

# **The Communication Conundrum:** How to choose the Right Automated Notification Solution



Whitepaper

# The Communication Conundrum



In today's global marketplace, businesses are becoming larger and more geographically diverse. According to [Nemertes Research](#), approximately 90 percent of employees work in locations other than their company's headquarters, and as many as 70 percent of staff members reside in different offices than their supervisors. This trend has made fast, effective, fully optimized communication across the entire enterprise increasingly challenging.

Many companies rely on email as the primary form of distributing critical corporate information. But, network failures, SPAM filters, and overcrowded inboxes have made this method highly unreliable when it comes to ensuring instant delivery and receipt of vital, time-sensitive messages.

**"Organizations average more than six communication devices and five related applications per employee. But, these methods still result in significant delays."**

**Sage**

Other companies utilize a variety of other technologies such as IM/text chat, Web and video conferencing, cell phones, and PDAs to distribute announcements. In fact, a [Sage Research study](#) shows that organizations average more than six communication devices and five related applications per employee. But, these methods still result in significant delays. According to that same Sage report, 22 percent of companies polled experience critical communication delays at least once a month, while 13 percent are faced with them on a weekly basis.

Additionally, the use of numerous different information delivery devices can lead to inconsistencies and inaccuracies that can negatively impact productivity and hinder business performance.

Every organization fully understands that swift and timely communication is crucial to their ability to achieve the kind of agility needed to gain a competitive edge. But, as messages, and the way they are delivered, have become more complex, "companies still have difficulties contacting key decision-makers in a timely fashion", claims leading industry analyst firm [Forrester Research](#).

So, the true communication conundrum is this – how can a business make mission-critical information such as important announcements, current sales campaigns and promotions, product updates, breaking company news, emergency notifications, appointments, and other events readily and instantly available to their employees, business partners, and other stakeholders?

# Automated Desktop Alert Systems: Why You Need Them



An emergency has occurred, and requires immediate action from your staff members. A critical business system has gone down and will not be up and running again for several hours. Important company news that will impact people across the business has just been announced.

How do you distribute that vital information throughout your entire organization in a matter of seconds?


Email, phone, and other traditional methods are slow and ineffective, delaying the delivery of mission-critical and often time-sensitive business information. But, a variety of automated

software solutions are now available to organizations, helping them to instantly “push” vital information to virtually anyone, anywhere, at any time. With these powerful technology applications, companies can:

- Take a more proactive approach to internal and external communications by dynamically distributing critical messages to employees, as well as suppliers, vendors, and other strategic partners.
- Make sure urgent correspondence gets immediate attention.
- Boost staff productivity by reducing calls to IT help desks, emergency networks, and other employee support groups.
- Get instant feedback by distributing surveys and polls, and collecting results within minutes.
- Ensure instantaneous communication across multiple locations and branch offices, even when email systems are down.

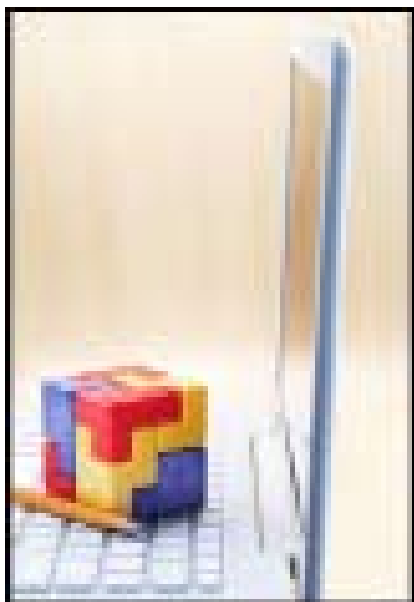
These automated alert systems facilitate a wide array of important internal business communications in real-time, increasing agility and collaboration across the entire enterprise. For example:

- **Human resources departments** can instantly notify employees of last minute office closures and other events, or easily “poll” employees to quickly gather the information they need to develop the most effective recruitment, retention, and training programs.
- **Marketing teams** can keep employees fully informed about the latest campaigns and promotions.
- **Help desks** can alert employees when systems go down, when applications will be unavailable due to schedule maintenance, and when technical issues have been resolved.

- 
- **Senior managers** can ensure that staff members are fully aware of important company news, as it breaks.

Without an automated desktop notification system in place, a company's ability to communicate and share information in real-time is at risk. And, when key stakeholders don't receive the alerts and data they need, when they need it, their performance – and that of the company – is put in serious jeopardy.

