

# Customer Profile

iWay Software's suite assembles powerful, pre-built components for enterprise-class integration scenarios – without custom code – delivering the fastest, most cost-effective, and simplest way to integrate business processes and achieve the promise of SOA: true reusability.

## Collections Etc.

### Snapshot

#### Organization

Collections Etc., a major gift catalog company based in Chicago.

#### The Challenge

Deploy new IT interfaces to meet explosive company growth.

#### The Strategy

Create a multi-purpose EAI infrastructure that can handle many types of databases, platforms and information systems.

#### The Results

Significant strategic advantages in a competitive market through the ability to do message content routing throughout the enterprise.

#### Information Builders Solution

iWay Software; Information Builders' Consulting.



## Streamlining Data Exchange at Collections Etc.

### Major Catalog Retailer Automates Message Routing With iWay Technology

Even if you've never ordered anything from Collections Etc., there's a pretty good chance you've seen some of the merchandise from its popular catalog. With an extensive list of customers, Collections Etc. has been a major player in the mail-order gift market for many years. Over the past decade, the company has enjoyed additional growth across all channels, motivating a significant expansion in its operation. This rapid increase in business was the catalyst for a significant IT overhaul that landed iWay Software in the very center of the business.

"We have positioned iWay as one of the core technologies in our enterprise," says Anand Ranganathan, systems integration manager at Collections Etc.

Ranganathan and his team are leveraging iWay's ability to interconnect a wide variety of information systems, simplifying message content routing on a broad scale.

**“The iWay interface works beautifully, and it was just the beginning of a long journey for us. Ultimately, every piece of data that is floating around our enterprise will be routed through iWay Software.”**

specialists can help you develop a solid understanding of how to utilize their technology. To say that they were anything short of incredible would be an understatement. They addressed and fixed every issue that we put in front of them – and not just from a technical perspective, but from an organizational perspective as well. iWay is the kind of strategic partner we need.”

Collections Etc. uses IBM iSeries midrange servers running i5/OS (the latest generation of IBM OS/400). Along with the warehouse management system, many different types of databases are in use throughout the organization. “We use just about every database in existence,” confirms Ranganathan. “DB2 is a big part of our business because we are IBM-based. We also have Microsoft SQL Server, Oracle, Access, and MySQL. Every one of these databases is very important to our business and we needed the ability to interface each of them with various information systems in the most efficient way possible.”

iWay’s prepackaged intelligent adapters can connect to more than 250 packaged applications, transaction systems, legacy data, relational databases, and e-business formats, all without writing any custom code. With the ability to integrate systems in real time, near-real time, or on a scheduled basis, iWay provides a complete reusable infrastructure for EAI solutions, as well as for B2B, e-commerce, mobile business, and e-government. This extensive set of standard capabilities makes iWay an ideal fit for the IBM iSeries platform, which includes IBM AIX 5L, Linux, IBM WebSphere, Lotus Domino, and Java™ solutions as part of an integrated server platform.

“Given our diverse infrastructure of databases and platforms, iWay’s broad adapter set was a big part of what attracted us to iWay technology,” Pryce adds. “But the most attractive part was the fact that we can natively access the IBM iSeries environment, without making any sacrifice in performance. That was unique. The other vendors did not have nearly as much concentrated expertise with the iSeries platform, let alone the level of technical support we are receiving from iWay.”

Internal testing performed by Pryce and his team confirmed that the iWay interfaces were just as efficient as IBM’s native system transport mechanism. “By using iWay, we gained a ton of functionality without sacrificing any performance,” Pryce reiterates. “Plus we can apply this functionality elsewhere in our organization.”

### **Making New Connections**

Currently four developers at Collections Etc. have been trained to use the iWay software, and the links for routing messages between the order entry system and the warehouse management system are in full production mode. The data interface between the systems includes inventory transactions and information regarding invoices, order fulfillment, vendors, purchase orders, and items.

“If we were to shut down the iXTE server in our enterprise, there would be no exchange of information between the two applications,” Ranganathan emphasizes. “Orders would not ship, we would not be able to process any inventory receipts or accept any returns from our customers, and we would be unable to process any refund checks or adjust any inventory.”

