Online grocer teams with EMC Consulting to prototype the future of online shopping

Business overview
With operations in 12 countries, UK-based Tesco is one of the world’s largest grocers. Its web grocery, Tesco.com, is, in fact, the world’s largest online grocer, doing some £1bn (UKP) in business in 2008.

Challenges
Going online for groceries is not like the usual online shopping experience where the shopper buys a single book or a couple of DVDs. With groceries, the order might number 40, 50, or even 60 items, many of which are essential to daily living.

Focus groups show that Tesco.com’s customers are becoming increasingly conscious of health, cost, and the environment. They are also looking for smarter ways to shop for the products they need on a regular basis.

“Tesco.com pays very close attention to its customers. We know they want a richer yet more economical shopping experience,” says Nick Lansley, Head of Research & Development at Tesco.com.

At Tesco since 1987, Lansley started as an analyst/programmer. In 1995, he was asked to “see what I could do with this thing called the Internet.” He did quite a bit, helping build the first web and downloadable applications, managing grocery web development, and, in 2000, taking the helm of R&D.

Lansley says his mission is “to help tune out irregularities in the changing business and technical models in order to deliver a service that is better for customers, simpler for staff, and cheaper for Tesco.com.” This quest for better, simpler, and cheaper has led to the development of a remarkable, smart new experience for grocery shopping at home.

EMC solution
Customer focus groups told Tesco.com that they wanted a grocery site that was proactive and inspirational and would make shopping easier and faster.

Tesco.com realized that to meet those wishes, it needed a client application residing on the customer’s home computer connected to the web. This solution would offer better performance than a totally web-based experience. Connected applications that synchronize data online provide a much more robust and high-performing experience without degrading the dynamic nature that web interactions provide.

That insight led to EMC Consulting*, a part of EMC Global Services, to create the idea and carry out the design and development of Tesco@Home, a new prototype best-of-breed grocery shopping experience built in Microsoft Windows Presentation Foundation (WPF) technology.

“They’ specialists are skilled in designing excellent user experiences in software. The EMC Consulting User Experience and Design team in Europe raised their game pretty high to help create our ground-breaking Tesco@Home application,” Lansley says.
Improving the online shopping experience

The EMC consultants, working with Tesco.com, determined that although they were incredibly loyal to Tesco, customers found the online grocery shopping experience to be fundamentally flawed—not through its design, but simply by its nature. An online grocery shop means you have to coordinate your own personal diary and those of the other people in your household while finding 50 or 60 items in a store that holds 30,000 products. It is not a trivial task.

Lansley says, “Tesco@Home is all about quick and convenient shopping for groceries. It is designed to work with—not replace—Tesco.com.”

This new touch-screen application built in WPF is designed to make managing a household easier and to make grocery shopping much less of a chore. It starts with the informative and unobtrusive Tesco@Home gadget from which the user launches the application. It keeps the user up to date with to-do lists, Tesco deliveries, and even special offers.

When the application is launched, the main screen displayed on the shopper’s home computer looks like a “corkboard” or the door of the family’s refrigerator. It is the hub of family life with messages, to-do lists, schedules, and even photos accessed from Flickr, Live, and other RSS-compatible photo feeds.

Windows Live/Hotmail powers the calendar, so users with a Live-ID can let the application load and update their calendars. Usefully, the application links up with Tesco.com, so the booked Tesco delivery slot is automatically entered into that calendar.

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Head of Research & Development

“Tesco wants to create choice for users, not tie them into a specific Tesco service,” asserts Lansley. “So, we also intend to build in support for other popular e-mail and calendaring applications from companies like Google and Yahoo.

The home shopper can plan and budget meals by dragging products—and, for that matter, entire meal plans and recipes—into the calendar. Saved into the calendar, this information can be accessed from the web and other applications as well.

With the whisk of a finger, users can drag and drop products into their shopping baskets or “favorites” lists. Entire recipes—adjustable by the number of people being served—can be tossed into the basket. And sure to please weekend chefs, video recipes are available to provide step-by-step instructions and techniques.

“By doing good meal planning around the events in your life, you make your grocery shopping much more efficient, and less wasteful,” Lansley says. “In the UK, the average consumer throws away about 30 percent of the contents of their refrigerator. With the discipline of this planning approach, this quantity is vastly reduced. For those who don’t have this discipline, this application will provide it in an easy way. For those who do, it will help make planning easier and faster.”

For customers who need more detail, products can be displayed in three dimensions and viewed from different angles with a flip of the finger.

The prototype also has the ability to capture a barcode with an integrated webcam and search Tesco.com for the product. This means the shopper can pass an empty milk carton in front of the webcam and it will automatically be added to the shopping basket.
When Nick Lansley, assisted by Paul Dawson, EMC Consulting Director of Experience, presented the Tesco@Home prototype at the 2008 Microsoft Professional Developers Conference in Los Angeles, the webcam bar-code scanning feature earned a spontaneous ovation from the thousands in attendance. (View the video of the entire presentation at www.youtube.com/watch?v=kSjB0XiZ9Wg.)

**Customer happiness**

"Tesco@Home offers a step change in the customer’s experience over the pure website offered today," says Lansley. "The primary goal is to make customers happier. With this tool, we make it easier to browse while offering other functionality. Customers say they will come back more often and stay longer. They are happy to take more time if they can accomplish more."

"The Tesco@Home project required a lot of innovative work for the EMC Consulting team," says EMC’s Dawson. "We used the Total Experience Design approach to uncover potential solutions that flow outside the usual channels. We focused tightly on gaining insight into users and customers.

"Using an experience-planning process, we were able to discover things that will make a tangible difference, not only to the business bottom line, brand perception, and differentiation, but also to customers’ lives. The highest goal for these projects is to create functional brand utility—something that is tightly associated with the overall brand."

Dawson praises Lansley’s efforts by saying, “A lot of initiatives on Tesco.com have been around trying to reduce customer headaches. They’ve done an exceptional job at taking what, at first use, might be a 90-minute process down to about 20 to 25 minutes.”

In turn, Lansley says, “I have asked Paul Dawson to bow at regular intervals to accept thanks for his team’s design and development of the prototype application.”

**Summary**

Tesco.com has opened the door to the future of online grocery shopping. The next step is customer testing involving prototypes placed into 50 to 100 homes. The summer of 2009 is slated for the full-scale launch of Tesco@Home—a shopping experience designed to be better for customers, simpler for staff, and cheaper for Tesco.com.

*EMC Consulting performed this project through acquired UK-based company, Conchango, which combines consulting skills with creative and technical expertise.*