# Choosing the Right Automated Notification Solution



Once you realize you need an automated notification system, you're faced with the harrowing task of researching the various vendors and solutions on the market, and determining which one is the best for your business. But, not all available desktop alert applications are created equal, so you'll need to evaluate carefully to be sure you're getting the power, performance, and capabilities you require.

Some of the key features and functions to look for include:

## **Maximum message impact, with minimum disruptions**

The primary purpose of any automated alert system is to make sure that people get the information they need, whenever they need it. Therefore, the solution you choose should deliver messages in a way that is highly noticeable and difficult to skip or ignore. At the same time, these notifications should be non-obtrusive, ensuring that vital information is delivered to employees, without causing major interruptions to productivity or affecting other applications on their desktop.

## **End-to-end automation**

While simple notifications created by other staff members are always important, it is the ability to instantaneously and automatically distribute any type of mission-critical information – to any one, at any time – that provides true business value. Look for an application that can:

- Dynamically distribute information from a variety of sources, including RSS feeds, message queues, or third-party software packages.
- Send alerts through a variety of channels such as PCs, mobile devices, and popular toolbar platforms, so users can receive information regardless of their location.

## **Seamless integration**

In order to avoid the long, complex deployment cycles that drain IT staff resources and distract from other critical corporate technology initiatives, it is recommended that the automated notification system you select have the ability to plug seamlessly into your existing network infrastructure or technology architecture. Additionally, consider selecting a solution that can link directly to a variety of third-party software systems, such as portals;



customer relationship management (CRM), sales force automation (SFA) and enterprise resources planning (ERP) systems; or help desk applications, so important information from these sources can be easily included in alerts whenever needed.

### **Full support for Active Directory**

Like many companies, you likely rely on Active Directory (AD) to increase the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of your system authentication and authorization activities. In order to continue leveraging the benefits you've already

achieved, you may want to choose a solution that offers full AD support, including the ability to easily import users and user groups without any negative impact to their properties, as well as support for multiple domains and continuous synchronization between AD structures and the structures of the desktop alert system. With these features, you can centralize and dramatically simplify enterprise administration, eliminating the need to manage users separately in the alert system by allowing staff to control their attributes directly through Active Directory.

### **Advanced styling and multimedia capabilities**


Studies clearly show that messages that utilize multimedia elements are more likely to be read, and the content they contain is more likely to be remembered. For example, the [\*Online Publishers Association\*](#) claims that 44 percent of people react to a specific "call to action" when it contains video. And, [\*research conducted by author and multimedia expert Richard Mayer\*](#) proved that retention increased by as much as 89 percent when the information at hand was enhanced with multimedia.

Therefore, the solution you choose should empower you to make your alerts as eye-catching and interesting as possible to maximize message impact. Look for one that allows you to adjust colors, fonts, and other style elements, and enables you to incorporate images, video, audio, documents, presentations, and other multi-media techniques.

### **Ease of use and administration**

Automated desktop alert solutions that are time-consuming to manage can force end users to rely too heavily on already overburdened IT resources. Additionally, if they are difficult to use they can prohibit widespread user adoption and minimize return on investment. Therefore, the system you choose should:

- Provide an intuitive interface that makes it easy for even non-technical users to access and navigate the various features and functions
- Require little or no training, eliminating the time and costs associated



with teaching your employees how to navigate complex software

- Offer network-centricity, providing centralized control and administration from a single site
- Provide Web-based access, so the system can be utilized anytime, anywhere from any Internet-enabled location, and users can work in an environment that is both familiar and comfortable

### **Scalability**

Because needs evolve as time goes on, it is recommended that you look for a solution that offers the flexibility and scalability to support future growth, so you can derive maximum value over the solution's lifetime.

Before you begin evaluating solutions, discuss communication needs with various departments across your company, including help desk and technical support groups, human resources, sales and marketing, and senior managers. Ask them how they plan to use the system now, and if/how they expect their requirements to change in the future. This will help make it easier for you to choose a solution that can support your most vital communication needs now, and quickly adapt as your requirements change and grow in the future.

### **Advanced security**

Many alerts contain corporate information that is highly sensitive and confidential. So, the integrity of message content must be fully preserved at all times. Look for a vendor that offers advanced security features such as:

- Complete encryption of all alerts as they are transmitted, to prevent message information from falling into the wrong hands
- Centralized data storage, to give administrators the greatest control over the system, its messages, and related statistics


### **End-to-end message tracking**

The ability to know which messages were sent, received, read, ignored, or responded to is vital to any fail-safe enterprise-wide communication strategy. Look for a solution that provides comprehensive tracking of each individual message, so you know which information was received by its intended audience, and which alerts may need to be re-distributed. Statistics such as open rates and subscribers are also important, because they help identify important alert-related trends and provide the intelligence needed to alter future communications to ensure maximum effectiveness.