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“There are hundreds of message types that flow within our company,” Ranganathan continues. “These include not only thousands of telephone calls from customers each day, but also things like purchase orders, marketing data, and inventory-management information. iWay can deliver these messages to the appropriate information systems, then deliver automated responses to the customer, vendor, or pertinent user. Being able to route messages in this fashion is proving to be a significant strategic advantage for our company.”

To contend with rapid growth, developers looked for a more robust software infrastructure. As IT Director Matt Pryce explains, “We suddenly found ourselves in a situation in which we had none of the technology tools that a company of our size needs.”

### **Seizing Opportunities With iWay**

Collections Etc. had to integrate data from several software systems, including a new warehouse management system from Manhattan Associates and an existing order management system from CommercialWare, Inc. Both systems are iSeries applications.

Once these information systems were in place, they looked for an EAI tool that could transform and route more than 400 different types of messages that were flowing among critical information systems, many of which have been part of the company’s mail-order business since its inception. They evaluated all the primary enterprise application integration (EAI) vendors on the market, including Mercator, TIBCO, Vitria, IBM, and iWay Software, a division of Information Builders.

According to Pryce, Collections Etc. selected iWay for two important reasons. “iWay had a solution for the IBM midrange market with prewritten adapters for the AS/400 that were ready to go,” he says. “The solution appeared to be easy to implement and easy to learn. Also, iWay was the most responsive when it came to forming a strategic business relationship. Information Builders is interested in helping us advance the technology in this particular market.”

Collections Etc. hired Information Builders’ Consulting to assist with the first EAI project, which involved creating an interface between the order management system and the warehouse management system using iWay DB2 data adapters and iWay file adapters. Developers created staging tables on each iSeries platform. iWay monitors those tables for records, then executes the stored procedures to retrieve the data, convert it to XML, and deliver it from the order-entry system to the warehouse management system, and vice versa. Currently, nine iWay listeners transfer about 32,000 documents per day.

Ranganathan admits that the first interface was very simple, but proved the validity of the iWay XML Transformation Engine (iXTE) technology. “It took us about three months from the time we brought in the software to the time we went live,” he says. “The iWay interface works beautifully, and it was just the beginning of a long journey for us. Ultimately, every piece of data that is floating around our enterprise will be routed through iWay Software.”

### **Shaping an Elegant Architecture**

Ranganathan recommends that new customers hire an iWay system architect from Information Builders’ Consulting as part of the design and implementation team. “Lay the groundwork properly up front,” he says. “Information Builders’ consulting services are top-notch, and the iWay

## Find Out More

To see how we can help you succeed, visit us at

**iwaysoftware.com**, e-mail us at [info@iWaySoftware.com](mailto:info@iWaySoftware.com), or in the U.S. and Canada, call toll-free **(866) 297-4929**.

Pryce and his team see this initial interface as a big step for the company. However, it is only the beginning of their plans for iWay. "Our first phase has been an important learning experience," he says. "Based on the success we have had with Information Builders' software, we have charted out plans to use it for message content routing between other systems in the enterprise."

For example, iWay will be used to identify customers based on data in the marketing database and route calls to the appropriate customer support agents. "When customers call to place an order, we will be able to identify a platinum customer – someone who has spent a lot of money with us – and automatically route that individual's call to one of our platinum-level customer service representatives," Ranganathan explains.

Farther down the road, Collections Etc. plans to use iWay in conjunction with voice-over IP (VoIP) technology to explore the possibility of routing digitized voice over the EAI infrastructure. This would allow Collections Etc. to route phone calls through an iWay server instead of through a telecommunications switch. "The ability to interface voice through the EAI infrastructure would be incredible," Ranganathan muses. "Because we get thousands of calls each day, any innovations we can develop for routing voice would be a tremendous benefit to us."

"We have learned a lot about what iWay is capable of," Pryce says, in closing. "As we start bringing more interfaces online, iWay will help us keep the lights on. It is a critical part of our business. We are very pleased with our strategic relationship with Information Builders."



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