IBM

Leading Propane Distributor Charts a Course for Intranet Success

Given the inherent benefits of conducting business via the Internet, MAPCO Inc. is channeling its energies into improving communications for its nationwide business concerns. The implementation of its IBM e-business solution has rewarded MAPCO with not only more efficient communications processes, but improved employee productivity and awareness at a substantial reduction in costs.

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—*Chris Graves, Director of Information Technology, MAPCO Inc.*

"The benefits have been phenomenal," says Jon Baker, MAPCO's Intranet project leader. "Obviously we got a more manageable, richer messaging system. But what we didn't realize was that we were also getting a universal platform for deploying enterprise applications. The power of having a single, consistent, application run-time environment on every corporate desktop is hard to describe, and the speed at which applications can be deployed is amazing."

MAPCO Inc., a Fortune 500 diversified energy company based in Tulsa, Oklahoma, operates various business units, including the United States' fourth largest retail propane distributor. Enterprisewide daily operations and communications are now administered from a single location using Lotus Notes and Lotus Domino. MAPCO runs Domino on RS/6000 servers distributed across the country in its five largest locations. This Notes/Domino infrastructure has replaced many paper-based processes.

"We have one application infrastructure to roll out many types of applications," says Joey Bowles, Internet project leader for MAPCO. "MAPCO was very fragmented three years ago into various business units. We now have a common place where we can communicate."

Application	Intranet communications for multi-site employee base; extending intranet efficiencies to the Web
Business Benefits	Increased efficiency with lower overhead; estimated annual savings of $300,000+; reduction in support staff from seven to three
Software	Lotus® Notes® Lotus Domino™ IBM® AIX®
Hardware	IBM RS/6000™
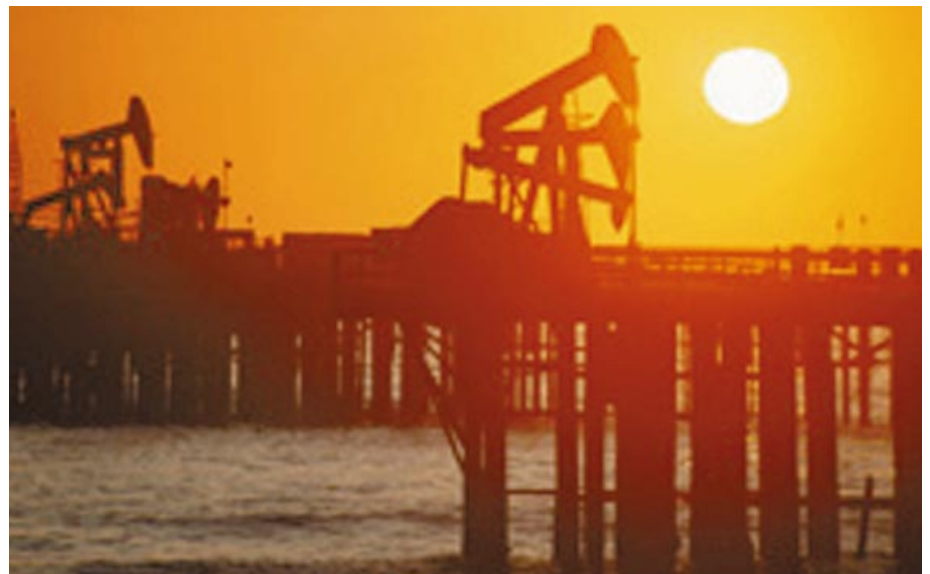
MAPCO is using e-business to improve corporate communications and deploy applications more efficiently.

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e-business

Blueprint to the Bottom Line

Before implementing Notes, MAPCO spent about $35,000 annually to publish just three of the many technical manuals produced by various divisions of the company. The same three manuals are now available through Notes at a one-time cost of approximately $25,000. "You can assume we're saving all the internal costs of assembling and putting that information together because now all we have to do is enter it once online and it's there," says Chris Graves, MAPCO's director of Information Technology. He estimates a potential annual savings of $120,000 by converting all printed publications to Notes.

Moreover, MAPCO has improved its business intelligence by making information available companywide from the Domino-based MAPCO Web site. Before Notes, MAPCO was able to give only a handful of employees access to online business news through disparate sources. Now, the entire company has access to 700 newspapers at a substantially reduced annual cost of only $25,000. An added bonus is an online message board where announcements, organizational charts, and questions and answers are posted for employee use. Corporate officials see the board as an asset in broadening communications between various departments and personnel.

Bridging the Communication Gap

Prior to the Notes solution, seven employees spread out among the different locations were required to maintain the e-mail load alone. Now a staff of three manages the Notes environment, including e-mail, calendar system updates, and other data functions from one location as if they were a single large server.

"We chose the RS/6000 to reduce our administration costs," says Baker. "By supporting up to 1,500 users per server (instead of 200 for NT), we are able to use a single server at each geographical site. And, since AIX is easy to manage remotely, we are able to administer all five Notes/AIX servers from our Corporate Headquarters."

Part of the reduction in technical support is due to the ease of use of the e-business solution. Because almost anyone can build a Notes application, MAPCO doesn't have to dedicate its programming resources or hire contractors. Now, many of the functions are administrative, and don't require the technical skills. "For example, a Notes administrator doesn't have to go in and update our Web site. We have non-technical people doing this in our corporate affairs and HR departments, streamlining the value chain by eliminating unnecessary steps," says Bowles.

The external portion of MAPCO's Web site, *mapcoinc.com*, operates primarily as a recruiting tool and a source for investors, while the Notes applications operate within the firewall.

With 99 percent availability and integrated Internet support, no new tools are needed to deploy applications to the Web. "We decided that Domino would be a natural extension of the Notes infrastructure," explains Bowles. "Extending Notes beyond the firewall allowed for more functionality than deploying a traditional Web server. It gave us an application infrastructure to deploy dynamically generated Web sites, canned and custom applications, and customer self-service sites." The applications are available through a native Notes client or through a standard Web browser.

As a result of these solutions, an annual savings of $300,000 has been realized in increased employee productivity and reduced software needs. "We can do so much more with Notes," Graves explains. "Our staff is the same size as it was with our old system, but now they're actually rolling out applications and maintaining things that add value. In reality, the $300,000 per year figure is probably conservative."

On the Horizon at MAPCO

"We now manage everything from one central location across our wide area network," explains Baker. "So where other companies are rolling out multiple Web servers and building infrastructures that go along with their e-business solution, ours is already in place from Alaska to Nashville, all managed the same — both inside and outside the firewall."

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