

THRUPOINT **HotOffice**™

Web-based Intranets Empower & Link Businesses

From Internet to intranets, extranets to WANs and LANs, it's a wired, wired world. Digital communications are the lifeline of business. Communications are seamless. Transactions are immediate.

Still, while private intranets have been the tool that has linked large businesses operations from a local to global scale, such systems have been beyond the reach of smaller companies. This has left some companies searching for affordable tools to help them become more productive and efficient.

Now along comes instant Web officing, or Web-based intranets. These private, fee-based subscriber services and networks, like the HotOffice® Web-Based Intranet Service, have become the connective tissue among companies, their vendors and their customers. Like the arrival of powerful, inexpensive personal computers and the Internet itself, such services will help level the playing field between companies large and small. Free services round out the offerings and give users a choice between professional-level tools and ad-supported variations.

COST NO LONGER A FACTOR

For small companies unable to afford expensive intranet hardware, software and IT personnel costs, the concept of Web-based intranets has turned a once disparate and disconnected business world into a real solution of connectivity and interactivity. It has even made more practical the concept of telecommuting, or moving the workforce to their homes or other workplaces in order to improve productivity and bottom-line employer costs.

With low cost, high functionality, reliability and ease of use that's as simple as any Web site, arguments for Web-based intranets are compelling. Managers with small or large companies looking to empower their workforce will discover greater productivity with decreased reliance upon IT personnel.

Still, Web-based networking is not a threat to corporate IT. To the contrary, it empowers the client community with simple, easy to use applications, and frees up IT personnel to handle more pressing and technically challenging tasks.

Many Web-based tools rival those once available only to well-financed corporations. In addition to core features traditionally available only through expensive networks, service providers like HotOffice Technologies, Inc. deliver an array of products and services otherwise found at a host of separate Web sites. For example, HotOffice offers core features such as document management, file sharing, electronic mail, online calendar, private chat and bulletin board communications. Through a fully integrated business center, third-party content providers deliver such services as discounted printing, credit reports, tradename searches, and online business advice and audio clips.

SIMPLE APPLICATIONS ALL IN ONE PLACE

Simplicity is key to the applications. For example, HotOffice provides easy document publishing, encrypted file transport using a simple wizard, and private conference rooms and group scheduling functions.

This aggregation of business services is a very powerful tool for the small business. Even for large companies with LANs or WANs, these services can help provide more information content and data to in-house and remote (teleworking) workforces.

In many instances, Web-based intranets out-perform traditional intranets. Users can contact customers, clients or even remote workers or executives beyond the corporate offices, providing solutions for immediate, worldwide connectivity.



All of these services are delivered without the upfront costs associated with servers, installation, maintenance and training. Web-based services are hosted off-site, decreasing personnel costs associated with hiring, training and retaining IT staff.

Minimum system requirements typically are 486 PC with 16 megabytes of RAM and Windows 95 or 98 operating software, an Internet connection, and a Web browser, such as Microsoft® Internet Explorer 4.0 or higher or Netscape Navigator® 4.5 or higher. Most services perform well with traditional dial-up accounts ranging from 28kps to 56kps. Even without access to the latest connectivity technology such as cable modems, ADSL and ISDN lines, small businesses will find these services to be reliable, powerful tools using standard dial-up connections.

What does all this mean? Simplicity is an embedded benefit in many of these applications. Most importantly, neither the rank-and-file client nor the existing IT workforce must perform any technical setup, maintenance or even upgrades. Service providers host applications and provide immediate access to programs and applications. When new versions and upgrades are issued, the entire user community has access to the feature. With certain product offerings, access is as simple as a button embedded on the desktop enabling the full functionality of a powerful office, all within one, low monthly subscription fee.

Web-based intranet subscriptions can cost far less than traditional networking solutions. Some are offered free, in exchange for viewing ads. Others range in price from \$10 to \$15 per user (per month), yielding inexpensive access to a powerful virtual intranet. Typically, these arrangements are made on a month-to-month basis, providing corporate executives or the client community the flexibility to grow or shrink their subscriber base real-time depending on current demand. Decisions can be made on the fly, without lengthy discussions.

For a group of teleworkers or remote sales team members in need of a network to facilitate communications for either an immediate project or long-term correspondence, the price point is low enough that the expense likely wouldn't require approval by management. And for organizations needing to organize projects or departments — while ensuring appropriate access rights — Web-based solutions provide secure, functional solutions.

WEB OFFICING OPENS TELECOMMUTING

Even professional organizations and associations that have membership over a wide geographic area stand to benefit. Designed to accommodate from one to hundreds of users, Web-based intranets are an immediate and cost-effective community link among once disjointed and disconnected populations.

The benefits of Web-based intranets extend beyond the brick-and-mortar walls of the corporate workplace, into the virtual world of computing. Companies that turn to the Internet as the foundation for their traditional, office-based connection toolkit then can utilize telecommuting, remote officing and other forms of virtual work-styles to increase productivity and decrease the hard and recurring costs associated with real estate space, communications and telephony service. They can even cut those costs devoted to an anchored and permanent staff.

The emergence of Web-based networking solutions opens up a plethora of benefits to any company. Web-based intranets bring to life the vision of the totally interconnected world, linking customer with company with supplier. Efficiencies are increased and streamlined. Information delivery times are shortened. Service is improved.

And the ubiquity of Internet access, the low cost of ownership and the ease of use will become primary factors that will drive this technology to any business needing networking.

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