Irresistible Offers.com Powered by Zend

Customer:	Offers.com, a subsidiary of Vertive, Inc.
Geography:	Headquarters in Austin, Texas
Challenge:	Deliver thousands of online offers from leading brands, requiring that products be categorized, verified, rated and updated daily. Enable customers to personalize their shopping to watch specific offers, categories and stores, and receive updates when offers are added or changed. Create a true Web 2.0 environment that requires reliable high-performance technology and solid IT best practices to support this level of customization, collaboration and interactivity.
Solution:	Offers.com chose Zend Framework, the Zend Studio IDE and the Zend Server Web Application Server for a complete, tested PHP stack to support the full application life cycle for its e-commerce Web assets.
	Zend was chosen for its ability to streamline application development and management, reduce time to market and meet business objectives for availability and performance.

Offers.com
Save Time • Save Money • The Best Offers

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**Josh Butts
Director of Web Development
Offers.com**

"The New Frugality" is with us as the global economy strives to rebuild, but just how frugal are we? A recent study showed that while people are avoiding brick and mortar stores in favor of online shopping convenience, they are still leaving money on the table by not taking advantage of offers, coupons and other deals readily available online. Offers.com is bucking this trend by helping consumers to save time and money while finding the best offers for online stores with travel, household goods, clothing, software and more. One of the secrets behind the company's success is its e-commerce technology powered by Zend.

Every day, Offers.com delivers more than 15,000 offers, promotions, coupons, free trials and clearance items from leading online stores representing more than 3,000 recognized brands such as Home Depot, American Express, Travelocity, Target and Banana Republic. Products are categorized, verified, rated and updated daily on the Offers.com Website. Customers can personalize their shopping with the My Offers Locker™, to watch specific offers, categories and stores, and receive updates when offers are added or changed. It's a true Web 2.0 environment that requires reliable high-performance technology and solid IT best practices to support this level of customization, collaboration and interactivity.

Raising the Bar with the Right Technology

The Web application environment for the company's client-facing operations and internal Content Management System (CMS) was developed from the ground up in PHP on Zend Framework. According to Josh Butts, Director of Web Development at Offers.com, "We knew this was going to be a large, high-traffic site and we didn't want the burden of trying to maintain anything home-grown at this scale."

"Our IT group had experience deploying PHP applications on our previous sites and was preparing for Offers.com to be a major Internet property. We needed to ramp up new developers quickly, and ease of maintenance was a big priority. We then began using the Zend Studio Integrated Development Environment (IDE) for PHP, and we've stayed with it ever since. Zend Studio gives us the cross-platform support for Linux and Windows that allows us to maximize our existing resources and work from anywhere."

Offers.com is an optimized multi-server production environment running Linux, MySQL and Apache. The IT group maintains several developer environments, and each developer has a virtual machine. At any given time, this group manages many test instances of the site.

"We'd been considering options to improve deployment and maintenance of our site when we heard about the Zend Server Web Application Server. The Code Tracing alone made it an attractive buy, and with optimization and job queuing in the same package, it was an easy choice. When we adopted Zend Server, the developers came in on a Sunday night, shirtsleeves rolled up, prepared for an all-nighter in the data center to get things up and running. Zend Server literally was a drop-in replacement for the stack that we had. We just copied the files over and everything worked. That was a welcome surprise."

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Within its first year of using Zend Server, Offers.com evolved into a heavily-trafficked site with over 15,000 pages. With traffic increasing over 450% year over year, the site is growing at a brisk pace, and the IT group is well-equipped to manage the impact of this growth.

'Future Proof' without the Crystal Ball

"We didn't want to spend a fortune on hardware and wanted to continue leveraging LAMP stack open-source components, but we wouldn't sacrifice one iota of performance either, and the application had to be easy to maintain. We had to plan ahead without quantifying what kind of horsepower the site would need in the future."

"Our developers don't need to worry about customizing the Offers.com Web infrastructure. Instead, they can focus on the business logic. Zend Framework provides the PHP infrastructure and Zend Server keeps us current with PHP. This flexibility has allowed us the time to build a fully-customized CMS so our editorial team can make changes to offers and promotions on the fly. This ensures that we always have the right offers available at the right time."

"When we want to extend the application with a new feature, our developers can work individually; their code is integrated in-house and loaded onto the clone site, and server metrics are checked before we go live. Zend Server is easily configured to monitor daily performance from a single Web console across the site and to send instant email notifications when issues are detected. We can check monitor and net logs at will, and determine whether issues need immediate attention or can be dealt with at a later time."

"Zend Server was simple to deploy and it has been a real productivity boost in our service to external partners. Zend Server improves Apache's scalability by taking over static content downloads and passing them to a dedicated process that is optimized for parallel downloads. Now we can serve large XML files directly from Zend Server more quickly, without tying up server resources."

ROI Gets a Thumbs Up

"For us, average response time of pages across the site is a key metric. If something deviates from the norm, we can detect it with Zend Server and optimize our code. It's easy now to catch the outliers we would have missed before we had Zend Server. The ability to track the amount of memory required for pages to render live and to flag lower performing pages in real-time has helped us reduce our memory footprint by about 90%. We've cut average page response times by 50% or more across the entire site, and we can probably cut another 50%. The site runs significantly faster on Zend Server than on our custom-compiled infrastructure."

"Knowing that our customers will experience snappy responses at every point during the shopping process is a huge win for Offers.com. Our developers know this experience can only be achieved with high quality code. Zend Server paid for itself by virtue of the issues we found and fixed in the first week alone – a benefit that is magnified exponentially as our e-commerce application grows."

"With the integrated application monitoring and code tracing, we can resolve issues faster and focus on coding rather than spending time trying to recreate problems in the production environment. We don't have to build or outsource Job Queue functionality now; having it as background task in the server infrastructure means we will be able to write application code to talk to it. We all know how to write to Zend Framework and Zend Server, so we're more productive, and our development costs have come down as a result."

"Today, we are scaling up, adding more servers, and our developers are using Zend Studio. We plan to contribute components back to the Zend Framework open source project that we've extended on the Framework. With each production server we add, Zend Server will be on board."

"We've found that PHP has power and versatility for Web application development and a very prolific open-source community. We are selective with new hires; real programmers with computer science backgrounds. We like the fact that while PHP is powerful, we can ramp up new hires quickly even if they're not PHP experts."

"It has been great working with Zend. They have provided continuity and are very attentive in supporting us as a customer. We have the confidence of knowing that if an issue arises, they will work proactively to resolve it. At our parent company, Vertive, Inc., PHP is our core technology, and we're with it for the long haul."

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