

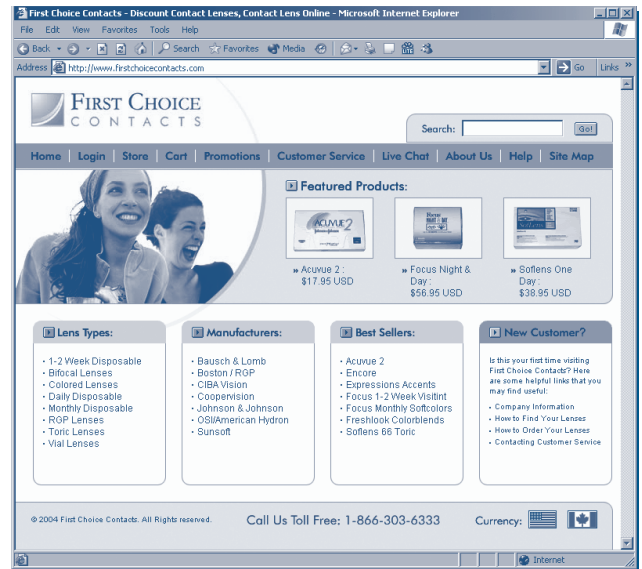


First Choice Contacts is a contact lens distributor who offers the service of ordering lenses online. Their competitive prices, combined with highly personalized service, guarantee complete customer satisfaction.

After deciding to sell online, First Choice Contacts identified several very important needs. The most obvious being an eye-catching website and online store that placed highly in search engine results. But, being a new company, the most immediate requirement was to have a corporate logo designed.

To help us develop an appropriate logo, we needed information from First Choice Contacts such as who their target market is, where the logo will be used, what should be communicated through it and any design preferences they had. After a series of designs, feedback and revisions, a final logo was approved that reflected the high level of service First Choice Contacts' offers its customers.

Nicom and First Choice Contacts then began discussing their website requirements. One of the most important requirements was that it had to be extremely easy to browse different lens types on the website and then, in turn, purchase them. Time was also spent focusing on various functionality issues such as how lenses would be organized, what information would be displayed and the purchase process.



First Choice Contacts had some very specific requirements for their website including a customer login, order history, product feature selection and order tracking. To meet these requirements, Nicom custom developed a backend database/catalog and online store that was tailored specifically to First Choice Contacts.

When consumers purchase items through the online store, the orders are processed automatically online through a payment gateway system. First Choice Contacts automatically receives an encrypted e-mail with the buyer's name, billing/shipping information, products purchased and prescription information, which is then automatically entered into a live backend database/catalog for order history.

Since most of First Choice Contacts' revenue is generated by online sales, high placement in search engines was essential. To achieve this, Nicom compiled a list of the most common words and phrases used when searching for contact lenses online. Then, using various techniques, the list was integrated into the website. After being fully optimized, the website was launched and directly submitted to a number of search engines.

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This proved to be one of Nicom's most challenging and rewarding projects. It allowed us to utilize and merge a number of our key skills and technologies into one powerful web solution, in this case, an online company. First Choice Contacts' website is an excellent example of how

a company can directly benefit from utilizing a company like Nicom. As a further testament to that, it was only a matter of weeks before First Choice Contacts easily surpassed their sales projections.



Protecting Your e-Commerce by David Nicholson

You received a large order from your e-commerce website from a new customer. The credit card was accepted and processed and your efficient distribution system had the order shipped to the customer on the same day. But then something odd happened. Two months later you receive a notice from the credit card company explaining that the card holder did not place this order. Now what?

Unfortunately, if a card holder claims (truthfully or otherwise) that they never made a purchase on the internet, it is the merchant, not the credit card company, who is responsible for the loss. So how do you protect yourself against such a fraudulent situation?

First of all, the good news is that the vast majority of people making purchases on the internet are honest individuals and are actually glad to be able to pay for the convenience of purchasing over the Internet.

There are however, several things you can do to protect yourself from those individuals who are

actually trying to steal from you. Probably the best method is to use a payment processing service to automatically check the validity of credit cards for you. Nicom has partnered with a Halifax based company called TransActive Ecommerce Solutions for such a purpose. TransActive has the technology not only to immediately check the validity of the credit card number, but they can also verify that the address that the product is to be shipped to is the same address used on the credit card.

Perhaps the best means you can use to protect yourself is to use good business discipline and judgment. There are several things you personally can do to protect yourself. Be very wary of orders placed from individuals using a free, untraceable email service such as Hotmail. Never ship product to a Post Office box - always ship to a physical address. And finally, be extra wary of overseas shipments - one of our customers sent an order to Spain, only to have the Visa rejected months later. And definitively, if you are unsure of anything, call the customer directly.



New Employees

We are extremely pleased to introduce you to Nicom's three newest employees, Brent Rockwood, Veronica Gillis, and Jamie Houghton.

