

Portals Today

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Interoperability for Portal Services is Coming!

Portlets, Gadgets, iViews, XpertLinX...Whatever your vendor chooses to call portal services, their importance is something everyone can agree on. Given recent major developments in the portal industry and the larger world of Web services, it appears that a single technology standard for these services – and hopefully a standard name as well – is on the horizon.

Portal services are the objects that enable a portal to integrate all the Web-enabled content and applications inside and outside your enterprise into one interface. For end users, portal service interoperability will have major ramifications.

In a recent in-depth survey of corporate portal deployments, decision-makers cited extensibility as the most important feature affecting the success of their portal deployment. Greater interoperability among these services will allow portal administrators and end-users to add

Success of portal deployment is dependent on extensibility

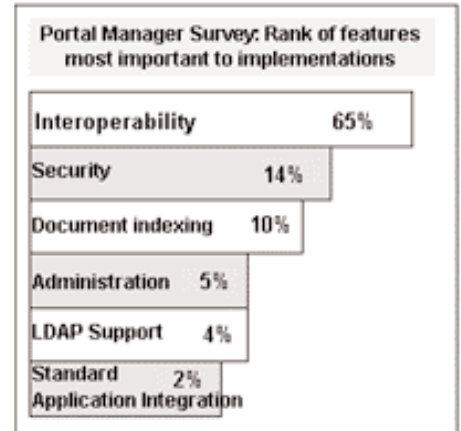
and remove these services from multiple portal vendors and other sources, without getting IT involved in the process.

Interoperability grows among vendors

Until recently, vendors have remained fiercely proprietary about their portal service software. While most are developed in Java, J2EE, Perl, or Active Server Pages, and many support the HTTP standard and can be hosted on an application server, each portal vendor has their own proprietary method for defining the parameters that allow a portal service to function dynamically within HTTP.

This has made it difficult for portal customers to utilize portal services from another vendor, to integrate their portal with a portal from another vendor (say that of a business partner or supplier), or to conceive of a multi-vendor portal implementation within a large organization.

For portal vendors, the first step to interoperability is convincing the rest of



the industry that their way of building portal services is the best candidate for a standards model. That means loosening the grip on their APIs, PORTALS continued in order to spread the word and build a constituency.

MicroPC's director of marketing Karen Moorehouse points out: "Once you've established a standard, then everybody can play, and the bar is equal." But for players who want to lead the industry, as MicroPC does, it's imperative to reach the developer

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Case Study: MyWorld Desktop Online

Can a portal save nature? That's the goal of MyWorld Desktop, a new site deployed by The Foundation for Natural Resources.

The Foundation needed a fast and streamlined way to share information and resources. The portal is built on CrestWare's PortalPower product and provides Foundation employees and others with tools for sharing information on conservation resources and best practices. "We hope it will change the way people work," says Celia Cross, communications coordinator for The Foundation for Natural Resources.

Knowledge sharing key to success

Since its inception, The Foundation for Natural Resources has relied on world-

wide sharing of scientific research and methodologies to effect conservation. From planning, to ecological management and restoration, to monitoring impact and measuring progress of employed strategies, to applied research on emerging issues, the transmission of data and standard practices is essential to the success of professionals working in isolated office throughout the U.S. and the world.

Yet until the portal was deployed, communication of this information was less than efficient. "This has been our main hurdle," says Cross. "When it was a small organization, telephone and face-to-face meetings worked fabulously well. Everybody knew what everybody else was doing."

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Product Review: EasyTech introduces user-friendly portal product

EasyTech announces the second release of MyPortal Server, the portal foundation extension of their MyPortal software platform.

MyPortal is EasyTech's family of e-business infrastructure, applications, and services. Foundation extensions such as MyPortal Portal Server (WPS) provide the basis for specific e-business development in areas such as portals, pervasive device support, and voice-enabled access. Release 1, which was released last week, features several user-friendly advancements in the areas of personalization and knowledge management.

Enhanced personalization sets MyPortal apart from the pack

EasyTech is also packaging MyPortal Personalization Server into this release of MyPortal. "It provides both a customization capability, to allow end-users to tailor the screen, as well as the ability to set rules-based personalization, so the portal that's presented to the end-user changes depending on that end-user's requirements and capabilities," says Lou Jordan, president of EasyTech.

