



IBM helps state educational service center create a Texas-sized intranet

Education used to be something that happened within four walls, with teachers writing on blackboards and students dutifully taking notes. Today, with the proliferation of the Internet and Web-based services, teachers, classrooms, and school districts have access to a wealth of resources and communications tools that expand the traditional definition of education.

“We couldn’t have completed this project without IBM. Frankly, we wouldn’t have even begun implementing it without them. IBM was absolutely key.”

—Dr. Joe Farmer, Executive Director, Texas Region 10 Education Service Center

One example is EdNet¹⁰, a new, but rapidly-growing telecommunications intranet created by the Region 10 Education Service Center (ESC) of Texas, which serves 90 school districts, 580,000 public school students and 40,000 educators in nine counties.

EdNet¹⁰ delivers Internet access, enhances inter- and intra-district communications, facilitates collaborative program development and sharing, and establishes links to a rich supply of resources for the benefit of all users.

Faced with the task of developing the intranet and its associated services and providing access to such a large user base, Region 10 turned to IBM for an end-to-end hardware, software, and consulting solution. Today, with Lotus Domino, Lotus Notes, and IBM Firewall software working in concert on IBM RS/6000 servers, the center can deliver cost-effective, high performance connectivity between the region’s faculty, students, staff, and their communities. Initial feedback from the growing number of users is extremely positive.

Critical success factors: cooperation and integration

IBM was first contacted during feasibility studies, because, Farmer says, “It was clear that if we were going to have any chance of

Application	Intranet for expanding public education services
Business Benefits	Improved communications and access to educational resources, lower administrative costs
Software	Lotus Notes & Domino IBM® Firewall
Hardware	IBM RS/6000™ IBM S/390®
Services	IBM Global Services



A student uses EdNet¹⁰ to access novaNET instructional software.

success with this major initiative, we would have to surround ourselves with home run hitters.”

Later, when its intranet plans became more tangible, Farmer’s team challenged IBM to design a system that would not only work, but one that the ESC itself would be able to operate and support. Farmer adds, “We needed it to be scalable, and we weren’t interested in experimenting.” During the proof of concept stage, IBM successfully implemented what would become an important application—ordering educational videos over the intranet. That success, plus IBM’s ability to partner with Region 10’s chosen networking supplier, Southwestern Bell, led to the selection of IBM. “We couldn’t have completed this project without IBM,” says Farmer. “Frankly, we wouldn’t have even begun implementing it without them. IBM was absolutely key.”

“The key requirements were to enable e-mail, Web pages, and Internet access,” says Dr. Bruce Curran, the center’s director of computer services. “The Lotus Domino Web server, Lotus Notes, and the IBM Firewall software operate as a unit to provide these services.”

In addition to hardware, software, and application development, IBM provided network and infrastructure design and server capacity planning. The ESC’s operational data resides on an IBM S/390 Model 9672 server and is supported by a T1 line, which connects the districts’ wide area networks to the regional hub.

Many ways to communicate with peers and parents

EdNet¹⁰ is designed to deliver several categories of services:

Internet. Secure Internet access through IBM Firewall software, hosted Internet mail services, e-mail exchange functionality, and Web site hosting.

Intranet. Region 10 programs and services, including catalogs of instructional resources and videos, which users can view and order online rather than through the mail; online registration for Region 10 workshops; and other efficiency-building programs such as classroom scheduling. The ordering and registration information is stored in Lotus Notes databases, residing on an IBM RS/6000 server.

Third-party products and distance learning applications. To be implemented in the next phase of the project.

The ESC provides participating districts both an intranet site, for communications within Region

10, and an Internet site with which they can reach out to parents and colleagues across the world. IBM designed a series of Web page templates—one for elementary schools, another for secondary schools, and a third for administrative issues. The templates include frequently-asked questions, directories and sports schedules. Districts can create basic Web pages by filling in the templates, or they can customize the templates to create more complex pages. In their simplest form, these Web sites can serve as communication tools, an effective way for the districts to communicate with the parents. But Curran believes that the districts will greatly enhance their Web sites as they become more familiar with the technology.

Domino and Notes offer convenience and security

While the center hosts all the Web sites on its Domino Web servers, each district manages and maintains its own Web pages with the assistance of an ESC Webmaster. This lifts the administrative burden from Curran’s group. “Domino was the ideal product for this application,” says Curran, “because of its ability to distribute these management functions to each district, while keeping each district’s sites secure from the others.” Domino’s remote management capabilities and security features make it easy for each district to maintain its Web sites, ensuring that only authorized users will be able to alter site content.

Lotus Domino, the first integrated groupware and e-mail server for the Internet, also offers flexibility through its compatibility with multiple authoring tools. Districts can use Domino’s built-in tools and easy-to-use Web page editor, or choose other authoring tools with which they are more familiar.

To streamline communications and reduce the paper flow, the ESC is encouraging users to communicate through e-mail as much as possible. The IBM solution has made the transition simple. Since the Notes e-mail system is tightly integrated with the Domino server, users can easily find addresses of other users, and send mail by simply clicking on a directory entry.

In a little over a year, the ESC has created the infrastructure and has 90 districts online. EdNet¹⁰ currently has the potential for 80,000 active addresses. “It’s a continuing journey,” Farmer says, “but we have a tremendous leg up at this moment.”

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