

The NFL scores a win with extranet media portal

Overview

■ The Challenge

Outdated extranet sites and inefficient content management were limiting provision of best possible information services to the media and other industry partners

■ Why IBM?

Prior high satisfaction with IBM technologies, excellent services available from IBM Business Partner Gemini Systems and faith in IBM's robust extranet portal platform due to its market leadership and the extensive experience behind it

■ The Solution

Extranet media portal based on IBM® WebSphere® Portal and IBM Workplace Web Content Management™, with groundwork laid for future rapid development of other custom sites

■ Key Benefits

- The NFL can provide more content in new, more accessible ways
- Automated content management and reuse simplify site administration
- Easier, faster content management and access helps increase efficiency and productivity for both NFL staff and media reporters
- Media-friendly environment generates goodwill and supports primary goal of promoting professional football



The National Football League (NFL) is America's most popular sports league and has the highest per-game attendance of any domestic sports league in the world.¹ The league's 32 teams compete each year to win the Super Bowl, the world's biggest sporting event. Founded in 1920, the NFL developed the model for the successful modern sports league, and as the professional sports industry leader on a wide range of fronts, it has been called "one of America's best-run businesses" by *BusinessWeek* magazine.²

"We have a very good relationship with our media and are proud of the services we provide for them. The media portal is an extension of that, which is why we want to keep moving forward and making it the best resource we can."

—Leslie Hammond
Director of Media Services
National Football League

Key Components

Software

- IBM WebSphere Portal Server
- IBM WebSphere Information Integrator OmniFind Edition
- IBM WebSphere Application Server Network Deployment
- IBM WebSphere Portlet Factory Designer
- IBM Workplace Web Content Management
- IBM Rational® Application Developer
- IBM Rational Performance Tester

Hardware

- IBM LS21 AMD Opteron Blade Server for IBM BladeCenter®
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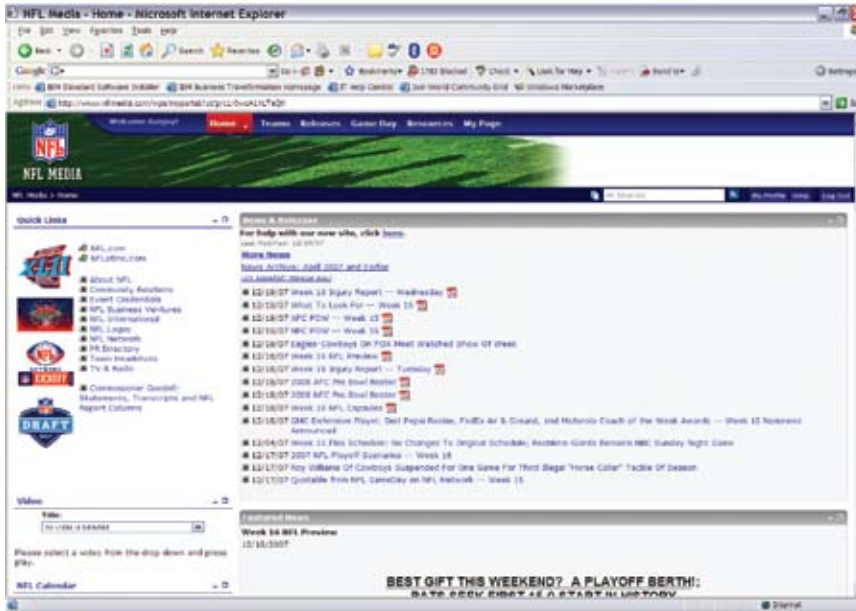
With offices in New York, New Jersey and Los Angeles, the NFL provides central services for producing and promoting the game of professional football and supporting the league's teams. Various departments are dedicated to working with broadcasters, game officials, sponsors, fans, product sales, the national media and other industry leaders, as well as with teams and players. The league offices manage huge amounts of information, much of which must be made available to these external constituencies.

The goal of improved information services generates a game plan

Extensive game and team information is made available externally to fans and others via the NFL's official Web site as well as individual team Web sites. In 1997, the NFL was the first sports league to develop a media-only site. Ten years later, with the same technology still in place, the media site and other external sites had become dated while users had become more experienced and used to more sophisticated Web capabilities. It was time for a change.