Search and indexing is robust, presentation less so

MyPortal features a strong search functionality, with categorization crawlers to build a taxonomy, connectors to both structured and unstructured data, and federated searching to make searching across different data types easy for end-users. However, the product lacks a presentation layer for surfacing information, a feature which has become a standard expectation of portal software. However, our testers found the product easy to integrate with popular presentation layer software such as ICT PolyView and Delmar's Blue Horizon.

Jordan promises that the next release of MyPortal, version 1.2, will include this capability as part of its core infrastructure. "We work well with other vendors, but realize we need to offer the complete package," he says.

Pricing & availability

Version 1 of MyPortal Portal Server began shipping last week. Version 1.2 will be available by early summer. Pricing is available by user (ranging from \$5 to \$200) or per CPU (\$50K).

For more information, visit <http://EasyTech.com>.

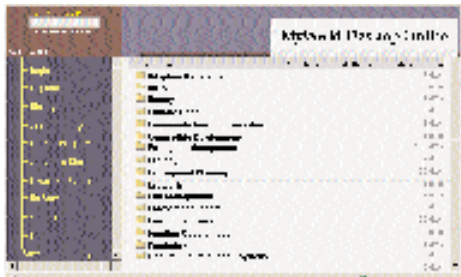
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CASE STUDY

But today, the organization's growth has thrown the old communication paradigm out the window. In order to leverage the organization's methods and experience into new and different conservation projects, the organization needed a way to communicate both internally and externally. "We needed to provide an easy way for both Foundation and non-Foundation staff to get practical information," says Cross. "We wanted to make it as easy as possible, one stop to get everything they needed."

Intranet plans lay groundwork for portal

Before arriving at a portal solution, Cross was in the process of developing an intranet site for Foundation field staff. But even before finalizing the site, it was clear



MyDesktop interface is simple and easy to use.

that an intranet would not be sufficient.

"This was brought quite explicitly to our attention by the field staff, who said it simply wouldn't meet their needs," Cross recalls. "So we decided we had to go to an Internet site, one that was markedly different from The Foundation for Natural Resources's Internet site itself, which was primarily a marketing tool."

CrestWare offers Internet access with minimal programming

After closely examining half a dozen portal products, Cross settled on CrestWare. At the time, many of the applications that contained knowledge management tools were intranet focused, while Internet-ready products such as KnowledgeTech were too powerful to be economical. "At some point down the road we may need that type of capacity," Cross says, "but for right now, CrestWare comes closest to what we need."

Cross hired a programmer in June, who quickly got up to speed on CrestWare. The two major challenges she faced were customizing the portal for Internet use and fine-tuning the search function. "The nice thing about CrestWare is it allows full-text searching, so we don't have to rely on the user to put in the proper keywords" notes Cross, "But that's been a challenging programming question, to take full advantage

of that function.

Biggest challenge: finding time to make the change

Cross is optimistic about the future of the portal, but sees it as a long-term process. "It will be a significant change for the Foundation to work this way," she says. "Everyone is very focused on his or her immediate task at hand. Conservation work is all urgent, so what do we do a little less of to make time to publish our work to the portal?"

To support the shift to a portal culture, Cross plans to add another programmer and at least two content editors over the next fiscal year. "That's just the bare bones approach," she says. "We'll need dozens of editors eventually, to make this happen."

Key Lesson: Prepare for all scenarios

Ironically, modest expectations caused the most trouble for Cross and her team. "We weren't prepared for success," she admits. "When it caught on and we had to ramp up very quickly, it was a real stretch." He advises other portal planners to think through every possible scenario: "If this catches on, you want to know what you're going to do, how fast you'll have to do it, and what staff and consultants you'll need to add." ▀

community. "Our objective is to have numerous developers developing portlets for our portal product," says Moorehouse, "and the more cost effective you can make that, the better. That's what clients want."

MicroPC is working toward submitting industry standards. "The standard we're setting for the portlets will be one that all can share," Moorehouse adds, "so portlets written for one portal will be able to be utilized inside another. There are a lot of benefits to that for customers, and in the industry as well."

