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SaaS tool opens portal to better data management

The StreetSmart productivity suite from InfoStreet helps a mobile game publisher get off the ground and weans away employees of a BC broadcasting firm from the e-mail jungle.

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by Nestor E. Arellano

For serial entrepreneur Adi McAbian getting the right product to market at the quickest time possible is critical to the success of any project.

In his foray into the highly competitive and rapidly evolving mobile entertainment market, McAbian relied on the flexibility and quick deployment offered by Web-based software-as-a-service tools to get [TwistBox Entertainment Inc.](#) now a global publisher of mobile content, off the ground.



Like many of McAbian's other venture's, TwistBox relies on [StreetSmart](#) -- a SaaS-based productivity suite developed by software company InfoStreet Inc. of Tarzana, Calif - to handle the company's file sharing e-mail management, customer relations management (CRM) and other workflow processes.

Rather than building out these services from scratch, the StreetSmart tool helped TwistBox create these services with the help of templates that can be customized and accessed quickly through a hosted portal.

"With StreetSmart, we were literally up and running with our TwistBox-branded e-mail and everything in a couple of hours," according to the TwistBox co-founder and managing director.

He said getting the company's portal live in a matter of hours and reducing the cost of IT infrastructure management and maintenance is vital in a market filled with very nimble competitors.

McAbian estimates he was able to achieve a 30 per cent increase in business since the implementation mainly because he was able to "jump ahead and focus of running the business instead of managing and maintaining the IT infrastructure."

Through licenses and partnerships with more than 100 operators in over 40 countries, TwistBox runs 400 wireless application protocol (WAP) sites, 50 live mobile TV channels, various video and text chat services and Web portals. The company is also credited for publishing more than 150 games.

McAbian, a specialist in entertainment and media rights management who has dealt with companies such as AOL/Time Warner, Discovery Channel, Disney and BBC, said many small to medium-sized startups in the industry often find it difficult to find the right applications that will help them manage the tremendous amounts of data that their business eventually generate.

"Whether it's for sales people, designers, lawyers or Web developers, the file sharing capability, CRM, calendaring, work process and Web management will generate a lot of data and will require a lot of management."

Often budding entrepreneurs, McAbian said, get caught up with the massive amount of detail in creating the company's infrastructure rather than focusing on the business itself.

Some organizations end up purchasing expensive enterprise-grade solutions or employing a hodge-podge or dedicated tools or seeking out a hosted services vendor. "When you don't have the excess capital to spend it's best to search for a reasonable all-around solution."

This is the area where StreetSmarts plug-and-play capability shines, he said.

Among the chief benefits of the StreetSmart products are:

- Reduced external and internal IT cost due to absence of any software or hardware to install
- Ease of access and limited need for employee training
- Highly secured database hosted by the provider
- Subscription-based pricing with no large upfront fee with prices ranging from \$10/month for one user to \$2,700 for 1,000 users

Many firms are employing SaaS tool and Web portals to [handle various operations](#) and project management tasks, according to another new media specialist.

"Up until a few years ago, people in the industry were mainly using e-mail for project management," said Ravi Singh, associate director of New Media for the [Knowledge Network](#), Birtish Columbia's public educational program broadcaster.

The trouble of course, Singh explained, was when people needed to search for a certain file they had to wade through volumes of e-mail strings. "You can easily attach all sorts of files to an e-mail and send it out but how can you dig for an e-mail that goes six years back?"

Knowledge Network, began using StreetSmart two years ago untangle the company's mailbox madness.

"We no longer use e-mail. All data and applications are easily accessible by staff and contractors through our Web portal."

The StreetSmart tool features a file registry that makes it very easy even for non-technical users to find files.

Beyond sharing information, StreetSmart also helps Knowledge Network employees and outside contractors book meetings, collaborate on files and schedule tasks.

For companies shopping for a SaaS product Singh has the following advice:

Check your business requirement - Determine the business requirements of your company. Pinpoint which processes will benefit from a SaaS implementation.

Look for tools that offer flexibility - Once you have determined your needs, shop around for tools that can meet them at the price you can afford. Look for flexibility to scale up or down as your operations require. Also consider vendors that allow you to add and subtract modules or services as the need arises.

Seek ease of use - To cut cost, look for products that will require minimum management and maintenance from you IT staff. Look for a product that will require little training on the part of users and administrators.

Focus on security - The security and privacy of your company data as well as the sensitive or personal information of individuals or businesses your company deals is vital. Make sure the SaaS provider handling the information has a reliable security and privacy track record. Go with a provider that can offer outstanding business continuity and disaster recovery protection as well.

Here are five ways to determine if [SaaS fits your data management project](#).

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