

## **SUN Microsystems, SkyMall Case Study**

### **RETAIL**

**SkyMall, Inc.**  
Phoenix, Arizona

**Application**  
In-flight retail catalog service

**Summary**  
SkyMall, Inc. has raised the art of catalog shopping to a higher level – literally. The Phoenix-based company produces a merchandise catalog featuring a unique in-flight service that enables passengers to shop at 30,000 feet just by reaching for the catalog in the seat back in front of them. With the help of an on-board phone, passengers place orders in the air for pick-up on arrival. SkyMall performs this consumer magic with help from a client-server network of SPARCstation™ and SPARCserver™ computers from Sun Microsystems Computer Corporation (SMCC) and a Sybase RDBMS.

“We have greatly expanded our business and include services that other catalogs don’t – and perhaps can’t – offer. For example, we’ll track special event tickets in the city of destination and deliver them to the gate,” says Dough Ulrich, senior systems engineer for SkyMall. “To deliver the catalog goods to the gate by the time the passenger arrives requires speed and easy access to data. The Sun/Sybase solution has really been our ticket to success.”

The Sun network expedites the entire SkyMall process. When a passenger phones in an order, it goes into the Sybase RDBMS residing on a SPARCserver 470. Data, including the passenger’s name, the item number, billing information, and the airport of destination, is entered into dumb terminals. Orders are distributed over the network to SPARCstation IPCs that function as servers for computer terminals located in the warehouse. Some warehouse personnel use the terminals to access order-data, while other people working in the warehouse locate the desired items quickly and ship them to the airport in time for the customer’s arrival.

An online credit-checking capability further speeds delivery of gift items.

“We want to make the SkyMall catalog and serve options an enticing option when flying,” says Ulrich. “The SPARCserver network will help achieve that goal.”

**Hardware/Software**  
A SPARCserver 470 houses the Sybase RDBMS, and 12 SPARCstation IPCs function as terminal servers. Approximately 190 dumb terminals used by warehouse personnel complete the Ethernet network. Files are shared via PC-NFS and NFS. Software includes the Sybase RDBMS, Sybase APT Workbench for software development, and an in-house package developed with APT Workbench that handles order entry, receiving, shipping, and purchasing.