With the help of Gemini Systems, an IBM Premium Business Partner, the NFL embarked on a comprehensive needs analysis to determine how best to serve the diverse information needs of its staff and industry partners. As part of the process, the league underwent an IBM Business Value Assessment (BVA) for Portals and a Day-in-the Life Demo to see where in the business a portal could add value and how it could support different functions.

At the end of its decision process, the NFL determined it wanted a robust extranet portal platform capable of supporting multiple custom portals. The end goal was to provide portal entries to the extranet customized for various industry partners, where they could find the content, information and applications relevant to their needs and tailored for their unique consumption. Secure and robust infrastructure as well as scalable design and administrative flexibility were defined as key requirements to allow for continuous growth of the user base and the volume of content.



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*–Joe Manto
VP of Business Services
and User Support
National Football League*

The NFL selected IBM WebSphere Portal as the platform for its new extranet portal. “We decided in favor of WebSphere Portal to take advantage of the years of experience behind it and the number of companies that can support it,” says Joe Manto, VP of business services and user support for the NFL. The choice was also influenced by the NFL’s prior good experience and success with other IBM technologies, the excellent services and counsel provided by Gemini and specific faith in the WebSphere Portal product based on its market leadership.

NFLMedia.com provides information hub for the media

With a scalable infrastructure in place, the NFL was in a position to meet its PR organization’s need for a first custom portal while simultaneously planning for more custom portals in future. It chose a media portal as the first site to be rebuilt on the new extranet portal platform. Three primary goals were identified: First, provide one-stop-shopping for concise, intuitive, searchable and immediately consumable league, game and team information that would help reporters write better stories quickly. Second, establish a system permitting better Web-based content administration, reuse and scalability. And third, lay the groundwork for future custom portals.

The portal redesign incorporates many user suggestions and some newer capabilities they have come to expect such as video, content archiving and history. Personalization is also an important new capability.

The NFL polled media partners prior to development of the new portal to elicit their wants and suggestions. Gemini played a key role in defining the business and system requirements, designing the technical and system architecture and rolling out the system. The portal redesign incorporates many user suggestions and some newer capabilities they have come to expect such as video, content archiving and history. Personalization is also an important new capability. In the past, everyone came on to the site with just a shared login; now, each user has their own login and user profile that specifies their role, location and the team they cover. This makes it possible to provide custom views of information tailored to the user for greater convenience.

The portal provides access to every possible type of information of interest to the media, yet organization and custom sorting make things easy to find. The NFLMedia.com home page features current news and press releases with a link to the archives, the current league standings and links to related entities and Web sites. There is also information on prominent events in the time period, history and policies of the NFL, press credentialing for games, calendars and schedules, community relations activities, league statements and transcripts and officiating and rules change videos.

A Teams Page provides weekly releases, transcripts, statistics and game books for each of the 32 NFL teams. There are team media guides and links to all of the teams' own Web sites. There are also links to Team Media Only sites, where registered members of the media can access custom views of information specific to the team they support.

A Release Page provides game capsules and other NFL releases. A Game Day Page provides all the available information about games being played on any given date. The Resource Page offers encyclopedic information about the NFL's history, policies and extended activities, as well as a directory for the NFL Communications Department and Team Public Relations (PR) Contacts. In addition to all the above, there is an e-mail link for sending inquiries to the NFL's league offices.

Improved content management simplifies site administration

All the information that populates the media site is funneled through the league's PR department, which is responsible for maintaining community, business and interleague relationships. Additionally, information arrives daily from other league departments and the individual teams. There may be five to ten people at a time from the PR department working to transform these inputs into content for the media site. All of these people produce content, though only a few are authorized to publish and update content on the site.

To orchestrate all this activity, the NFL PR team is using IBM Workplace Web Content Management, which is tightly integrated with WebSphere Portal. Surfaced through a set of portlets, this technology enables users to create and edit content from

wherever they are working. Automated workflows coordinate the end-to-end content creation process, from co-authoring and approvals to publication and post-publication management. Actions can be scheduled in advance for specific dates and times, such as for when particular pieces of content will first appear or when they will expire.

