

Terra Mobile iobox

- Industry:** Mobile telecommunications/Internet
- Product(s):** BEA WebLogic Server™
- Project:** Wireless B2C portal providing mobile device users with wide choice of hosted content and services
- Why BEA:** Flexible infrastructure enabling rapid aggregation of partner content and services, easy scalability to handle explosive growth; innovative and proven J2EE environment
- Highlights:** Portal/hosting infrastructure deployed in just 5 months, serves 3.5 million customer base growing by 12,000 a month, manages peak loads of 10,000 simultaneous users generating 500 transactions a second; new developers productive in 2-3 weeks

COMPANY BRIEF

iobox (www.ioibox.com) is a pan-European wireless portal company, providing 3.5 million mobile device users with Internet-based content and services—and dozens of content and service providers with a rapidly growing distribution channel. Launched in Helsinki, Finland in 1999, has its headquarters in London and operates country-specific portals for the UK, Spain, Germany, Finland and Sweden. In July 2000, iobox was acquired by Terra Mobile, a joint venture of Spain's Telefónica Móviles and Terra Networks.

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

In 1999, as a startup in the emerging, already intensely competitive European mobile Internet market, iobox had to build market share fast. The company's strategy was to attract as many customers as possible as soon as possible by offering a larger, more attractive range of content and service choices than established competitors. To do that, iobox needed to partner with leading content and service providers. To enlist participants, they needed a service delivery infrastructure that would allow partners to come on board easily, and the portal to build a critical mass of mobile Internet applications and users.

BUILT ON BEA™ SOLUTION

Today iobox has a customer base of more than 3 million registered users and is currently adding 12,000 new accounts each day. Portal applications, such as email, short messages, scheduling and games are complemented by a myriad of offerings from leading Internet content and service providers such as amazon.com, cnn.com, boxman.com and about.com.

The company's success in growing its partnerships and user base is partly the result of choosing the BEA WebLogic Server as its infrastructure platform for mobile service delivery.

"We chose WebLogic because it was the most proven, stable and, at the same time, innovative J2EE platform available," says Petri Rahja, director of software architecture for iobox. "Working in Java makes it easier to integrate new technology and service

components. The WebLogic n-tiered architecture also simplifies development by helping us keep a clean division between infrastructure and applications, so we can flexibly add, change and enhance them independently.”

Attractive content and services has drawn mobile subscribers to the portal even faster than iobox founders had envisioned. It took the portal 5 or 6 months to get to one million users, but only 2 months to get to 2 million, and less than a month to reach 3 million. This rate of growth posed a significant challenge: how to welcome new subscribers while maintaining the response times and quality of service the iobox user base had come to expect?

“The mobile services market is very demanding,” explains Rahja, “because of the built-in expectations phone users have for instantaneous, always-available service. And word of user satisfaction or dissatisfaction spreads—in this market, it can be a more potent force than advertising.”

The WebLogic platform has proved elastic, rapidly scaling to accommodate demand. Currently, the iobox portal infrastructure handles as many as 7 million transactions a day. During peak hours, it manages up to 10,000 simultaneous users making up to 500 transactions a second. Response time for these mobile customers remains at a few seconds, the same as it was when demand was half what it is today.

“We expect to reach 5 million users soon,” says Rahja, “and when we do, it will be a simple matter of adding some hardware and making a few tweaks to the software. Scaling for us is really just a configuration task. The platform will automatically rebalance loads without interrupting or diminishing service to our users.”

Rahja says that when iobox first decided to bet its business on a Java platform, he had some concerns. “I am quite familiar with industrial-strength platforms like BEA Tuxedo, and I wasn’t sure that the Java environment could provide the same level of performance, which I believed we would need for iobox,” he says. “But now I can say from experience that from the point of view of scalability, high-availability and transaction reliability, WebLogic is very robust. We’ve seen it, and we are now very confident about it.”

Meanwhile, building the iobox portal on the world’s leading J2EE platform also helped the company attract the developer talent it needed to grow quickly. “Having a leading-edge development environment was a big, big competitive advantage for us in the early stages of growth,” recalls Rahja. “We were able to recruit the best Java programmers pretty easily, then train them on WebLogic. New people usually became productive in two weeks.”

The race never stops, however, especially since many mobile services competitors are now also embracing Java. The company is confident, however, that’s its choice of WebLogic will help keep it in the forefront of wireless Internet services delivery. “BEA is very involved in the industry effort to develop Java-based technologies and is constantly expanding the WebLogic platform to incorporate new standards, such as XML and XSL,” asserts Rahja. “That’s going to allow us to stay ahead.”