

Businesses Go Far with Software-as-a-Service

Using Web-based software, businesses can operate and collaborate from anywhere – as long as broadband is available.

By Kimberly Gibby Fifita ■ AtTask, Inc.

The Internet and its resources have become indispensable to business. E-mail has become the standard means of communication at work. Nearly every organization has its own Web site. And in the last few years, as broadband Internet access has become more widespread, we've seen the rapid growth of Web-based software, also known as SaaS (software as a service).

Thousands of business productivity tools are available online for the business broadband user. According to Nucleus Research, the largest category of Web-based software is CRM (customer relationship management), while PPM (project and portfolio management) comes in a close second and e-commerce solutions are third. Web-based programs like Salesforce and NetSuite manage customer relations, while programs like StoreFront and StoresOnline manage e-commerce, and Daptiv and @task provide project and portfolio management.

Web-based software offers several advantages over traditional on-site software implementations. They have become popular because they are:

- Cost effective: Web-based software does not require expensive on-site software installations or the purchase of costly new equipment. It works on the computer the business already has.
- Portable: Web-based software can be accessed from any Internet con-

nection – at home, while traveling, even on a handheld mobile device.

- Collaborative: Many users can access the software at one time, and it doesn't matter whether they are all based in the home office. Users at a remote office in Arizona can access the same software – and the same information – as the users in the home office in Tokyo.

Web-based programs are especially helpful for small businesses in rural communities. While a business's physical location may be remote, with broadband Internet access and the right Web-based software application, there are no limitations on who a company can conduct business with on a daily basis. Physical location is no longer an issue.

FROM TEXAS TO THE WORLD

Take, for example, the James Avery Craftsman jewelry company. James Avery founded his namesake company in 1954 in Kerrville, Texas; today, James Avery Craftsman owns a chain of 42 retail stores in Texas, Colorado, Louisiana, Georgia and Oklahoma. In 2006, James Avery began using the on-de-



mand project management software @task from AtTask, Inc., to manage its IT projects.

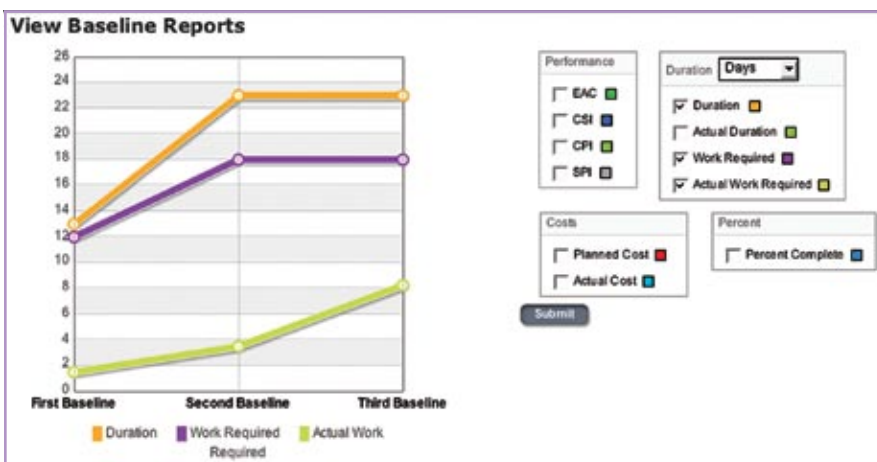
In July, Andy Dolan, IT Project Coordinator at James Avery, told AtTask's marketing director, "It's really an exciting time for us; we're taking advantage of the sophisticated tools out there and vastly expanding our business. We're rolling out e-commerce on our Web site, and the global potential is huge." From a small location in Kerrville, Texas, to a five-state presence, James Avery was able to advance by using collaboration software over the Internet to embrace a global market.

Broadband Internet and SaaS applications like @task are giving James



Newtown, Pennsylvania. MCM publishes unbiased medical programs, from take-home modules and online courses to medical meetings and symposiums. While it is a small company of about 20 people, it has a very large reach. Using broadband Internet and SaaS programs like Chorus Call, an online conferencing tool, MCM is able to offer Web conferences and online seminars for medical professionals not just in its immediate area, but anywhere in the world.

Another advantage of using SaaS applications over broadband Internet is that it allows collaboration. Being able to collaborate successfully with colleagues no matter where they are located is becoming essential in this continually shrinking world.