### **Centralized storage**

The desktop alert solution you select should offer fully-centralized storage of all application-related information, including messages, message drafts, users, user privileges, and related actions. This will not only simplify administration and optimize system performance, it will also eliminate down time by allowing





you to implement a fast and effective migration and back-up strategy in the event of a system outage.

### **Customizability**

For many companies, branding is an important initiative both internally and externally. And, ensuring that all correspondence – whether it is delivered to customers, partners, or employees – has the same “look and feel” and conveys the same corporate image is vital to any branding strategy.

If your business wants to ensure consistency across all communications, then you’ll want to choose a desktop notification system that allows you to easily customize your alerts with logos, icons, color schemes, and other styling elements. So, your messages can maintain and enforce your unique image at all times, regardless of who they are delivered to.



# Third-Party or Self-Hosted: Which Is Better?



Automated alert solutions are available via two deployment models:

- Self-hosted solutions, also known as on-site or on-premise applications, which are installed and managed at the company's own location, by its own internal IT staff.
- Third-party hosted solutions, also known as software as a service (SaaS), in which the application is "rented" from a provider, who deploys and administrates all needed hardware and software at their own site, and makes it available to paid subscribers via the Web.

Many companies choose third-party solutions, because they lack the internal resources needed to effectively support an automated desktop notification system, or want to minimize the impact on their budget by spreading the cost of the application out over

several months or years. There are many benefits associated with third-party hosted solutions, including:

- **Accelerated deployment.** With SaaS-based applications, the hardware and software has already been implemented at the third-party provider's site. Therefore, clients can get up-and-running almost instantly.
- **Reduced IT burden.** Because all required system components are housed and maintained at the hosting provider's site, IT staff members are not responsible for ongoing administration of the system.
- **Lower upfront costs.** Unlike on-site applications, hosted solutions usually require little or no upfront expenditures, so their initial impact on budgets is dramatically reduced, and costs are spread out as the system is utilized.

On the other hand, there are a few drawbacks to the SaaS method, such as:

- **Lack of control.** Companies who utilize third-party hosted software relinquish a certain amount of control over the application and its data. They must trust their service provider to conduct routine system maintenance, perform scheduled upgrades, and maintain optimum data center conditions.
- **Security concerns.** Most – but not all – third-party hosting providers take security very seriously, and have implemented advanced techniques and technologies to protect their clients' data. If you choose a SaaS-based applica-



tion, be sure your provider has stringent security measures in place.

- **Lack of integration.** Third-party hosted solutions cannot be integrated with the other business systems within your existing technology environment, making information-sharing between applications a challenge. This becomes a critical issue where Active Directory is concerned, since the ability to seamlessly link AD to your desktop alert system is required to maximize efficiency and minimize administration.

On-premise solutions offer greater control and tighter security, as well as the ability to connect to other systems in the environment. Additionally, they typically offer a lower total cost of ownership over the life of the application. Yet, there are “cons” to this method as well. For example, initial deployments and ongoing maintenance can strain already overworked IT staff. And, they usually must be paid for before installation, and therefore require large upfront expenditures.

So, which deployment model is better?

The answer is neither. Each approach has its pros and cons, and which one will provide greater value will differ greatly from company to company, depending upon objectives, needs and available resources. While SaaS may be the better option for one smaller organization, because they have limited financial and IT resources, an on-premise solution may better address the requirements of a larger enterprise with complex integration needs.



SpreadHub Enterprise by ArtOfWeb is a powerful one-way desktop notification system designed to help companies communicate more rapidly, effectively, and cost-efficiently than ever before. Through its broad range of features and functionality, SpreadHub Enterprise provides the ability to:

- Rapidly create alerts using pre-loaded message templates
- Generate fully-customized and personalized alerts
- Incorporate Flash, text, images, audio, and video for compelling, eye-catching message content
- Track messages, receipts, responses, and other statistics for fail-safe communications
- Centralize storage of all sent alerts and related historical information
- Distribute alerts to mobile devices such as cell phones, Palm Pilots, and Windows Pocket PCs
- Incorporate data from RSS feeds into notifications
- Schedule messages for distribution at pre-determined dates, times, or intervals

SpreadHub also available as SaaS.



ArtOfWeb Inc  
Ohotskaya street, 73  
Novosibirsk, Russia 630040  
tel.: +7 913-9865104

mailto: [sales@spreadhub.com](mailto:sales@spreadhub.com)  
<http://www.spreadhub.com>