



Build-A-Bear Partners with TierPoint to Modernize Online Shopping Experience

Build-A-Bear Workshop

Build-A-Bear Workshop, Inc. is a multi-generational global brand focused on its mission to “add a little more heart to life” appealing to a wide array of consumer groups who enjoy the personal expression in making their own “furry friends” to celebrate and commemorate life moments. Founded in 1997, Build-A-Bear pioneered the idea of having its guests select, create and customize their own special stuffed animal and create a lasting and emotional brand connection.

When consumers enter a Build-A-Bear Workshop retail location, they first select a furry friend from a wide selection—such as teddy bears, bunnies, unicorns, dragons, cats, or licensed characters from well-known and best-in-class entertainment properties. The guests then take their chosen furry friend and with the assistance of a Bear Builder associate, add stuffing and a heart, followed by selecting outfits, accessories, and special scents or sounds, and giving the friend a name while creating a birth certificate.

Build-A-Bear’s web site had also provided customers with a similar process for selecting and buying furry friends online. But until now, this was done in a typical, two-dimensional ecommerce environment, with a product catalogue and shopping cart approach. Build-A-Bear decided to once again redefine experiential retail, this time in the digital space.

Challenge

In early 2020, governmental mandates due to COVID-19 temporarily closed Build-A-Bear Workshop stores for several months. However, online sales of furry friends remained strong, with increased demand driving triple-digit growth over the prior year. Even before the onset of the pandemic, Build-A-Bear had begun developing a more interactive, three-dimensional ecommerce site to enhance user engagement. The goal was to create a more entertaining, virtual buying experience that would provide a fresh take on Build-A-Bear’s iconic bear-making experience.

“Our guests’ in-store experience is highly interactive and emotional as they get to create a custom furry friend and actively engage in our signature heart ceremony,” said Mike Early, Senior Vice President and Chief Information Officer at Build-A-Bear. “Our goal with this project was to break the mold by adding more fun and engagement to online shopping as we continue to move our digital transformation forward.”

Solution: The 3D Workshop

To create and support Build-A-Bear's vision of a virtual online store, they needed access to advanced graphics technology, expertise in 3D design, and a customized cloud environment. Build-A-Bear sought help from three leading technology companies: Buzz3D, Nutanix, and TierPoint. The solution, called Bear Builder 3D Workshop, was done in three phases:

Design of the Virtual Store: First, Build-A-Bear brought in Buzz 3D, a UK maker of 3D retail and ecommerce software that counted well-known brands like Johnson & Johnson, Kraft, Unilever, and Walmart as clients. The Buzz 3D team helped create the virtual store layout and customize it to Build-A-Bear's needs.

The new Bear Builder 3D Workshop features a simulated 3D bear stuffing experience, similar to the one in stores, where consumers click and drag stuffing into the furry friend; a wardrobe area where different outfits can be selected; and a sound station where the furry friend can be customized with recorded sounds and songs.

Selection of a Robust Cloud Platform: Build-A-Bear and Buzz3D chose the Nutanix Cloud Platform to support the virtual store and the Nutanix Frame Desktop as a Service application for streaming high performance and graphics-intensive applications such as online games to the user's web browser.

The Frame application runs with an embedded app in the buildabear.com site, which launches the 3D digital experience on any PC or device with a browser. It is not necessary to have a powerful device or high-bandwidth connection to use it.

Reliable Infrastructure and Technical Support: Both the Buzz3D store and the Nutanix platform run on a private cloud that has been customized by TierPoint to support high-performance requirements. TierPoint's long-standing relationship with Nutanix and Build-A-Bear positioned the company as the best provider to oversee the development and deployment of the private cloud supporting the new Bear Builder 3D Workshop.

TierPoint deployed a solution that:

- provided consulting services to find the best infrastructure for the client's needs
- offered technical support to host the cloud solution using data center and cloud expertise
- built a custom solution that matched Build-A-Bear's needs that enabled the unique experience they wanted to create
- handled much of the day-to-day management and maintenance tasks, relieving Build-A-Bear's IT staff of the burden.

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Mike Early

Senior Vice President and Chief Information Officer, Build-A-Bear

Nutanix Frame on TierPoint's Private Cloud included a unique host configuration that was not readily available elsewhere. Specifically, the host configuration needed to be customized to support a large number of concurrent users. Each host was configured with multiple NVIDIA GPUs, as well as a higher frequency pair of processors. These hosts powered the Nutanix Cloud Platform and Nutanix Desktop as a Service solution, Frame.

The solution is also protected by TierPoint's next-generation CleanIP™ network security solution, which provides threat protection and visibility via rapid intelligent response, security expertise, and specialized hardware.

Results

The new Bear Builder 3D Workshop is expected to help the company attract, engage, and grow their digital consumer base – a goal they've been progressing over the past few years.

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About TierPoint

Meeting clients where they are on their journey to IT transformation, TierPoint (tierpoint.com) is a leading provider of secure, connected data center and cloud solutions at the edge of the internet. The company has one of the largest customer bases in the industry, with thousands of clients ranging from the public to private sectors, from small businesses to Fortune 500 enterprises. TierPoint also has one of the largest and most geographically diversified footprints in the nation, with over 40 world-class data centers in 20 U.S. markets and 8 multi-tenant cloud pods, connected by a coast-to-coast network. Led by a proven management team, TierPoint's highly experienced IT professionals offer a comprehensive solution portfolio of private, multitenant, managed hyperscale, and hybrid cloud, plus colocation, disaster recovery, security, and other managed IT services.