

ADVERTISE

REPRINTS

CONTACT US

RECORDS

CLASSIFIEDS

Search B&T's Real Estate Records Online

Type in an address, name, lender or property details ...

ESTABLISHED 1872

BANKER & TRADESMAN

THE REAL ESTATE, BANKING AND COMMERCIAL WEEKLY FOR MASSACHUSETTS *Online*

Issue of April 25, 2005

YOUR ACCOUNT

SEARCH

ADVANCED SEARCH

NEWS

- Front Page
- The Teller
- Editorial and Opinion
- Profile in Commerce
- Banking & Lending
- Breaking News
- Commercial & Industrial
- Residential Real Estate
- By the Numbers
- People
- Work in Progress
- Real Estate Records
- Credit Records

NATIONAL NEWS

SUPPLEMENTS

BROWSE

- Back Issues
- Records
- Classifieds
- Other Publications

SERVICES

- Advertising Info
- Article Reprints
- Contact Us
- Editorial Calendar
- Newsstand Locations

A PUBLICATION OF



Editorial and Opinion

Online Functionality Adds Up to Happy Clients, Big Returns

By Ann Westerheim

Working together, office technology and Web site applications can enhance your business, create customer-fans and enable you to level the playing field with larger competitors.

For today's financial services provider, taking a step back and strategizing to develop a technology plan that integrates office technologies and Web site applications can really pay off in a variety of ways.

In the Office In order to create a functional Web site that can extend one's business, a company also needs the in-office technology to back up and support that digital online business "extension." Office technology can work hand-in-hand with one's Web site to integrate business efforts, create increased work volumes and dramatically shrink business processes time for clients.

Take for example Emerson Lending (www.emersonlending.net), a residential mortgage company in Massachusetts. Emerson's president Bill Nickerson made some strategic decisions about technology. "I wanted to increase productivity so our employees could focus on what's most important to us here – the client. Client service is our No. 1 priority. We wanted to make it easy for clients to do business with us," he said.

Over a period of 12 months Nickerson worked with Ekaru to add a number of technology improvements to his suite of offices in Acton. One centrally important upgrade was a high-speed Internet connection (T1 line) for fast online access to his external lending partners, clients and business associates. The Internet line also included a router and firewall to protect internal systems from unauthorized access.

All Emerson's desktop systems and laptops have access to the Internet (and each other), as well as other network resources through a switched Ethernet network. The PCs and laptops also all have antivirus software to ensure security from any external threats or viruses that make it through the firewall. The notebooks also have wireless encryption software included for channel security.

Emerson also has a Windows 2003 Server for data storage and management. The server includes an ACT application database for client data, a QuickBooks database for financial data and a centrally managed corporate edition of Symantec's antivirus software (with the latest virus definitions automatically updated and deployed to all Emerson PCs via the



ANN WESTERHEIM is president of Ekaru LLC (www.ekaru.com), a strategic hands-on technology services firm in Westford. She can be reached at awesterheim@ekaru.com.



Construction Recruiters

Building the Companies that Build Boston.

We have your next...
Proj. Exec. Estimator
MEP PM
Site Super Engineer
Architect Biz. Dev.

242 E. Berkley Street
5th Floor
Boston, MA 02118
617.422.0888

info@constructionrecruiters.com

Internet on a frequent basis). The server, with managed access to information for authorized users, runs daily backups of all databases and user documents to an off-site location. Additionally, a Virtual Private Network, or VPN, provides secure remote access to data on the network from any location that has Internet connectivity.

On the Web

All the necessary office technology is extended to the Emerson Web site for customer convenience. Today the Web site is more than just a digital brochure of services for the company. It's an extension of Emerson's business, offering online calculators to determine prequalification amounts, monthly payments and payment schedules, as well as providing applications for loans and lines of credit.

Emerson's online applications enhance its business offerings and provide great customer service for clients. These applications are accessible on the Web 24 hours a day, seven days a week, whenever customers need help.

These "always available" capabilities enable Emerson or a company of any size to provide products and services on a par with their largest competitors. They also enable companies, such as Emerson Lending, to increase the volume of business handled without overburdening staff.

"There are a number of terrific features in our online loan application process," said Nickerson. "First of all, it's available to our clients any hour of the day or night – all the time. So whenever they need to apply, we're there for them. Also, all sensitive information is securely transmitted to us, propagated into our Calyx application and then sent to our loan investor partners."

For instance, a client saw a house he liked on a Sunday and wanted to bid on it. However, other bids were coming in that day and the client had not been qualified for a loan. Later that Sunday he called Nickerson, who was able to direct him to Emerson Lending's Web site to fill out the online loan application. Nickerson was then able to download the information remotely into Calyx through a wireless link from his laptop and send the information on to one of Emerson's lender partners. On Monday morning just after getting to work, the client learned that he had been qualified for a loan. He was able to put an offer in on the house by Monday afternoon.

"Taking the step to extend our capabilities online has helped our business," added Nickerson. "Ekaru's recommendations have helped us increase business, and because it's so easy to use our services, we've created not just more Emerson Lending clients, but more Emerson Lending fans."

Strong office technology supporting functional applications online provides a terrific return on investment. It can improve the quality of your services, expand the volume of your business – often without increasing your size – enable you to compete with the largest of players in your niche and, through the convenience of laptops and secure wireless connections, enhance the quality of life for you and your employees.

Do you have a comment about this story?

Send a letter to the editor.



E-Mail This Article



Printer-Friendly Version