



Why e-Businesses Need Web-Access Reporting

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Preface

Internet technology gives both mature and new businesses a wonderful opportunity to reduce costs, maximize productivity, increase sales and secure a high return on investment. However, the operative word is “opportunity.” There is no guarantee. The journey is fraught with obstacles and pitfalls. The magazine “eCompany” provides a compelling example of this challenge. Its July 2000 edition contains an article describing the experiences of General Motors’ CIO, Ralph Szygenda, who was brought in four years ago to drag the giant corporation from the digital dark ages into the Internet era. Here’s a brief excerpt.

“...Szygenda would eventually rip out 2,500 different software applications used for accounting, payroll, design and other functions. In their place, he installed common systems so every part of the company could communicate with every other part. All of GM’s 120,000 salaried workers were given identical desktop computers and connected to a single network called GMOnline. The new intranet gave employees wide access to the company’s operations (with some common-sense restrictions). Under vehicle development, say, they can find 59 different sites maintained by design and engineering.”

“...But Szygenda still had to get GM’s hidebound bureaucracy to use the new technology. His main method for doing this was to hire 200 top information officers and business-process experts from outside the company and seed them into every GM operation... Szygenda’s army helped GM’s top operational managers plan and install networks that achieved their business goals, and watched and measured their progress. He continues to meet with his top-30 team once a week and puts in 70 hours a week keeping track of his far-flung empire.”

As demonstrated in the GM case and many others, overcoming the obstacles of e-business transformation is more of a classical management challenge than a complex technical puzzle. Classical management simply means having a plan, monitoring its implementation, and making adjustments when deviations or exceptions are detected (not always easy, but those are the basics). The first and third steps are critical, but they’re outside the scope of this article. The middle step, i.e., “monitoring implementation,” which is the subject of this paper, requires establishment and use of a comprehensive, reliable reporting system.

In the case of e-business operations, the reporting system must provide managers with information that reflects both financial and functional performance. Traditional accounting methods, i.e., profit and loss statements, balance sheets, and cost accounting reports can supply financial information. However, at present, there are very few tools for providing information on functional performance in a Web-enabled environment. In this context, functional performance means “the use of network resources to implement e-business transactions via internal and external Web sites.”

As highlighted in the GM case, e-business transactions require employees to make *extensive* use the Web, visiting all types of business-related sites. Consequently, in well-managed organizations, business managers and industrial engineers lay out plans for the work force to make such visits in patterns that maximize productivity. Assuming this is the case, functional reporting is needed to monitor performance against those plans. Such reporting needs to focus on two questions: “Are the new IT systems and Web-enabled e-business processes the right ones, and are they being used as planned?” Additional questions, at a deeper level, include the following: “Are the workers visiting the right sites, and are they visiting them often enough?”

Coupled with financial data, functional reporting that depicts Web-access patterns can help managers assess the success or failure of their e-business processes. It can also help them analyze problem areas, including those related to Return-on-Investment (ROI). Finally, functional reporting is absolutely critical when it comes to making technical adjustments, revising training programs, modifying business procedures, and making personnel decisions.

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Wavecrest Computing has been providing Web-access reporting tools since 1996. These tools originally focused almost exclusively on identification of improper use of Web-access privileges. The emphasis in those early days was on Web usage that had legal liability implications, e.g., downloading and viewing pornography. However, in recent years, Wavecrest has augmented and refocused its products to provide productivity enhancement and Employee Internet Management (EIM) features that respond to the e-business issues discussed above. It did this while retaining the ability to provide legal liability protection for its clients. Wavecrest's current product line includes CyBlock for ISA, CyBlock Proxy, CyBlock Appliance, Cyfin Reporter, and Cyfin Proxy. With a range of capabilities and prices suitable for organizations of all types and sizes, all of these products are designed to help maximize productive use of Internet, Intranet, and Extranet resources. More information on these products can be obtained by visiting www.wavecrest.net.