

## Mail Order and Online Ecommerce

Established in 1995, the Owl Barn Gift Catalogue is a mail order business based in Norfolk, England, which serves regular customers from around the world. The Owl Barn strives to keep their entire range in stock at all times, and aims for a speedy turnaround of orders.

The Owl Barn manages an ecommerce website and it is vital that they maintain a policy of maximum confidentiality and security regarding customer data and transactions made over the Internet. Their Secure Server mechanism protects the integrity of any financial information a customer transmits through their site.

Robbie Murray of the Owl Barn met RapidHost at a specialist Filemaker Seminar a number of years ago. At the time, The Owl Barn was a relatively young company, with no web presence, running the business on an ever increasing number of inter-related Filemaker 3 databases as the business developed.

When the e-commerce operation was launched, RapidHost took over the central hosting of the website to ensure security and facilitate development, but Owl Barn still had to upload, download, vet and update daily files of information between the central and local servers.

## FileMaker Upgrade

In 2005, Owl Barn rebuilt their entire system in Filemaker 7 running from a dedicated server managed by RapidHost.

Robbie Murray comments, "Our single database accommodates not only Customer & Prospect data, Inventory & Stock Control, Sales & Purchase Orders, warehousing and all other necessary functions of any Mail Order business, but in addition hosts a separate wholesale business supplying Bird Centres throughout the UK, and handles Donations, Adoptions and administration for the Owl Sanctuary which we support, plus Course and Hunting Day bookings for an associated Falconry operation. We have always believed that the system should accommodate our requirements, rather than force us to bend the business to fit the software, and having evaluated all the off the shelf software on offer, we could find nothing that came close to meeting our needs, even with massive (and expensive) customization. Developing Filemaker was the only sensible and cost effective option."

The system upgrade immediately resulted in substantial cost and time savings, as web customers could place orders directly onto the database, eliminating any intervention from Owl Barn, and having a single remote server which could be accessed from anywhere in the world changed the business completely.

## Real-Time, Multi-Site Support

Robbie continues, "We have two offices, 15 miles apart, and a remote 3rd party fulfilment house, all now benefiting from real time stock control and fulfilment processing."

The Owl Barn now uses Filemaker 8 and has a structure that will enable new satellite websites to be established from the same database and server as they expand their product ranges.

Chris Astridge, Managing Director of The Owl Barn concludes, "For the past year, our fledgling web business has been fully integrated into our back-end processes, which proved to be a smooth and robust development. From the point of view of ourselves as an SME, the facility to access the remote server from any location allows us to involve outworkers for order processing at peak times, and management to interrogate, maintain and develop the system at any time (even on holiday!). As self taught developers, working in partnership with RapidHost ensures that when we get out of our depth, professional help is only a phone call away".