



# Emerils.com

Popular site is kicked up a notch with WebObjects



## Summary

Chef Emeril Lagasse has the recipe for success. His website, Emerils.com, recently added an electronic postcard function, mCards, which enables fans and food lovers to share messages accompanied by sumptuous food photography. The mCard application was based on WebObjects 5.1 application server, which allowed the developer to quickly and inexpensively design a sophisticated, scalable postcard application that can evolve as the Emerils.com site evolves.

## Key Benefits of WebObjects

- Object-oriented architecture enables the development of applications in modules for flexibility.
- Application can be seamlessly placed in virtually any website.
- Elegant design lends itself well to “agile” development practices.
- Modules can be reused in multiple projects.
- Standards-compliant design fosters ease of integration for open source and other Java modules.

How do you explain the phenomenal popularity of Chef Emeril Lagasse—a popularity that includes restaurants, cookbooks, television shows, a line of cooking products, and a huge following of fans worldwide? Some would say it's the food—recipes and cooking techniques that fire the imagination as well as the palate. Others might say it's Emeril's personality—his fun, friendly, high-energy approach to cooking. Others would say it's the quality of the products, or the popularity of Southern cuisine, or even a combination of all of the above.

Whatever the reasons, a key element in Emeril's success is his ability to connect with his fans, customers, and viewers. Part of that connection is reflected in his website, Emerils.com, a sophisticated site with information, recipes, and products with easy-to-use navigation and a “personality” that reflects Emeril's own focus and enthusiasm.

## Challenge

The web team at Emerils.com wanted a tool that would enhance an already thriving aspect of the company's success: word-of-mouth recommendations from satisfied customers. They determined that electronic postcards would be a way to allow Emeril's fans to share and receive information, and the postcards would also add an entertaining element to the website.

No available e-postcard solutions, however, met the team's standards. Most didn't have the graphical excellence they wanted, or were too expensive, or just didn't work well. The team required a highly sophisticated, high-quality look and feel, with graphics that would incorporate the product branding from the rest of the website. They wanted a solution that could be seamlessly added to the site without massive recoding, and they wanted scalability. And they wanted it quickly, at a reasonable price.

Webmaster Damion Michaels says, “There were no out-of-the-box solutions that met our needs, so we looked for a custom application that could grow as we grew.” Michaels and his team had extensive plans for the Emerils.com e-postcards, or mCards—cards that could be used in branding Chef Emeril and his restaurants and food creations, cards for advertising upcoming product launches, cards designed for children to go with upcoming features on children's cooking, cards for expanding recipe-sharing ideas, and more. The wealth of ideas pointed to a need for an application that was highly flexible and easy to modify and expand.



## WebObjects Customer Profile

Emerils.com

### Solution

The Emerils.com team contacted illumineX, a Minneapolis-based company that designs custom software applications for businesses using Internet technologies such as Java and builds consumer software products for Mac OS X. illumineX CEO Gary Longsine says, "We chose WebObjects 5.1 for this job because it gives us tremendous scalability in several dimensions at once. Some frameworks can't reach the big projects, the high-load deployments. Others can't reach down because the framework architecture is too cumbersome to use on a small project." He adds, "WebObjects has an elegant class hierarchy that can benefit projects of all sizes. Its architecture lets us employ load balancing as needed, without redesigning the application."

He explains that WebObjects also has a robust implementation that stands up to heavy loads, and a standards-compliant foundation in an affordable runtime that allows easy integration into almost any existing website. "Aside from WebObjects, it's pretty tough to find all that in one framework, and that is only part of the benefit you get."

The speed and ease of developing in WebObjects allowed illumineX to include a working prototype of the application when they sent their proposal for the job to Emerils.com. From there, weekly—sometimes daily—development iterations could be made and deployed to the customer's project website, giving both customer and developer a fast look at solid new features. Longsine says, "WebObjects lends itself very well to modern, 'agile' development practices. The days when customers are forced to sign a ten-pound requirements document, then wait silently for six months before they see any functioning software, are long gone—they just don't know they have a choice yet."

He explains, "The idea that it's possible to document every single requirement of a software project before writing any code is probably flawed to start with. Regardless, customer ideas and needs are constantly evolving—they see an idea come to fruition and that idea leads to more ideas. WebObjects allows us to keep the development process interactive and flexible. We can stand up a project quickly, and use live software to help customers visualize and express their requirements. Customers have always wanted involvement and input, and they need the ability to change their minds as their business environment changes. With WebObjects, we can give them a flexible application architecture and the freedom to add new requirements throughout the lifecycle of the application."

"Developing in WebObjects is such an improvement over other tools," says Longsine. "It has a tremendously elegant architecture at every level." But he adds that the ease of development wasn't the only benefit of this application.

"WebObjects makes good use of Java and related standards such as XML, so it's a piece of cake to integrate off-the-shelf modules from third parties or open source projects wherever that makes sense," Longsine explains. "The scalability of WebObjects allows us the freedom to pursue unique business opportunities that wouldn't make sense with other frameworks." As an example, the staff at Emerils.com encouraged illumineX to consider turning the mCards code base into a commercial product. mCards is now available to other customers as an illumineX product called iX Cards, which can be customized by illumineX and added to virtually any website, regardless of the platform, databases, or servers.

The mCards application was developed and is deployed on Mac OS X Server running a FrontBase database. Longsine says, "Our development team uses the PowerBook G4 for their development workstations, which they use both at the office and at home on AirPort wireless networks."



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—Damion Michaels, Webmaster, Emerils.com

Michaels says, "We use all Mac systems for development of the content for the site and development of the recipe database. We have been using Mac OS X in a full production environment since version 10.1 was released. Our productivity has greatly increased because now the system doesn't crash when there's an application problem." Plans are under way to photograph the restaurants and convert the photos to QuickTime VR tours—invaluable for party and special event planning.

He continues, "Although we have dozens of freelance food writers and dozens of brilliant chefs developing content, our entire web development department's production staff consists of three people: a production assistant, a Flash designer, and me. That's it. We consistently shock other high-profile entities with that one fact. That is why we need reliable hardware, an incredible operating system, and awesome web development software. That is why Apple saves the day."

### Benefits

According to Michaels, Emeril's mCards have been an unqualified success. With no promotion or fanfare, thousands of customers have used and sent the cards, within just two weeks of the cards going online. The cards feature sumptuous food photography, photos of Emeril, and photos of Emeril's restaurants. And they include a link to the Emerils.com site, so recipients can look at recipes or products or send their own mCards. The tool enables customers to spread the word about Emerils.com—advertising that the team feels is more successful than traditional marketing. "It is much more fun and effective to receive information from friends rather than from a company," Michaels says. "We think this application will change the way e-greetings are done."

## For More Information

For more information about the WebObjects application server, please visit [www.apple.com/webobjects](http://www.apple.com/webobjects).

For more information about Emeril Lagasse, visit [www.emerils.com](http://www.emerils.com).

For more information about illumineX or the iXCards application, visit [www.illumineX.com](http://www.illumineX.com).



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