

Internet solutions that automate business processes

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The evolution of the Internet has shown us that static Web sites are really just brochure-ware. Though many still feel it is important to showcase your products and services via an electronic brochure, others are embarking on e-process solutions that include Content Management Systems (CMS) and company portals (formally known as Intranets).

To understand how companies can benefit from a CMS, you first must understand what it is and how you might benefit from it. Simply defined, a CMS is a means by which you can manage your company's information through a Web interface.

We know that in order to make critical business decisions, either corporately, departmentally or individually, we need to have access to information. In the past, you may have hired programmers to provide you with information in the form of data. And for a time, business owners saw a benefit in having that data because it could be analyzed, sorted and calculated.

But just like everything else, information management has evolved and it is clear that programming for data storage and/or presentation, is not enough. The reality is that the computer only deals with syntax. It does not deal with the meaning and the value of the information.

The critical success factor in managing information for business today is to have a development team that understands the difference between information and data. That difference is "process". A CMS solution provider must understand the real business objectives and take a more process-oriented approach to the development cycle.

Unlike a static Web site that is developed and can sit untouched for months or even years, a CMS becomes an integral part of your everyday business activities.

Here are a few of the many ways a CMS would benefit a company.

- 1) to support process improvement
- 2) to document current processes which can then be analyzed (track and measure)
- 3) reduce training time
- 4) to improve response time
- 5) to improve help-desk efficiency.

Here is a before-and-after synopsis of a typical business process.

Imagine you are a manufacturer of products. Each product has several parts. Each part has a serial number, a model number and a sku number used in the ordering process. Each part may also have a different price, depending on who is ordering.

Before CMS:

- 1) A customer in need of a part calls your company in seek of help.
- 2) They are not quite sure what part it is that they need.
- 3) Jane – the office staff that answers your phone knows a lot about your products but in this case must consult with John (one of the warehouse workers) to find a solution for this customer.
- 4) The customer remains on hold for 5 minutes while Jane looks for John. Unfortunately, John can't be found.
- 5) It may take several days before Jane and John connect, to discuss a solution.
- 6) Jane then attempts to call the customer back but cannot seem to find where she wrote down his name and number.

After CMS:

You have implemented a CMS that is connected to your company portal. The same situation occurs.

- 1) A customer in need of a part calls your company in seek of help.
- 2) They are not quite sure what part it is that they need.
- 3) Linda, who is new to your company answers your phone and clicks on the button that calls up the CMS. The first question she asks the customer is their name and telephone number, which she types into the system. Then she asks the customer to describe what product the customer is calling about.
- 4) She clicks on a link for that product and up pops a picture (graphic) of the product, which shows the many, parts available. While listening to the customer's problem, she moves her mouse over the part your customer is describing. With a simple movement of her mouse an information box illuminates which contains the product

name, part number and a price. Unlike the first scenario, Linda can communicate with the customer without having to know the products. The customers needs have been met immediately.

- 5) If the customer decides he wants to buy that part, Linda clicks on a purchase button and an order form appears. She fills out the order with the customer and with another click e-mails a copy of the order (or invoice) to him. That same click updates the pick list for fulfillment department, logs the serial number in the registration database and adds that customer to the company mailing list.

Information in this kind of system is no longer static but multi-dimensional because it redefines the process. Consider what a CMS would do for a traveling salesman, or world-wide dealer base. Through a Web interface, anyone with login access can manage critical business information just as Linda did.

Another key feature of a CMS for a business owner is that they can control the information that is presented without the aid of a Web developer. So if a new product was introduced, you would simply click “add picture”, “add features” and “add price” and the information is dynamically updated in the CMS. Click on Notify Group and it automatically sends out a "news alert" informing users of the recent additions.

In today's economy, we know that to be competitive we must change the way we do business. The Internet exposes us to possibilities we may never have considered.

So think beyond your static Web site and consider what an e-process solution would do for your business.