Web-Based Directory and Automated Distribution Lists Boost Productivity

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>
> *Corbin Meek*
> *Exchange Administrator*
> *American Tower Corporation*

AMERICAN TOWER

With a portfolio of approximately 15,000 tower sites, American Tower's (ATC) employee base spans across the U.S., Mexico and Brazil. This makes internal communications particularly challenging - and important. ATC found the task of manually maintaining its company directory and distribution lists (DLs) labor-intensive, resulting in information being out-of-date or inaccurate. To improve the quality of internal communications and reduce administrative costs, ATC deployed two tools from Imanami, a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner. The first, WebDir, enables employees to access and manage their directory information via any browser. The second, SmartDL, automates the creation and management of Distribution Lists. As a result of deploying these tools, ATC's directory is now much more accurate; staff members can readily locate and communicate with each other; and administrators are relieved of hours of manual coding, improving productivity throughout the organization.

CUSTOMER PROFILE	BUSINESS SITUATION	SOLUTION	BENEFITS
American Tower Corporation (NYSE: AMT) is a leading infrastructure provider for the wireless and broadcasting industries. Headquartered in Boston, the company owns and operates approximately 15,000 sites in the U.S., Mexico and Brazil.	With employees situated throughout many locations and time zones in the U.S., Mexico and Brazil, ATC had a tough challenge of keeping its company directory accurate and up-to-date. All changes required manual coding, and when the changes fell behind, company communications became unreliable.	ATC implemented two Microsoft Exchange®-based applications from Imanami. WebDir allows the company's users to access, search and maintain their directory data and groups via any Web browser; SmartDL automates the management and improves accuracy of Distribution Lists and security groups.	The Imanami solution cuts administrative costs by eliminating manual maintenance of the company's global address list and distribution lists. It also boosts productivity by enabling faster, more reliable communications company-wide. "This saves a lot of time for many people," says ATC's Exchange Administrator, Corbin Meek.

Situation

With approximately 15,000 tower sites located throughout the U.S., Mexico and Brazil, American Tower (ATC) is an exceptionally decentralized organization. Many of the company's current employees are field-based - which makes managing a company directory particularly difficult. "We have a unique challenge, with so many people located in different offices and cities," says Corbin Meek, Exchange Administrator for ATC.

Employee information must be updated constantly. Until recently, this involved considerable manual labor for ATC. Every time a staff member changed work location, mobile phone, pager number or address, they had to personally notify ATC administrators, who would then manually access and change the user information in Active Directory. And, whenever an individual joined the company, changed positions or quit, the company's Distribution Lists had to be manually altered. At times these lists would become so out-of-date that people began building their own, which hindered productivity.

Solution

Imanami, a Microsoft® Gold Certified Partner, develops applications that facilitate and automate Microsoft Directory Management. ATC first began using Imanami's products four years ago. "We had run into a typical problem when we were using Exchange® 5.5 Server, and our users couldn't upload their contact information themselves," explains Meek. "We looked into what most Exchange Administrators were using, tried WebDir, and found it to be a great fit."

WebDir is a Web-based Directory Management solution that extends the function of Directory and Group management to end users. With WebDir,

users can search the global address list, change their passwords, update their own information, and manage their own groups via any browser. WebDir immediately began reducing the time that ATC administrators spent updating the directory, password and group information.

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From then on, the two companies maintained a strong partnership, and when Imanami released SmartDL 3.0, ATC was eager to take advantage of it. SmartDL is designed to improve corporate communications by automating the management of Distribution Lists (DLs) and Security Groups. Rather than building DLs as static lists that must be modified manually as members come and go, SmartDL continually refreshes the lists by querying the Global Address List and Microsoft Active Directory® at scheduled intervals (administrators can set the queries to run as often as they like). That way, a company's DLs are always as current as its Global Address List.

SmartDL is written entirely within the Microsoft .NET Framework®, which makes it extremely flexible, with the ability to create and maintain DLs consisting of Multi-Level Dynasties. A primary dynasty - "the world," for example - could contain subsets such as Country, State, County, and City. SmartDL enables users to readily send messages to selected subsets of the primary dynasty. So, for example, SmartDL can send a message to all the sales people in Texas with just a few clicks. "Miscommunication because of inaccurate DLs lowers productivity," says Meek. "SmartDL addresses this business issue by

preventing us from having to manually maintain the distribution lists, which took on average an hour to two hours every week."

"One of the other nice things about SmartDL," he adds, "is that it can take over our existing DLs and upgrade them to smart ones - so we don't have to recreate them." Implementation of SmartDL was "a piece of cake," according to Meek. "We already had a server built that runs WebDir. We just uninstalled our older version of SmartDL and downloaded the new one. It took about 25 minutes, tops."

"I've used many applications," Meek continues, "and I'm happy with the ease of administration of Imanami's products. They have some of the best support in the business - partly because the products work so well that you almost never have to call." ATC is running WebDir and SmartDL on a platform of Microsoft Exchange 2000 Server and Microsoft Windows® 2000 Server.

Populating Active Directory Effortlessly

To maximize the advantages of SmartDL, ATC's next step was to fill in their global address list. "SmartDL is based on querying attributes," explains Meek. "We've been on Active Directory for a long time, but we didn't have all of the data fields filled in."

To facilitate this data collection, ATC and Imanami came up with a clever application using WebDir and SmartDL together, with the addition of a custom Distribution List. "It was a simple thing to do," says Meek. "With everything standards-based and XML-based, it's easy to customize and modify these applications." With the help of Imanami, ATC set up SmartDL to auto-search its Active Directory every night, and build a Distribution List of all those employees who were still missing attributes such as address, city, state, zip code, or phone number. The application then automatically sent everyone on this list an email notifying them that they needed to

update their contact information. The message included a direct link to WebDir so they could enter the missing information in just one step. This process was set to run on a daily basis so that users would receive the message until their directory information was complete. Once this SmartDL application was in place, there was no need for intervention by administrators - Active Directory was virtually filling in itself

Benefits

ATC has seen a great response from its initial use of SmartDL. "Within a matter of weeks, our AD data collection was 80-85% complete," says Meek. "We anticipate being up to 99% within a couple of months. Without SmartDL, we had no method of getting employees to fill in that data."

An accurate and complete Global Address List will be a valuable asset to the company, as it will provide faster, more accurate internal communications. "The Global Address List is available to everyone via Microsoft Outlook," explains Meek. "We will now be able to use this as our primary company white pages, which will ensure that people have the most up-to-date contact information, with very little maintenance or administrative hassle."

ATC is also working on integrating WebDir into its Intranet site to provide a Web-based staff directory. "This will allow us to eliminate our old phone book system and have access to the most recent data all the time," says Meek.

ATC has reaped a valuable productivity boost by implementing Imanami's WebDir and SmartDL. The products are serving to make internal communications faster and more accurate, and also eliminating considerable administrative labor. "All in all, this saves lots of time for many people," Meek says. In particular, he notes that the Imanami products are already saving 10-12 hours of an administrator's time each month. ATC anticipates greater

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productivity when it begins utilizing more features of SmartDL. "Imanami's tools are saving us a lot of soft dollars," concludes Meek. "They're worth every penny."

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