

## A widget comes up big

Grocery and general merchandise products retail chain Meijer Inc. has been selling products online for only about one year, but Meijer.com is breaking new ground with widget technology.

The Meijer MealBox widget was designed to help grocery shoppers plan meals by creating shopping lists that automatically populate with electronic coupons. Web shoppers then print the lists and coupons before heading to one of Meijer's 185 stores in Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Ohio and Kentucky.

The widget—a tiny application that showcases information and performs narrowly focused tasks—can be copied from Meijer.com for placement on a personalized iGoogle page, a consumer's page on a social network site, or a shopper's own blog or web page. "The MealBox gives consumers a convenient place to plan meals for the week and make a shopping list, and ways to save money with coupons and sale prices," says Dawn Bronkema, director of e-commerce marketing.

In addition to saving shoppers money on their grocery bills, the technology has cut Meijer's marketing costs. "We publish a lot of information in circulars," Bronkema says. "This is a new way to put that out to consumers, and we're all looking for ways to cut costs. Printing circulars is expensive."

The MealBox is a novel tool that gives Meijer a leg up on its competition, says Judy Foster, executive creative director at Grand River Interactive, an e-commerce design and software development company. "The MealBox tool is a global feature," she says. "With the holidays coming, it's a great way to help people set up shopping lists." As a unique feature, Foster recommends placing the MealBox higher on the Meijer.com home page.

Consumers seem to like the widget. Within the first few days of the MealBox feature going live in May, consumers downloaded about 1,500 widgets, and about 70,000 coupons were printed off the widgets and redeemed in Meijer stores in the first few weeks, Bronkema says. And in the first week of October there were about 41,000 visits to the MealBox by subscribers. By then, 6,100 widgets had been installed.