Results

- HP 9000 Superdome server and HP StorageWorks SAN support high-availability environment.

- Critical business processes are integrated into the HP-Oracle infrastructure.

- Oracle Order Entry system was up and running in time for record-breaking 2004 holiday sales season.

- Enhanced system utilization provides the ability to comfortably handle peak workloads and rapidly react to changing business demands.

- Flexible, scalable system resources are in place to meet future needs.

- Friendly application environment provides ease of use and faster user training.

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