Metadata tags guide content reuse and direct the contexts in which content may appear, so that putting a piece of content in one place can make it show up in multiple places throughout the site where it is relevant. Dynamic loading enables assembly of custom views on the fly. For example, if a user wants to see the schedule for week three of the current NFL season, he can set that selection and the pieces of content flagged for that week will come up. Or the user may wish to see all the information concerning a particular game, which of course involves two teams. A compilation of the information pertaining to both teams is then assembled so the user can see everything about that game in one place.

The NFL is also using document management capabilities that are available with some IBM WebSphere Portal offerings, as well as a self-service portlet that comes bundled with WebSphere Portal. A lot of data, such as game schedules, injury reports, team standings and more, is obtained from internal NFL systems through Web services. This data is then brought together with other Web content to create the Game Day page. IBM WebSphere Portlet Factory was used to develop these custom portlets and inter-portal communications that bridge system-to-system processes for capture and retention of data and data exchange.

The integration of Web and document managers within the NFL media portal enables better re-use of documents, such as allowing the same content to be rendered as a news story or as a downloadable PDF file. The capability to search all content—irrespective of its original storage location—is enabled by use of OmniFind™ as the back-end search engine. All information is disseminated in accordance with access controls defined in Microsoft® Active Directory®, which is integrated into WebSphere Portal through the Member Manager tool.

Sophisticated portal promotes efficiency and goodwill

The new NFL media portal provides more content in new ways, with tools that make it easier to manage and viewing capabilities that make it easier to use. Higher efficiency increases productivity. In addition to the efficiencies achieved by automated workflows for creating and managing content, the NFL PR staff—many of whom travel—appreciate being able to make content updates to the portal at any time, from wherever they are, via the Web. They are not bound to software installed on a particular machine, which helps reduce the chance of forced delays in posting late-breaking news. Another productivity boon is being able to post content once and automatically populate multiple locations with the same content. This helps reduce the number of postings required and the number of links to be set up.

The media users also benefit from new efficiencies, such as streamlined access to the portal. They can register via a self-service portlet without waiting for someone else to set up an account and password; a tight approval process on the NFL side gets them up and running quickly. Once the media member accesses the portal, everything they could want is readily available to help them craft their stories from any angle. When covering a game, they can see all the information associated with that game and both teams in one place—from injury reports to links to the local press in the teams' cities, as well as recent and archived information.

Making the portal such a media-friendly environment fosters goodwill. The information is accurate, timely and in usable form. The users know that releases and statements they get from NFLMedia.com are up-to-date, so they can convey this information to their newspapers, Web sites or other media outlets with confidence.

Although the media portal is new, it is already being heavily used. About 3,500 users signed up to use it within the first month, and with the football season in progress, it is carrying heavy loads. Users are embracing the portal, engaging as “co-owners” of the site and coming up with suggestions for making it even better. As Hammond puts it, “We have a very good relationship with our media and we are proud of the services we provide for them. The media portal is an extension of that, which is why we want to keep moving forward and making it the best resource we can.”

Media portal groundwork will help speed creation of other custom sites

The media portal was launched at the beginning of the 2007 NFL season and will be used for the entire 2007 season as well as in preparation for Super Bowl XLII and beyond. It laid the groundwork that developers of subsequent custom portals can leverage to speed their tasks and lower development costs.



The NFL intends to support its other partner relationships through the portal platform and will migrate its existing sites to the portal in the future. This will standardize the experience people have coming into the NFL environment, with a common entry point offering alternate paths to custom sites. Current plans include portals for broadcast operations partners, NFL players, and NFL business partners such as licensees and retailers. With its extranet portal in place and its current and planned custom sites, the NFL is on track to provide the best possible information services to its industry partners.

For more information

For more information on WebSphere Portal, please contact your IBM sales representative or IBM Business Partner, or visit ibm.com/software/websphere/portal

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¹ Highest attendance: see wikipedia.org/wiki/NFL

² Lowry, Tom. "The NFL Machine." *BusinessWeek*, January 27, 2003. www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/03_04/b3817001.htm

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