



Vcrew – Groupware – Case Study



Vcrew – Integrated Suite of Web based applications

Today Inc., planned to develop a groupware of Web enabled applications for information and knowledge sharing between workgroups. Its intended targets were medium & large sized organizations. Today Inc required a comprehensive enterprise computing solution, providing multi-platform, multi-protocol support. Icreon developed Vcrew for Today Inc., to provide enterprises with high-end tracking and management capabilities, along with the ability to synchronize and manage activities for mobile workers. As an integrated groupware, Vcrew enables workgroups to reduce project costs, improve staff efficiency, and foster an appropriate change in business culture and profitability.

Customer Profile

A leading IT consulting organization based in Japan, Today Inc., provides consultancy services to organizations in the field of content management, online education systems, broadband, e-commerce and mobile communication.

Business Requirement

To manage operations efficiently, enterprises require coordination of activities, schedules, and knowledge among team members working on various projects. Today Inc, recognized this requirement within medium and large sized organizations, where large teams need to coordinate while working on turnkey projects.

Solution

Benefits

- Enhanced monitoring and management of operations
- Fully customizable
- Cross-platform (Mobile Devices/PC) portability, accessibility and support
- Centralized management driven by reliable & high-speed database access
- Multilingual (English/Japanese)
- Integrated e-mail services that provide multiple POP3 access

Technologies & Platforms

- PHP
- HTML
- MySQL
- i-mode
- EZWeb
- WAP
- Jphone
- Windows
- Linux
- Solaris
- Macintosh
- Apache Server
- IIS Server

Requirement

Today Inc is a leading IT consultancy services organization based in Tokyo, Japan. The company observed the growing need among medium and large sized enterprises to coordinate and synchronize internal operations among large teams for efficient manageability. The larger the team size greater is the probability of mismanagement and lack of coordination. In its effort to prevent this situation, Today Inc. conceived the idea of a groupware that would allow team members and co-workers to manage and schedule tasks, proactively. The solution had to be developed as an integrated Web enabled groupware that could be ported on mobile devices as well as PCs. This would allow enhanced manageability of operations through continuous and global data accessibility. Workgroups would be well informed about the regular tasks that they would need to perform. With increased coordination, managers would be able to track and manage projects effectively, at reduced costs.

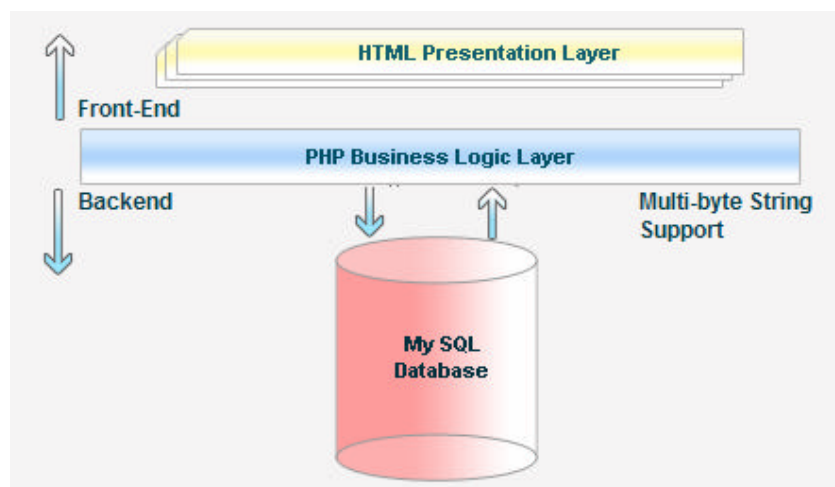
With these considerations, Today Inc., ventured with Icreon to develop a comprehensive groupware to perform enterprise critical operations. The objective was not only to develop an integrated groupware, but also to make it accessible over multiple platforms.

Enterprise Computing for Effective Manageability of Operations

During the initial stages of the project, we realized that data was required to be accessible over public channels or the Internet. Consequently, security was a major concern for this project. Besides this, we had to ensure that Vcrew was customizable by end-users to suit their business requirements. For us, the key areas of focus were:

- Seamless and secure data access
- Multi platform support
- Multi lingual and multi terminal support
- Net-ready mobile phones support
- Highly secure & reliable data access
- Customized and user-friendly front-end

After extensive research on the technology alternates, the teams at Icreon and Today Inc decided to setup a 3-tier architecture for Vcrew using HTML, PHP and MySQL to retrieve, store and present data.



The front-end is the HTML presentation layer and the backend is the open-source MySQL database. PHP is the business logic control unit layer, which is the middleware used to control the request-response functionality. The PHP business logic control unit includes the PHP extension “mbstring” for multi-byte string support. Multi-byte string



enables Vcrew to support Japanese characters and alphabets. In addition, Vcrew employs the IMAP extension for supporting a Web based e-mail client, used to access the POP3 server.

We developed Vcrew to be compatible with PCs as well as mobile phones, providing similar level of security and interoperability. Vcrew can be accessed using 'Net-ready' mobile phones like i-mode, jphone, WAP and EZWeb. These phones are developed exclusively for users in Japan only. Vcrew can be easily deployed within disparate operating system environments like Windows, Linux, Sun Solaris and Mac using Web servers such as, Apache, IIS or Xtami.

Vcrew comprises of two modules – Administrator and User. The administrator creates users, assigns rights and privileges to each user, and manages the overall activities performed by users, who work on the Vcrew user module. The User module provides tools that allow users to:

- Schedule Tasks
- Track & Manage projects
- Store Contact Information
- Manage Files & Folders
- Setup To-Do Lists for Personal Use and for Others
- Save Useful Weblinks
- Setup Bulletin Boards and Conduct Polls
- Create Forms & Questionnaires for Defining Workflows

The modules available in the Vcrew user and administrator interfaces are:

User Interface	Administrator Interface
Scheduler	Holiday Manager
Project Management	Facility Manager
Address Book	Address Book Manager
Mail	Message Manager
Private Groups	User Manager
Workflow	Templates Manager
To Do List	Rights Manager
Weblinks	Weblink Manager
Whereabouts	Whereabouts Manager
Announcement	Announcement Manager
BBS	BBS Manager
File Manager	File Manager
Polls	Poll Manager



Summary

Enterprise computing is a concept that is increasingly gaining the attention of top managements for managing business-critical operations. The idea is to exploit technology to develop an integrated repository of proven business value. Vcrew has been developed with precisely these considerations & parameters. The concept and design of Vcrew has been directed to allow medium and lower level managers to supervise, monitor, and coordinate day-to-day operations of enterprises along with secure and seamless data access of multiple platforms. Streamlining organizational procedures, Vcrew ensures the technical edge that enterprises require to administer tasks proactively without incurring extra costs for managing internal operations.

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