Brent attended TUNS and is a Microsoft Certified Professional, he has a number of years of software development experience and also has a real interest and knowledge in the operating system software side of the industry.

Veronica has a Business Administration Certificate, a Bachelor of Arts in Information

Technology and has a number of years of programming experience using the Microsoft development tools.

Jamie has a Bachelor of Commerce and is also a graduate of ITI. Jamie has a number of years of programming experience and was fortunate enough to have been involved in a project that, literally, took him all over the world.

We are excited to have these individuals join our software development team.



System availability is an extremely important requirement for a network server. A common technology used today, called RAID (Redundant Array of Inexpensive Drives), can help maintain computer uptime in a very cost effective manner. In most RAID configurations, the failure of a single disk drive will result in no data loss and the system will continue to run uninterrupted until the failed drive can be replaced, thus preventing unnecessary downtime. RAID is a pretty amazing technology for any computer system - a drive can break and you will not lose any data AND the computer will keep working for you.

There are many RAID configurations that can be implemented through software or hardware, each with their advantages and disadvantages. The Windows server operating systems allow implementation of RAID through the use of software, but there are limitations as to what can be accomplished. Using a hardware controller to implement RAID will provide more flexibility and better performance because processing of disk information is handled by a processor on the controller rather than the computer's CPU. In either case, the cost to implement a RAID solution is relatively inexpensive.

Following are the commonly used methods to implement RAID and their advantages and disadvantages.

RAID 0 - Disk Striping. Data is written across multiple disks in stripes. This gives excellent read and write performance because the drives are accessed in parallel but there is no redundancy so if one drive fails all information stored on the array is lost. For this reason, Raid 0 is not used very often - by itself.

RAID 1 - Disk Mirroring. This configuration requires two drives. All data is written to both drives at the same time so that you have two identical drives. If either drive fails, the system will keep running on the remaining drive with no data loss. When the failed drive is replaced, the mirror is regenerated automatically. There is a small overall performance gain with RAID 0 because data can be read from both drives in parallel.

RAID 5 - Striping with striped parity. This is one of the best overall configurations because it provides good performance in a cost effective configuration. Data is written across multiple drives, along with parity information. If any one drive fails there is no data loss and the system will continue to operate. A minimum of three drives are required for this configuration. There is a good performance gain in a RAID 5 configuration.

RAID 10 - Mirrored Striping. This configuration combines RAID 1 and 0. By configuring two sets of RAID 0 disks so that they are mirrored you get the performance of RAID 0 along with the redundancy of RAID 1. While this configuration provides the best performance, it is the most expensive to implement due to the number of drives required.

The best price/performance solution is RAID 5. It provides data redundancy and improved disk throughput with the lowest cost per megabyte. However if you choose any of the configurations of RAID 1, 5 or 10, the benefits of data redundancy will more than pay for themselves when a hard drive failure occurs.

Murphy's Laws of Computing:

As soon as you find that your personal computer is easy to use, it is necessary to add some peripherals you don't understand how to operate.



What is a Data Warehouse and How Can it Help My Business? by Tracey Gant

In today's competitive markets, companies strive to stay one step ahead of their competitors. What is the secret of these companies that have the ability to stay on top? In most cases it is the ability to bring together information from different sources and put the information into a format that is conducive to making solid, timely business decisions.

A Data Warehouse functions as a Decision Support System (DSS) and an Executive Information System (EIS). This means that it supports informational and analytical needs by providing integrated and transformed company wide historical data. Thus providing management with relevant data to analyze.

Until the advent of Data Warehouses, databases were expected to serve many purposes, including online transaction processing, batch processing, reporting, and analytical processing. In most cases, the primary focus was on satisfying only operational needs and requirements, such as data

entry, storage of historical data, and data retrieval. Information reporting and analysis needs were secondary considerations. Even as the use of PCs, relational databases, 4GL technology and end-user computing continued to grow, it changed the means of information processing. As more and more business users demanded that their needs for information be addressed, Data Warehousing evolved not only to meet those needs but to do so without disrupting their every day business operations.

A data warehouse enables Business Users to access only the data they want to report on, the rest of the data remains on the company's database server. Being able to provide such an organized environment of data makes it possible for each department within the company to quickly and easily create reports designed specifically for their needs. Users no longer have to depend on database administrators or software developers to build their reports for them.



About Nicom Ltd.

Nicom has been helping organizations become more efficient through the use of information technology since 1982. We provide all the services required to effectively define and implement these technologies for organizations.

Services We Offer:

IT Consulting

- IT Assessments
- Requirement Analysis

Software Development

- Custom Database Applications
- Data Warehouse Implementation

Technical Support

- Network Installation
- Service Contracts

Web Design & Development

- Corporate Website Design
- E-Commerce

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Networking Infrastructure Solutions

