

Barnes & Nobles

The Challenge

Barnes & Noble operates 500 bookstores and 508 B. Dalton bookstores in 49 states and the District of Columbia. The company offers more than 175,000 book titles from more than 27,000 publishers. Along with the comprehensive in-store selection, each store can fill customers' special orders from more than one million books in print.

The Barnes & Noble distribution center is operated in Jamesburg, NJ, and is responsible for maintaining the books offered by the Barnes & Noble and B. Dalton bookstores as well as orders placed on the barnesandnoble.com Web site. The distribution center operates from a four-building facility with over one million square feet and more than one million books in storage, ready to stock orders. The center has an Ethernet network, Compaq servers and runs Windows NT Workstation at users' desktop.

To maintain the massive supply of books to fulfill orders placed by patrons at Barnes & Noble and B. Dalton bookstores and on the barnesandnoble.com Web site, the distribution center must continually communicate with publishing houses. "We place orders with many different publishing houses on a daily basis," said Ed Villalobos, Applications Development Manager for Barnes & Noble. To place these orders, purchase orders must be sent to the publishing houses, and fax is the communication method of choice for this task.

"In the past, four or five employees had the sole task of faxing purchase orders to the publishing houses," said Villalobos. "Because this job was done from traditional fax machines, it was a tremendously cumbersome process that took hours and was never quite complete." Not only did the employees have to manually fax each purchase order, they had to follow up the next day and research which fax transmissions weren't completed due to wrong or busy fax numbers, human error, or fax line problems. "When you manually fax about 10,000 pages each month, the time commitment is huge. We spent a lot of money on manpower and continually ran the risk of orders not being complete due to POs not getting to the publishing house."

The Solution

"My first responsibility when I joined Barnes & Noble in 1998 was to eliminate the tremendous amount of time and effort it took to fax out our POs," Villalobos said. "I knew that faxing problems such as tracking unsent faxes and wrong fax numbers would go away with a fax server." Because Villalobos had used RightFax products with prior employers, he began testing how RightFax would

work for Barnes & Noble. Testing was successful, and the company chose RightFax as the fax solution for the distribution center.

Purchase orders faxed from the distribution center are housed on an AS400 system, and Villalobos wanted an NT-based faxing solution that could communicate with his AS400 system. "Getting the two systems to communicate exactly as we needed them to required a lot of research and a couple of weeks to put together, but once it was in place, we were able to do exactly what we wanted."

Using RightFax Enterprise, the distribution center has been able to reduce the number of employees dedicated to faxing from five to one. "Installing RightFax allowed us to place several of our employees formerly bound solely to faxing into other areas of responsibility," Villalobos said. "The cost savings of our RightFax installation were immediately apparent."

Villalobos has also recognized and instituted other uses at Barnes & Noble for RightFax. The human resources department uses a private fax number to receive all incoming résumés, and the customer service department is in the process of implementing a special service. Customer service representatives continually send and receive correspondence to Barnes & Noble stores around the country regarding back orders, out of print books, and other business. "All of this communication is done via fax. Because our customer service representatives have their own fax numbers through DID routing, the process is quick and easy." The distribution center also has plans for a charge-back process in the finance department. If Barnes & Noble has been overcharged, a fax will be automatically sent to the publisher. This will free finance employees from the time currently spent faxing out charge-backs so they can return to their other responsibilities.

"I worked with RightFax products for many years before coming to Barnes & Noble, and I feel that each upgrade has shown great advancements," said Villalobos. "I chose RightFax for many reasons - it permits integration with other application platforms, is easy to use, lets us choose our own hardware and has outstanding administrative capabilities. Our business relies on our ability to communicate, and we rely on RightFax."