For some portals, interoperability is here

Multi-vendor portals are already a reality – albeit in a limited fashion – in some portal implementations. "I think there's a high degree of cannibalization, which is good for the customer," says WorldPortal VP Len Hammond. He says it's common for WorldPortal to integrate MyView or PeopleSoft modules into a WorldView portal, when a customer needs it. "Part of our strategic alliance with MicroPC was that we created an adaptor that converts Web components into gadgets and renders those in our portal," Hammond explains. WorldView also plans to offer an XML converter for proprietary portal services.

According to Hammond, total interoperability is probably six months to a year away. "I've been involved in discussions among major portal vendors where this issue has been discussed," he reveals. "The meetings happen, but right now, there's still too much caution between the various vendors for that piece of it to be something people should count on."

2 items you need to consider today

With true interoperability up to a year away, what should portal planners be looking for today? How can you be sure a portal solution that looks workable now won't be outdated when portal service standards become a reality?

1 When investigating a vendor, find out whether they have a clearly articulated strategy for using standardized Web services. Look for vendors who can tell you how they handle portal services today and what their plans are for a year

from now. As Moorehouse advises, "With portals and any other technology, these things are always going to change, so you need to be conscious of what the most likely migration paths are, and build a system that's open and flexible enough that will allow you to migrate to whatever technology comes along."

This also means keeping an eye on the broader Web services market, and watching for responses from portal vendors.

2 Focus on specific business needs. At the same time, remember this is only one factor in your portal decision – and it

may not be a top priority for some limited implementations. Being "outdated" may not be the worst thing in the world, as Hammond points out. "If a company has a department-level portal with a reasonably small group of users and

small number of applications tied into the portal, they may not need a robust portal platform."

The best practice, according to Hammond, is to identify your specific business needs, figure out how they translate into functionality requirements, and then identify what technologies best support them.

And if you determine that you need to run much of your business on a portal, and need an open framework into which you can plug iViews or portlets or gadgets, let's hope that when agreeing on a standard, portal vendors settle on a name for these objects, too. ▣

Total interoperability may be six months to a year away.

Portal planners must be aware of vendor strategy—both present and future and focus on specific business needs.

Learning the lingo: Portal terms you should know

AIX – Advanced Interactive Executive

a version of UNIX developed by IBM.

E-business platform

Centralized point of access for wide range of enterprise and Internet services, personalized for employees, customers, and partners.

iMode

Wireless communication protocol.

Portal service

Generic name for Web-based application that connects a specific application or content source to a portal.

Portlet

Agent or window into specific content or application source.

Pervasive device

Any intelligent component, such as a laptop or handheld computer, Internet-ready wireless phone, or PDA (personal digital assistant), that connects to a computer system.

SOAP – Simple Object Access Protocol

Web service protocol currently under review by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C).

Web service

Web-based application that originates inside or outside an enterprise.

Upcoming Events

Watch for these exciting events in the portals industry!!

The Griffin Group Portal Seminar Central

Featuring product comparisons, seminars, and hands-on training

Apr. 10-12, Chicago, IL

Tel. 800-555-3321

www.thegriffingroup.com/events

The Griffin Group Portal Seminar North

Featuring product comparisons, seminars, and hands-on training

June 19-21, Westin Ottawa, Ottawa, Canada

Tel. 800-555-3367

www.thegriffingroup.com/events

Portals World

Comprehensive seminars, case studies, and product profiles

Apr. 30-May 2, Santa Clara, CA

Tel. 800-555-8000

www.thegriffingroup.com/events



The Griffin Group Portal Seminar East

Featuring product comparisons, seminars, and hands-on training

Nov. 14-16, Hyatt Regency

Boston, MA

Tel. 800-555-3367

www.thegriffingroup.com/events

WorldView IT Forum

Featuring more than 75 portal products

May 20-24, The Bellagio Hotel

Las Vegas, NV

Tel. 800-555-3321

Portals World 2003

Year end product competition!

Dec. 1-5, Capital Hilton, Washington, DC

Tel. 800-555-8000

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