IT'S GOOD TO SHARE

Cloud-based custom intranets are the way forward for SMEs, says **Matt Burgess**

Business travellers on the move can nowadays take advantage of connectivity just about anywhere. But things get harder when it comes to accessing internal company systems while on the move. "It's a given that people in the working world now will have multiple devices," says Richard Ellis, director of the Microsoft Office Division in the UK. "And the expectation is that it is possible to access content from any of those devices, and not only access it but edit it or collaborate on it with others."

Through its web application SharePoint, Microsoft has long provided a way for businesses to do just that by creating shared spaces, projects, documents and intranets. Ellis says more than 200,000 organisations use it, and there are around a million developers around the world working on it. Earlier this summer, the company updated SharePoint to focus on a 'cloud first' and 'mobile first' approach. "When you think about a modern team

site or intranet, it needs to not just be available in the office in a PC, but also on the road when you're using a mobile device," explains Ellis.

But building custom intranets can be a complicated business. Berkshire-based Morgan & Wolfe, which has been working in enterprise technologies since 1992 and is a Microsoft Gold Partner, uses SharePoint to make this cloud-focused approach work for companies of all sizes. It's able to offer a pre-designed, packaged modular intranet within SharePoint in a number of days – making it easy for staff to collaborate, edit, discuss, manage, and share projects, documents and more.

"We were seeing the rise of the small-to-medium business moving into a commercial environment where they wanted to compete on a level playing field against far larger corporations, using enterprise software that would previously have been out of bounds to them," says Ian McNeice, solutions director at Morgan & Wolfe, adding that this is now an attainable goal.

According to a Gartner forecast, in just four years the cloud will be the 'default' option for business software and practices. More specifically, a hybrid of cloud and locally-based files and IT organisation will be most common. Since 2011, the number of companies dealing in Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS) has been growing 40 per cent in revenue per year. Combined with the Platform as a Service market, IaaS will have a revenue exceeding £41bn by 2020.

McNeice says major engineering enterprises, the defence sector and non-profits are now all looking to utilise SharePoint, and Morgan & Wolfe's philosophy is to sell "business solutions to business customers".

"I think we're looking at the perfect storm: where the speed of delivery, the price-point dropping, the removal of heavy on-premise costs and the rise of the small and medium business are all coming together," he says. "It's a major explosion in terms of business and technology. This doesn't have to be hard any more." ∎

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