ENTERPRISE-LEVEL HR MANAGEMENT

Equilife International is a global ecological/humanitarian aid nonprofit organization. Until now, its workforce has consisted mainly of volunteers located all around the world, from Minneapolis, Minnesota, to Pretoria, South Africa, to Utrecht, Netherlands. Equilife is using @task to manage its projects and tasks as it grows from a small volunteer-driven startup to an organization with a large paid staff. Equilife cofounder David Michiln says, "As we tackle ambitious goals like acquiring funding and getting nonprofit entities set up in other countries...we have to show so much more than just nonprofit registrations; we have to show enterprise-level human resource management."

Without broadband and Web-based project and portfolio management solutions like @task, Daptiv or Project Insight, this kind of international collaboration would be impossible. However, with the use of a Web-based PPM solution, Equilife is "seeing over a 35 percent increase in efficiency at the project worker level," according to David Michiln. With a Web-based collaborative program, employees can not only view the status of their own tasks, but also the status of their colleagues' tasks, as well as any project documents, notes or issues. Visibility – across the entire organization – is at each user's fingertips.

Some Web-based project and portfolio management solutions, such as @

The screenshot shows the "My Projects" interface with a Gantt chart. The chart has columns for "Start", "Phase 1", "Phase 2", "Phase 3", "Final", and "Completion". Projects listed include "Automated Billing System", "Emergency Project", "New Online Order Form", "Paper Order for @Task, Inc.", "Sample Project", "Suspension Box", "Update Contact Us Page", and "Update Warehouse Floorplan". Each project row shows progress bars and status indicators (On Time, Behind, Late) with corresponding dates.

Avery a global reach. Though it is still headquartered in a rural Texas town, James Avery is seeing its jewelry shipped to people all around the world.

GLOBAL COMMUNICATIONS

Another example is Medical Communications Media (MCM), a health care communications company located in

task Enterprise, have a built-in capacity planner that allows executives to view in real time how new or unexpected projects will affect current planned projects within the organization as a whole. Executives can literally drag projects around a table until all the projects and resources fit. There is no need for lengthy meetings or conference calls to find out how full each employee's plate is – it's right there on the screen. All changes or additions are made in real time so that everyone is up-to-date on the status of any project or task at any given moment. E-mailed notifications free project planners from having to notify project members individually, and eliminate the need for lengthy status update meetings.

Another feature of Web-based collaborative software is international language support. Salesforce.com provides its software in nine different languages (English, Spanish, Japanese, Korean, Chinese, German, Italian, Portuguese, and French), allowing users all over the world to benefit from its CRM solution, while @task provides support for six languages (English, Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, German, and French). This feature allows even small US-based companies to easily collaborate internationally as more businesses go global.

For example, the Creative Services Department at software devel-

oper Quark has recently begun using @task to collaborate across offices in Colorado, New York, Munich, Paris, Neuchatel, and London. The Colorado employee sees project information in English, while the Munich employee's view of the same project will be in German and the Paris employee's view will be in French. All dates and times are automatically converted to the user's time zone, so there is never any problem trying to figure out what time it will be in Neuchatel, Switzerland, if a meeting is

The Colorado employee sees project information in English, while the Munich employee's view of the same project will be in German and the Paris employee's view will be in French.

scheduled for 1:00 pm in New York – the program figures it out automatically.

Just 10 years ago, collaborating remotely was difficult and expensive. Now with broadband Internet access and the development of Web-based business applications, all companies, no matter how small or remote, can have an international reach.

WEB-BASED APPLICATIONS TO GO

Technology has now put Web-based applications in your hands – literally. Many developers have created mobile versions of their software. Salesforce.com offers Salesforce Mobile; NetSuite can run on a BlackBerry, Palm Treo, or Pocket PC; and @task for iPhone allows iPhone users to access their projects and tasks from their phones. Business travelers with mobile devices like iPhones or BlackBerries can stay up-to-date on their projects through the power of wireless broadband.

Dolan of James Avery appreciates being able to keep in close contact with the company's CIO. Even if he's traveling, the CIO can use his iPhone and a WiFi connection to check project and task status from the road. Dolan says, "Our conversations are much more productive because he knows what to ask after taking five minutes in @task to get the status."

As more companies discover the power of high-speed Internet combined with intelligent Web-based applications, the growth potential of small and rural companies expands exponentially. Rural companies with broadband access have the potential to reach a larger customer base than ever before. These companies are no longer limited by their location or resources. Broadband Internet access, combined with powerful Web-based business applications, can place all companies on the same level of the playing field. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kimberly Gibby Fifita is Content Manager for AtTask, Inc. She is a graduate of Brigham Young University with an M.A. in English. She can be reached at kim.fifita@attask.com. You can find out more about the company at www.attask.com.

