

Empowering Employees with The Right Information at the Right Time

By organizing and delivering relevant, real-time business information managers need, a Roles-Based Portal frees managers from the back room and puts them where they can have a positive impact on sales and operations—on the store floor.

Retail employees—particularly district and store managers—feel overwhelmed by the amount and variety of information they receive daily. It can take them an exorbitant amount of time to sort through, digest and act upon all the e-mail messages, reports, links, attachments and videos that come their way.

These managers need a versatile, job-specific solution that allows them to spend less time in the back room sorting through information and more time on the floor connecting with employees and customers. Team members need the right information at their fingertips, with built-in filtering that ensures this information is relevant to them and their stores.

To provide this organized, customized information, retailers require a systematic approach that integrates all that their employees do daily

Users don't have to manage multiple passwords or log on to and off of applications or different machines, increasing efficiency. And by automatically prioritizing information and including triggers and alerts for real-time notifications, a roles-based portal helps store managers focus on what's most important and relevant to their roles.

These efficiencies mobilize managers and allow them to spend more time on the store floor supervising staff and assisting customers. That has a direct impact on store sales and employee productivity. This type of Smarter Operations solution empowers store managers to make faster, more accurate decisions in key functional areas such as labor deployment and inventory control.

Microsoft is helping retailers realize these benefits with its

SharePoint® Portal Server Technology. Built on the Windows® Server System™, a SharePoint portal is easy to implement and manage. Retailers can design their portals to interact with a wide variety of information and systems, including those from SAP, PeopleSoft and MicroStrategy. Critical sales information can even be accessed while mobile, with a Windows Mobile-enabled device—such as a Smartphone or PocketPC—providing district and store managers with critical information no matter where they are.

Microsoft's Roles-Based Portal infrastructure can be deployed incrementally to meet specific usage scenarios, giving retailers a way to grow into their solution. Windows SharePoint Services can be implemented alongside existing portal and communication systems and presented in a seamless manner to employees. By bringing them the information they need in a consolidated, easy-to-use format, Microsoft can bring both communication and collaboration to new levels throughout the retail enterprise.

A Roles-Based Portal filters and delivers information based on its relevance to an employee's job, such as store manager, district manager or sales associate.

into a single source that knows who they are and what information and tools are relevant to their role. This is the very definition of a Roles-Based Portal.

Enabling Efficiencies

A Roles-Based Portal can help a retailer operate more effectively by providing a single vehicle for up-to-date and accurate information—a trusted source where employees can manage day-to-day business.

- To learn more about Microsoft Enterprise Collaboration solutions—including Roles-Based Portals—register for a webcast presented by RIS News as part of its webCONNECTIONseries. The webcast will take place April 7, beginning at 2 p.m. Eastern/11 a.m. Pacific. To register visit www.risnews.com/wcs
- To download the Microsoft Enterprise Collaboration business overview, visit www.microsoft.com/collaboration.

Roles-Based Portal Boosts Sales, Reduces Costs for Virgin Entertainment

For Virgin Entertainment to sustain profitability while maintaining its unique market niche, fast and accurate information flow through the organization is critical.

Like many companies, Virgin Entertainment had used e-mail and a rudimentary intranet as its primary internal communications mechanism. This system had severe limitations, including lack of security, poor document management tools and lack of search capability.

Robert Fort, director of Information Technology at Virgin Entertainment Group North America's Los Angeles headquarters, describes what can happen when information is not found quickly: "We frequently need to pull a manager off the floor to find needed information. He or she could end up spending hours locating the information instead of coaching employees and selling product on the floor."

Considering the cost of a manager's time and the negative impact on sales because of sold-out product or other inventory issues, this can cost a store hundreds or even thousands of dollars a day in lost revenue. "The more managers are out on the sales floor, the higher our sales are," notes Fort.

Making Information Accessible

Virgin Entertainment implemented Microsoft SharePoint Products and Technologies to help its 1,600 employees collaborate more efficiently by creating an enterprise portal and collaborative team sites.

The portal, based on Microsoft Office SharePoint Portal Server 2003, is the central source of daily information for all Virgin Entertainment employees. It helps the company overcome one of the biggest challenges that modern organizations face: finding, consolidating and sharing critical information in a single, easy-to-access location.

The solution also includes a data analysis tool that Fort says anyone in the organization can use. "We wanted something our managers could use to get answers quickly, and then get back on the sales floor and make a difference."

The Information People Need Now

The roles-based portal alerts store managers to new sales promotions, allowing them to quickly prepare by ordering an appropriate number of product copies. A store manager site provides access to news and announcements, special events information, contact lists, an employee directory, links to industry or artist Web sites, and up-to-date views of specialized data such as inventory spreadsheets.

"We push a lot of information to the stores and expect a lot from the managers," says Fort. "We realized we had to stop overwhelming people with unnecessary information and empower them to make better decisions in the moment. SharePoint Portal Server gives us this capability."

To view the complete Virgin Entertainment case study, go to: <http://www.microsoft.com/collaboration>



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Robert Fort, Director of Information Technology at Virgin Entertainment Group

Profile: Virgin Entertainment is the world's leading music and entertainment retailer, providing consumers with a range of entertainment experiences that include music, DVDs, videos and books.

Business Situation: For internal communications at Virgin Entertainment, e-mail and a rudimentary intranet named "The Wall" had become severely limited in security and functionality. The company needed a solution to disseminate and share accurate and timely information throughout its organization.

Solution: Virgin Entertainment implemented Microsoft SharePoint Products and Technologies to help its 1,600 employees collaborate more efficiently by creating a corporate information portal, collaborative team sites and a roles-based store portal. The portal is the central source of daily information for all Virgin Entertainment employees.

Benefits:

- Enables managers to spend more time on the sales floor supervising employees and assisting customers, resulting in increased sales and customer satisfaction
- Provides improved and focused communication between stores and the home office by empowering employees to connect with one another
- Reduces IT support costs by more than 15 percent
- Frees up 15 percent of a typical manager's time for higher-value tasks

Look for future articles in the Microsoft Smarter Retailing Series, exploring how other retailers are using technology to improve productivity and enhance business process efficiencies. Topics will cover solution trends such as Collaboration; Store Operations; Self Checkout and kiosks; and Enhanced Wireless and Mobile capabilities.

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