

# Customer Loyalty to Corvette America Fueled by Superior Web Experience with PHP on IBM i



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Customer: Corvette America

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Geography: Headquarters in Pennsylvania serving a worldwide dealer network.

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Business: Corvette America is a leading manufacturer of Corvette interiors and supplier of aftermarket parts and accessories for Corvette dealers and owners who may be buying, selling, restoring or accessorizing a vintage or late model Corvette.

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Challenge: To maintain lean, efficient central operations while providing fast and impeccable service to a 3,000-member dealer network with a worldwide customer base; driving more processes online to provide a superior business experience for both dealers and customers.

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Solution: Zend PHP solutions helped Corvette America's IT group extend the capabilities of its e-commerce application, quickly and cost-effectively, on IBM i.

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**Ray Taylor**  
Assistant IT Director  
Corvette America

Corvette America is a complete resource for Corvette interiors, parts and accessories for every Corvette model from 1953 to the present. The company's manufacturing facility in Pennsylvania boasts the nation's largest aftermarket inventory, high tech equipment and processes, fast order fulfillment and competitive prices. To maintain market leadership and retain loyal customers, Corvette America knew it had to differentiate itself based on superior service. They turned to their IT group, IBM and Zend for a solution.

According to Pete Sultatos, Corvette America's IT Director, "Corvette owners are well educated, value fine engineering and craftsmanship and live in virtually every corner of the world. They have pride of ownership, so our service has to be impeccable. And they are tech savvy, so we need to provide them with a positive and productive Web experience of our services."

"Our goal was to make the search for parts, prices, inventory availability, and the placement and tracking of orders much faster and easier for our dealers," said Sultatos. "We had a retail customer-facing Web site, but lacked a site dedicated to the needs of our growing 3,000-member dealer network. We wanted to provide them with a business advantage to help them sell more effectively to Corvette owners around the world. Our goal was to put product and sales information at their fingertips, allowing them to find and order products and track point-to-point order status online without multiple calls, faxes and delays."

"Our IT staff was well-versed in IBM i and RPG, the foundational technologies already in place to support our core business applications," said Ray Taylor, Assistant IT Director at Corvette America. "We discovered that Zend supported PHP on the IBM i platform, and liked PHP for its ease of use and flexibility for Web application development as well as the volume of proven open source libraries contributed by the PHP community. We purchased a new IBM i 6 server to run our new dealer-facing Web site, and it came pre-installed with the Zend Server Web application server."

To round out its project team, Corvette America engaged Jvalance Consulting to assess Corvette America's Web environment, and to help construct an optimal Web application infrastructure. The fact that PHP can accommodate procedural as well as object-oriented code allowed the IT group



The PHP Company

to leverage their RPG programming skills effectively and be productive in the PHP development environment.

"Our schedule to roll-out was one year," said Taylor, "and within 9 months, we developed, tested and launched a fully operational e-commerce site providing Corvette America's 3,000 dealers with a greatly improved user experience." Using Zend, the IT group automated and streamlined processes that previously involved manual effort, more steps and service delays. The new dealer Web site returns rapid results on part searches, presents product images, allows for viewing, printing, and emailing of past invoices, and provides real-time inventory status, ordering and tracking information. Now dealers can:

- quickly retrieve item information including current inventory status and price
- search thousands of parts by year, keyword, category, and color
- check orders, track shipping and delivery status, and review purchasing history
- create and manage multiple shopping baskets by car, customer, or project

Using Zend Server's built-in database drivers and extensions, Taylor's team integrated the dealer site directly to their custom back-end ERP system and DB2 database to provide up-to-the-minute and accurate data.

"Zend allowed us to take a collaborative approach to development. Our project team included our IT staff, our graphic designer Isaac Baker, Jvalance Consulting, and Zend. We used Zend Studio on Windows and Mac desktops, and stored the production and development projects on the IBM i. Then we launched the application on our IBM i production server. Seeing the UI provided by the Zend Studio IDE was enough to win over our graphic designer, who'd previously been using Dreamweaver to develop/edit HTML & CSS."

"Zend Studio's integrated debugging, combined with Zend Server's monitoring, code tracing and optimization capabilities, helped us save many weeks of development time on this project," said Taylor. "Zend Studio offered a very productive UI, with command and syntax support, Code Assist and online help. Zend Server proactively identified and alerted us to issues such as slow-running scripts and SQL functions in need of optimization, so we were able to cut page load times in half and launch our site with confidence that our code was correct."

"Approximately 70 percent of our business comes through our dealers. Before we launched the dealer site, they had to call in, get connected with the appropriate sales rep, and be prepared for possible delays in getting

information. A sales transaction sometimes required multiple phone calls, email and faxes between headquarters, dealers and customers. They appreciate having visibility into product inventory and pricing information, with the ability to track existing orders, typically UPS and FedEx shipments, in real-time. Now our dealers are more self-reliant in basic transactions, and they are closing business faster with less time and steps."

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"Our ERP system was developed over 20 years, so there's a lot of business knowledge in its DNA. It runs on the IBM i, which provided us with an extremely stable system and direct access to the ERP. But without Zend's tight integration with the IBM i, we probably wouldn't have chosen to develop our dealer site in this operating environment. Because Zend runs natively on the IBM i, there was no need for us to run on Linux or Windows servers and then connect via ODBC or other connections. With Zend we've modernized and extended our ERP system, quickly and cost-effectively. And with Zend Server on board, we are monitoring site performance continuously as we bring new dealers online, and optimizing resource utilization as well."

"One of the chief reasons we implemented the Zend PHP stack on the IBM i is the ease with which we could integrate with and call out existing RPG and SQL functions. For example, our pricing routines are business-critical, and fairly complicated. Rather than being forced to write new code, Zend enabled us to execute our existing code from the new site. This helped us compress the total development time and keep our costs down. The complete integration with our existing database and code library has helped to make PHP on IBM i a very attractive low-cost and low-risk choice for Web development."

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"After seeing Zend Framework at the 2010 Zend PHP Conference, our group is looking forward to using it at Corvette America. It's a rich lightweight framework that gives us the flexibility to implement specific pieces and achieve short-term wins along the way, or take a deep dive and use the entire framework as the infrastructure for our business-critical Web sites."

"We're at the forefront in the Corvette marketplace with a full-service website dedicated to our valued dealer network," said Sultatos. "Using Zend PHP solutions on the IBM i enabled us to put this innovation in place and offer a competitive edge to our dealers. At the same time, we have freed up our sales representatives to provide more proactive and tailored sales support to our dealer network. Our next step is to develop an intranet site, and we're

considering future ERP development in PHP rather than RPG. It's exciting to see new technology and support for the IBM i coming from Zend."