



TLP

Building a leading-edge corporate portal

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— Jose E. Lozano
Director of Information Technology
TLP

Business Benefits:

- Collective knowledge base—creates a corporate asset by pulling together disparate information from all areas and systems used throughout the company
- Improved client servicing—aligns the company’s account teams more closely with their clients’ businesses
- Unified communication—fulfills the need of the extended enterprise by providing one site for employees, freelancers, and clients.
- Reliability—provides guaranteed uptime and availability of the corporate portal

What makes it work:

- 2 Compaq *ProLiant*[™] 1850R systems—a production Web server and a staging/development server—each with dual Pentium III 500 MHz processors, 1 GB RAM, 100 GB storage, redundant power and fans, and failover capabilities
- 1 *ProLiant* 3000 system—the production database server—with dual Pentium III 550 MHz processors, 1 GB RAM, 40 GB storage, redundant power and fans, failover capabilities
- Software: Plumtree Corporate Portal; Windows NT 4.0; Microsoft SQL Server 7.0
- Storage: Compaq Ultra2 SCSI drives
- Services: Compaq Services

It's no surprise that the company that created Elsie the Cow for Borden's and gave 7-Eleven its name would also create a corporate portal that sets the standard for the marketing communications industry.

Founded in 1913, TLP (www.tlp.com) is part of Omnicom, the world's largest, most comprehensive network of advertising agencies. Today, TLP is the seventh largest promotion oriented agency in the world, and the 55th largest marketing communications company of any kind in the US.

Based in Dallas, TLP is geographically dispersed, with 462 employees in Dallas, Texas and Wilton, Connecticut, plus 37 field offices. In order to improve communication and harness the wealth of knowledge resident in the extended enterprise, TLP built the company's first portal using Plumtree software on a Compaq platform.

Creating a virtual community

Jose E. Lozano, TLP's Director of Information Technology explains, "When I joined the company, one of the problems that was identified was an inability to share and disseminate information company-wide. Our home office and field-based employees couldn't easily share documents, and internal knowledge was difficult to find and leverage. So our initial charter was to identify and bring that information to all our employees."

Lozano felt that a corporate portal was the answer he was looking for.

Industry analysts agree. According to Gene Phifer, Vice President of Internet Strategies at Gartner, "In today's fast-paced Internet economy, Global 1000 companies are looking for a robust portal that assists their knowledge workers through each step of the decision-making process. They need a browser-based application that enables them to gain access to, collaborate with, and take action on a wide variety of business-related information regardless of the workers' locations or department affiliations, the location of the information, or the format in which the information is stored."

TLP looked at many different solutions before choosing the Plumtree and Compaq solution. Lozano comments, "There are a lot of products out there that call themselves portals, but they are not really portals in the true sense. Plumtree very much fit the bill for what we were looking for in terms of functionality and feature set in a portal product."

When it came to choosing a hardware vendor, Lozano's decision was easy. "I chose Compaq based on my past experience with the platform. I am comfortable with the architecture and services. Compaq is all we use here at TLP." In addition to using Compaq for their corporate portal, TLP uses Lotus Notes on a Compaq platform for its messaging and collaboration solution."

Plumtree's vision

The Plumtree Corporate Portal is a Web portal for corporate information and applications. It presents a complete view of the business, drawing resources from the widest possible range of existing applications and Internet services and presenting that information in one simple, personalized Web experience.

Conan Reidy, Channel Manager at Plumtree Software, Inc., discusses the genesis of the product. "In 1996, Plumtree set out to build a Yahoo! for the corporate user. That user could be an employee, a business partner, or a customer."

Rather than try to create a database that would house various data formats, Plumtree's vision was to build a directory that linked the user to the information—so that all data could reside in its native format and in its original location. Reidy comments, "After solving some pretty serious technical problems, we were able to build a simple-to-use and easily extendable architecture that allowed us to index different kinds of content. Users issue a search against a directory that corresponds to the organizational structure of the business—which is really helpful in searching for new information and ensures that every search is rewarded with relevant results."

