

Taking the desktop into the world

by Susan Levi Wallach

Heritage USA Community Federal Credit Union is so please with its new productivity package that its marketing director wrote a mash letter to the provider. The package in question is StreetSmart, now in version 7, a Web-based on-demand IT software service from Infostreet that consists of an integrated suite of business applications to which users have access from any computer anywhere. All they need is Internet access.

"We didn't have any real problem," said Laurie Merrill, marketing director of the Midland, Texas, which has about 7,000 members and \$33 million in assets. "This just makes things easier."

What StreetSmart does is take the full complement of business applications - calendar, address book, e-mail and mailing lists, file and application sharing, workflow management, instant messaging, PDA and Outlook synchronization, Web publishing, and knowledge base - and turns them into interactive hosted applications. "Since it doesn't sit on your computer, you (a) don't have to have a computer, and (b) don't have to have the software," said Doug Lynner, president of McNeil/Lynner WebWorks, an IT reseller that has several dozen clients that use StreetSmart. "And you don't have to have the person who comes in to fix it when there is a problem."

What you do have is the ability to turn any online computer into your desktop. "This takes and personalizes the Internet experience to what you need exactly, as defined by you and the people you work with," Lynner said. "It's a personalization of your browser as your actual office" - hosted at an InfoStreet Inc. data center, where data backups take place daily and 99.98% uptime is guaranteed.

At Heritage USA, Merrill sees StreetSmart's calendar - "having everyone know everyone else's schedule" - as its most valuable feature. In addition, she said, "all branches can keep in touch easily. We have about 25 employees and three branches. And we don't have to print out as many paper memos.

Though Lynner has clients that use StreetSmart's intranet and extranet features, Heritage USA's system is for internal user only. "It's a must-have item if you want to keep all your employees abreast of what's going on and in touch," Merrill said. "They can go to a section and reach in and get what they need. We have a rule here that no more than three people can be off on any one day. If you want a certain day off, you can look at the calendar and see whether other people are off that day. If you're going to be out on business, it lets people know. It is so user friendly. When we first got it, a lot of the employees said they didn't know if they'd ever use it. We said, 'You need to look at it every morning. Put it on and check your mail.' At first we did it so they needed to reply, so we knew if they were checking it or not. Now everybody does, and they're really using it."

To Lynner, the application and file sharing implementation stands out. "You're able to decide what access people can have to what documents on a document-by-document basis," he said. "You can allow customers, for instance, to have access to a certain document on your intranet and not to other information there." Lynner is clearly one of StreetSmart's fans. "As a generality, what I would point out is you can put away your IT worries. You don't have to worry about an e-mail server. You don't have to worry about a file server. You're not waiting for trucks to deliver equipment. In one minute you're going to be up and running, because that's how long it takes. They can leave their IT headaches to people who do it everyday."