

E-COMMERCE

Playback Pinpoints Problem Pages

Application helps Tower Records monitor online transactions

BY SHAWN NELSON

In an ongoing effort to improve the online shopping experience and boost sales, Tower Records is studying customer behavior — particularly the way shoppers search and make purchases, and how and why they leave the website.

Web-based technology gives Tower Records the ability to passively watch users of its website. That technology captures every visitor session, which

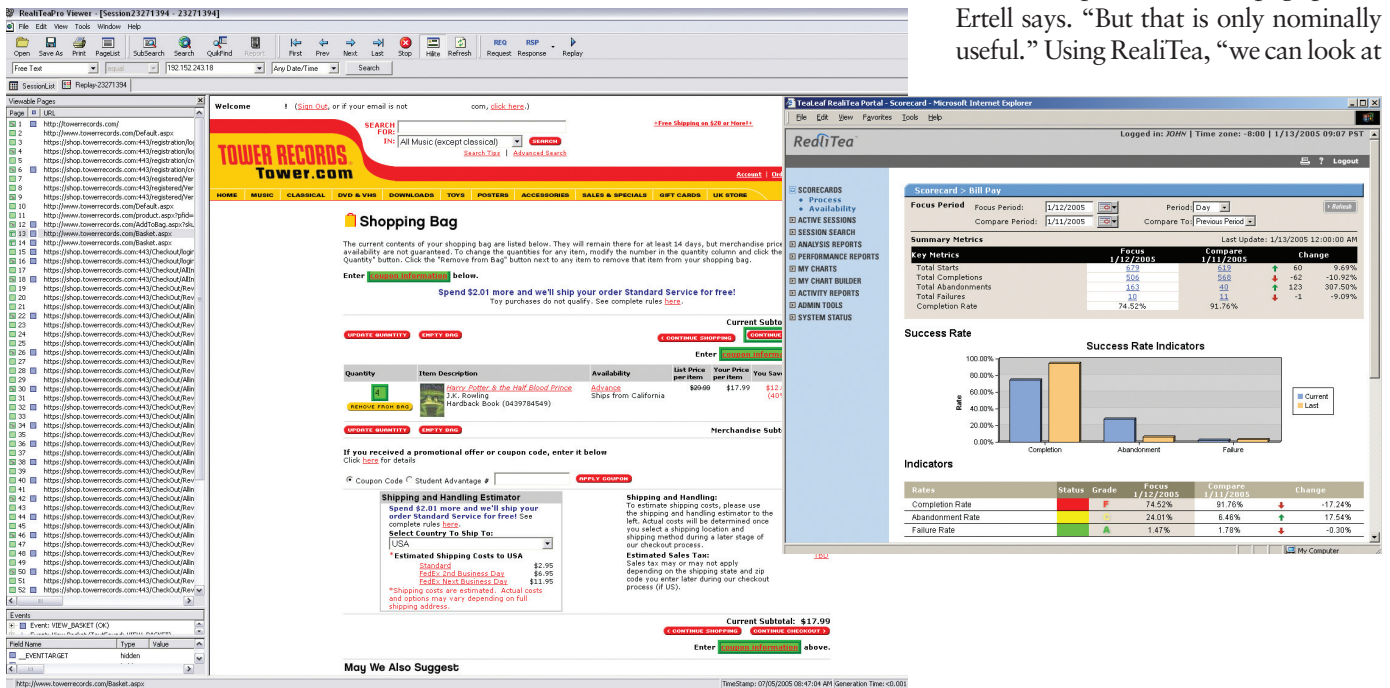
Tower can view in real time while helping a customer or when investigating potential online credit card fraud.

“We’re trying to understand merchant

dising on the site,” says Kevin Ertell, senior vice president of online operations for Tower Records, and “there is nothing like seeing the pages customers saw.” To accomplish this task, Tower is using RealiTea, a web application management solution from San Francisco-based TeaLeaf Technology.

