

E-mail and records management software

As e-mail correspondence inundates the workplace, storage and organisation can be a problem. **Graham Eshensky** of Multibase Australia says there is a solution



Graham Eshensky, managing director of Multibase Australia Pty Ltd, has over 20 years' experience in the IT industry, with a focus on SME enterprises. Eshensky has worked in distribution, marketing and sales, hardware maintenance, software support and in the successful development of software products. E-mail: graham@officebase.biz

Multibase Australia Pty Ltd exclusively researches and develops software products for niche areas of the e-mail and records management markets. Visit: www.officebase.biz

Business need

Market research has shown that, on average, most users spend approximately seven days per year looking for documents. The ability to reduce this wasted time and increase productivity is a very attractive proposition.

In the past four years, most people and organisations have changed the way they communicate with each other. E-mails have now replaced faxes, post and the telephone to become the predominant means of communication. This change has created a major problem for most users – managing their e-mails.

Existing e-mail systems were not designed to cope with the volume of e-mails used today. Their storage in many cases is difficult to control, which has forced many corporations and government authorities to limit the size of users' inboxes, and e-mails are stored separately from other records such as Word documents. Additionally, e-mails tend to reside on a person's desktop, whereas they should be shared on a network.

Solution

OfficeBase has provided a solution to this problem with the release of OfficeBase Version 4. The OfficeBase e-mail management system is now an integral part of the OfficeBase Records Management System. E-mails are captured and stored with a client's other records. This solution provides substantial improvements in productivity by reducing the incidence of records and e-mails being either misplaced or lost.

A more critical situation occurs with e-mails that have been deleted due to the frustration experienced by users in working out what to do with them. This has created many potential legal minefields, since it has recently been reported that many corporations are breaching corporate law by deleting e-mails that should be kept.

The demand for e-mail management has become so strong that OfficeBase has now released an e-mail management-only version.

Technical overview

OfficeBase has been fully developed in Australia and is the result of substantial market research both in Australia and the US. There are two versions of OfficeBase, a single-user version and a network version. The

network version uses Microsoft's MSDE or SQL Server. One of the unique features of the product is the way in which it has heavily integrated with Microsoft Office.

Through its seamless interface with Microsoft and its unique naming system, OfficeBase eliminates the need to create folders and filenames for all records, including e-mails.

Records of any file type are profiled and stored against client-based criteria and this, together with a simple yet comprehensive search engine, enables the records to be found quickly and easily.

Many other records and e-mail management systems rely on searches either of content or by category. This in itself relies on the discipline of having naming conventions. These systems are cumbersome and end up breaking down due to the lack of discipline in the use of the conventions.

With the seamless interface that OfficeBase has with Outlook 2000, e-mails are captured by OfficeBase and stored with all the other records and e-mails for the contact. E-mails from other systems such as Outlook 97, Outlook Express and GroupWise can also be easily captured with the OfficeBase Profile Records feature. In addition, a unique version control system provides the ability to create a new version of a record with one click of the mouse. All versions are catalogued and easily assessable.

The initial OfficeBase product took 12 months to develop. The major task undertaken during its development was the integration with Microsoft Word. Once this technique was mastered, the addition of other applications such as Excel and PowerPoint took very little time.

Changes in versions of Microsoft Office presented new challenges that needed to be resolved. The new e-mail security that was introduced in Office 2000 with service release 2 interfered with the OfficeBase integration with Outlook. A third-party tool provided a solution to this problem.

Marketplace

The OfficeBase development has always been as a response to the needs expressed by the market. The

initial product was developed to satisfy a major need in the market and, once developed, installations were immediately undertaken.

Users have quickly acknowledged the benefits of the seamless interface with Microsoft Office and have been attracted by the functionality it provides. It complements a user's workflow, and installations require much less training and support than other systems in this market space.

The system has a low cost of ownership and is aimed squarely at the small and medium sized office – and thus at a portion of the market that the larger records management systems vendors do not address.

Its positioning is that it is a very simple and intuitive solution to a very common and annoying problem – one that won't bring a business to its knees, but one that, if solved, will enhance effectiveness and productivity.

Most companies do not have a regimented and strictly enforced file naming and storage convention. So users commonly forget the way they named a file, or what folder they saved it in. OfficeBase is a simple solution to this problem – users never have to name the saved files, or determine the location it is saved in – the system does that for them and associates it with a person, customer, company or subject that the file relates to.

The software provides the solution that the business community understands. These sentiments are mirrored internationally, with approaches from companies in the US and UK to distribute OfficeBase. ■

FURTHER INFORMATION

A White Paper by Tim Shinkle: 'Changing Technology Requires a New Look at Enterprise Email Management'.

View this article: www.aiim.org/documents/wp/TrueArc_EnterpriseEmailMngmt.pdf

'Email minefield' by Karen Dearne, published in the *Australian IT Business*, 11 March 2003.

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PRODUCTS

OfficeBase Professional

OfficeBase Corporate (Network Edition)

SECTORS OF APPLICATION

E-mail and records management for corporations and government agencies

SUCCESS FACTORS

Recipient of the Item 3 AIIA Software Showcase Award 2001

STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT

Version 1 released 1996/97

Version 4 released January 2003

IN BRIEF

AUSTRALIAN GAME DEVELOPERS HAVE STRONG PRESENCE ON WORLD STAGE

The computer game industry is worth US\$30 billion a year worldwide, with computer hardware and software sales worth \$US800 million in Australia annually. Victoria has a thriving local games cluster as featured in *Software Journal*, October 2002 issue, and is home to more than 50 per cent of Australia's game development industry. More than 200 games developed in Victoria have been sold globally. Australia has gained a reputation for quality game developers, animators and creative programmers, cost-effective game production along with depth of government and community support. Flow on growth has also occurred in related sectors including animation, sound production, online education,

multimedia authoring and visual content creation.

As a further initiative, *Game Plan: Game On* – a Blueprint for growing the Victorian Computer Game Industry, was released by the Victorian Government earlier this year and outlines the Victorian Government's latest strategy for the computer game industry. This follows the Game Plan policy initially launched in 2000 and *Game Plan: the Next Level* in 2001.

For further information on the Victorian games industry and to view copies of these reports visit www.mmv.vic.gov.au/gameplan or contact Mark Bishop, manager, ICT Industry Development, Multimedia Victoria.

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