

Title: Enterprise Extranets

Author Names: Aaron Dillon, Carrie Moers and Bob Houser

Company: Syntax, Inc,

**Address: 33650 Sixth Avenue South
Federal Way, WA 98003**

Telephone Number: 253.838.2626

Fax Number: 253-838-1996

E-mail Address: bob.houser@syntax.com

Enterprise Extranets

In today's digital economy, technological advancements challenge companies to make apt, informed business decisions. Many organizations model their business structures to meet the needs of their customers. Efficient and seamless integration with key inventory, fulfillment, distribution, shipping and billing systems is critical to delivering higher levels of customer service and building successful customer relationships. The design and implementation of external exchanges, via web processes, with other companies is necessary to continue to interact effectively with suppliers, developers, bankers, and associates. In order to continue effective interaction with suppliers, developers, and associates, the external exchange of information via the web is essential. Developing information for use by other business partners is an important element of the Extranet.

With the advent of the corporate Intranet came the ability to connect to the various databases in an organization, allowing everyone to share and update vital data. Messaging, discussion group, email, and scheduling programs for the Intranet allow all employees to stay more closely linked than ever before. Productivity in many areas of business operations has increased with the elimination of redundant efforts, and the alignment of schedules throughout the company. Overall, organizational effectiveness has increased.

By themselves, Intranets warrant wholesale adoption of Web technology throughout the business world. However, the dynamic properties of the Internet allow communication between businesses also. This leads to the next revolutionary step — Extranets. In order to make the business processes more efficient and effective, companies need to tightly integrate partners and customers into their business processes and share enterprise data. The enterprise of the 21st century will be measured by the strength of its business partnerships and its ability to adapt.

Extranets allow you to harness the power of the Internet for third-party collaboration with partners, suppliers, and consultants. Extranets combine communications, transactions, accounting, and support functions for a company's customers and partners in a single Web-based interface. It is like having a salesperson, call center, catalog, and technician in a single package, available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Tying these resources together, in an expanded concept of Intranet principals, is the goal.

When designing the Extranet, careful consideration needs to be given to what information is to be shared, with whom, and how servers are to be secured. Security and trust boundaries must be established by rules. The administration of an Extranet requires standards for both storing and accessing shared enterprise data.

Extranets are private — designed only for a company's clients, and other authorized entities. Privacy can be maintained by requiring password authorization to enter from the regular Internet, or it can be enforced with sophisticated encryption devices located at

both the customer's and the vendor's location. The level of security required for the particular application will dictate the approach used. This aspect of privacy and security is the distinguishing feature of an Extranet from regular websites on the Internet.

Basic security is provided by firewalls, network containment and privileged access to the Extranet. Extranets require designated information to be shared beyond physical security containment. Therefore, identification of persons accessing the information is the prime consideration of Extranet security.

How do we know what users to allow into the Extranet and what resources will be provided?

Directory Services become an essential element in providing user and group access to shared resources. Directory services can provide a common standard, though many are proprietary (example ADS and NDS). Many companies have chosen LDAP (version 3) as a standard protocol for directory services to avoid conflict with proprietary solutions. LDAP directories that are based on open standards extend information to partners simply, securely, and reliably. Information in these environments needs to be particularly sensitive to the exposure to the Internet. LDAP provides for a fast identification of the user and then allows access into the firewall protected Extranet information. LDAP's fast search routines, flexibility, and dynamic information contents have proven successful in many websites.

The Extranet provides appropriate business information to all parties for the mutual benefit and profit of the participants. The unification of information resources allows all involved to grow and gain perspective. The Extranet is a major move away from information containment to secure information sharing. With the Extranet, management decisions are more informed and provide an escalation of business potential.

A decade from now, Extranets will be the rule of business for all companies. Right now, the opportunity is ripe for leading companies in every industry and market to strengthen their market position and profitability. Business executives should closely analyze the options and necessary requirements to enter this new medium as early as possible.