Before RealiTea, Tower could not tell where problems were occurring, and therefore could not take prompt corrective action. This slowed efforts to improve customer service. “All the information we get from our other analytics packages, for the most part, is on an aggregated level,” Ertell says. The TeaLeaf application utilizes session replay, which provides information about all areas of users’ online sessions.

“When you’re looking at aggregated data, you might see a hundred sessions that took a particular three-page path,” Ertell says. “But that is only nominally useful.” Using RealiTea, “we can look at



The screenshot displays two browser windows. The left window shows the Tower Records website's shopping bag page. The right window shows the RealiTea analytics dashboard.

Tower Records Shopping Bag:

- Item: *Philly Philly & the Staff Blood Prince* (Advance)
- Quantity: 1
- Unit Price: \$20.99
- Your Price: \$17.99
- Shipping: \$1.00
- Subtotal: \$18.99

RealiTea Analytics Dashboard:

Key Metrics	Focus 1/12/2005	Compare 1/11/2005	Change
Total Starts	522	522	0
Total Completions	306	368	-62
Total Abandons	163	43	+123
Total Failures	10	11	-1
Completion Rate	74.52%	91.76%	-17.24%

Success Rate Indicators:

Indicator	Status	Grade	Focus 1/12/2005	Compare 1/11/2005	Change
Completion Rate	Red	F	74.52%	91.76%	-17.24%
Abandonment Rate	Yellow	D	24.01%	6.48%	+17.54%
Failure Rate	Green	A	1.47%	1.78%	-0.30%

individual sessions to see where customers came from, where they went and what they clicked. It's pretty useful."

The passive technology sits on the back end of a retailer's website, unobtrusively gathering online session data.

Tower is watching

Tower's website averages 80,000 visitors and 5,000 orders each day. Using RealiTea, "we can see what people do, and by seeing it we're able to see where the problems are, correct them and improve the shopping experience," Ertell says.

If a shopper gets hung up on the checkout page, he can call the help line: A customer service representative will pull up the customer's session and troubleshoot the problem in real time. Such action generally secures a sale for Tower and helps prevent similar problems going forward.

Before RealiTea, performance of the Tower Records website was, according to the company's IT staff, unacceptable, though it could not find the cause. IT staffers have since identified the causes of server timeout errors and long page

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generation times and were able to make the necessary changes.

"We've dramatically accelerated Tower Records' ability to convert," says Geoff Galat, vice president of marketing and product strategy for TeaLeaf Technology. For example, Towers' international website was losing money because a "legacy bug" prevented volume purchases, causing users to abandon the site.

Although RealiTea helps increase Tower Records' conversions, the retailer's biggest return on investment is in customer satisfaction. "We haven't measured specific ROI to any gains that we've tied directly to RealiTea," Ertell says, "but we do pay a lot of attention to customer service level and how that relates to sales increases."

Ideally, Tower would like to offer the same level of customer service to its online customers that it provides to its bricks-and-mortar shoppers. And those

efforts are paying off.

Customer satisfaction tool

The American Customer Satisfaction Index "gives us a score on par with Amazon and Barnes & Noble," Ertell says. "It took time, but it's a pretty quick turnaround for the most part," and TeaLeaf is "one of the best tools we have for increasing customer satisfaction. Anything we do to increase our customer satisfaction score increases sales."

Understanding customer behavior also helps the retailer detect online credit card fraud.

Tower can tell, for example, if a user is trying to make a purchase through multiple attempts in a single session. If a user tries to place an order using one credit card number after another in an attempt to hit a valid card, the software interprets this behavior as a possible fraud purchase. An alert is sent to Tower Records' IT team, which can pull up the session in real time and see what the user is experiencing.

If the customer has a legitimate problem, the IT staffer can help. If the user is attempting to make a purchase using stolen credit cards, IT can pull the user's IP address and block him from the site.

STORES

"It's inevitable that glitches will crop up along the path to checkout. TeaLeaf RealiTea makes sure our customers aren't the only ones finding these glitches, and helps us take care of them before they impact purchases."

— Kevin Ertell, vice president of operations, Tower Records