

# SmarterKids.com

## Client Overview

SmarterKids.com, based in Needham, Massachusetts, is a leading online educational store and resource for parents of children age 15 and under. The site provides parents with the information, advice, and tools to find the best educational products and services. Thousands of books, software packages, games, videos, hands-on activities, instructional products, and services are available. SmarterKids.com uses a sophisticated, patent-pending process that analyzes products for parents so that they can make informed buying decisions. In addition, the company has the ability to use a child's test results and goals to emphasize the best learning approach and products for that individual child.

## The Challenge

During the 1999 holiday season, SmarterKids.com fulfilled over 99.8 percent of its orders on time, but knew it could do better. The company wanted to ensure a smoother, more efficient peak period in 2000 with an even higher order fulfillment rate. Like many e-tail sites, it had expended enormous energy in its front-end functionality, developing a user-friendly, secure website that offers its target audience quality products. Back-end operations—distribution, material handling, and systems—did not provide the seamless supply chain activity or the exemplary customer service desired.

The greatest challenge for Tompkins Associates was the short timeframe. Within five months of contacting Tompkins, SmarterKids.com needed a completely new fulfillment solution in operation. SmarterKids.com was using a 3PL with an unsuitable distribution center (DC), picking system, and no Warehouse Management System (WMS), as well as intensive labor requirements.

## The Solution

Tompkins employed its proprietary e-fill<sup>SM</sup> strategy to address problems in technology infrastructure, building layout, material flow, storage needs, and order fulfillment. e-fill<sup>SM</sup> allowed a fast-track implementation and start-up that other solutions did not provide. A new DC that could handle smaller and more frequent orders was quickly designed and built, and the latest equipment and technology were integrated.

Systems including Logility's WarehousePro, Enterprise Application Integration (EAI) suite, Clippership manifesting system, and Symbols's radio frequency data capture were integrated to support the new distribution methods. Additionally, significant integration with automated material handling equipment was accomplished to allow

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high volume shipping with minimal staff. All systems were Windows OS and a combination of DB2 and SQL Server databases.

The customized DC boasted a modular, scalable, and flexible design with equipment such as interlink racks that will fulfill thousands of orders per day during the regular season and more than 10,000 orders per day during the holiday season. To cut labor requirements, Tompkins designed a batch, pick-to-cart process that allows pickers to be added in order to handle higher volumes without over-automating the process.

## **The Results**

Within four months of the project start date, SmarterKids.com had a fully operational facility to help secure its e-tail niche. Labor staffing has been reduced by over 50 percent. Order fulfillment capacity has nearly tripled, and SmarterKids.com is processing 400 more orders per day than it did with its 3PL provider, and with less staffing. Moving into the next phase of this project, SmarterKids.com continues to maintain a competitive advantage in its market, where speed and customer service are the keys to success.