Bring on the Gadgets

With the introduction of Plumtree Portal Gadgets™ in 1999 with the third release of the product, Plumtree has what Reidy considers to be a complete solution. Gadgets are plug-in components that give portal users easy access to enterprise applications—such as Siebel or SAP. They also have the ability to deliver Internet services such as weather updates, sports scores, or an individual's stock portfolio or 401K.

"The result is that you see information that's tailored to your specific needs, says Reidy. Plumtree's founding vision was to use the Web to build a window into your corporate world. The combination of our directory and Gadgets allows us to realize that vision fully."

To see Plumtree in action, check out their demonstration site: www.corporateportal.com

The solution: MyTLP

When designing its corporate portal, TLP wanted a system that would support employees, customers, and vendors from anywhere in the world. The 500 users include executives and individuals from account services, creative, studio, print production, art buying, and media planning and buying.

The company named its corporate portal MyTLP—reflecting the fact that it was about TLP, and also that it was personalized for each user.

MyTLP's knowledge database includes some 5,000 documents on several company-wide servers in a variety of formats—including Microsoft Excel, PowerPoint, Word, and Adobe pdf files—and a POP3 Mail Client. TLP used Plumtree Portal Gadgets™ to create a wide range of tools, including a Digital Asset Management System, Address Book Search, Lotus Notes/Domino Calendar, Notes Inbox, Notes To Do, company news publications, announcements, and active forum bulletin board.

The portal is customizable by the end user, so each receives the information he or she needs to do a better job.

The payoff

According to Lozano, “Installation was relatively smooth and easy. The Plumtree Corporate Portal on a Compaq platform has proven itself to be a very solid solution. MyTLP's collective knowledge base and Web-based collaboration has made our employees more knowledgeable and better able to service our clients.”

TLP employees now have more accurate information about business in general and their clients in particular. MyTLP has the ability to crawl a variety of sources for PR and industry news and deliver it proactively to the user. And internal communication has improved because TLP can disseminate company literature on a timely manner to field people.

“The beauty of this solution is that people from the field can access information from our central knowledge database from anywhere in the world. They can be sitting in a hotel room with a customer and be able to access the information they need, when they need it. And it's secure,” comments Lozano.

Changing the business culture

Now that the technical challenges have been met, Lozano sees the major challenges around MyTLP to be the cultural ones.

“The major business challenge that we see will be getting Account Services employees to use MyTLP to become more knowledgeable about their clients' businesses and use the wealth of power that MyTLP will bring to their everyday jobs in the field. Another challenge will be getting our non-technical employees to adopt and use the corporate portal to the fullest extent possible to help them do their jobs more easily and more efficiently.”

Learning lessons 101

Lozano offers valuable advice to other companies that are thinking of creating a corporate portal.

- Start thinking of all the ways that corporate portals can be used throughout your organization.
- Address the cultural change issues immediately for quicker acceptance of a new way to create, manage, use, and share knowledge
- Think about how your company is organized so you'll be able to optimize your taxonomy structure. This will make it easier to find information in your portals.
- Start seeking out knowledge worker employees in your organization to make them your content managers for particular areas of information.
- Use vendor consulting services to help you get your portal off the ground quickly. I cannot recommend this lesson learned more highly because Plumtree's consultants were invaluable to our success.

What's next?

Now that the corporate portal is up and running, TLP's future plans include integrating MyTLP with the company's Advertising Workflow System and with Cognos for the Finance Department. Lozano wants to build new Gadgets that will enable an online employee suggestion box and survey. TLP also plans to extend the portal to new audiences—including outside vendors, suppliers, and new customers.

Based on the success of the TLP portal, another Plumtree and Compaq implementation will be rolled out soon at Omnipoint Management Services—the organization that provides services for TLP and 11 other Omnipoint-owned agencies in the Dallas/Ft. Worth area.

Reidy sums it up well: “Web development within corporations is becoming more and more extensive. What you need to leverage those investments fully is a way to bring all the resources available to your business together in one unified experience. And that's precisely what a corporate portal does.”

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