Providing the 90 Percent Solution
By Scott Vanderlip, President, Internet Software Sciences

Overview

Web+Center is primarily designed to be an "out of the box" web-based help desk and sales CRM solution. Most of our clients use the software in this configuration with perhaps minimal configuration adjustments that can be made through the web-based administrative options. But other users will have some unique aspect in their operations or business flow that can only be handled by a customized solution. In this case, Web+Center provides an Open Source **"90 percent"** solution.

Same result, different processes

Although many of our customers seek the same end-results (providing external/internal IT support, external customer support, etc.) each organization often has unique processes to complete their business and operations. One of the key strengths of the Web+Center application is the open source, open database design architecture and the easy customization options of the application. Unlike many applications where the designs and programmatic changes are hidden or difficult, the Web+Center application is designed to be easily and extensively customized by users to exactly fit their unique organizational processes.

The Web+Center application originally was written in a compiled C++ (ASAPI) environment for the first few releases. After repeated requests for customizations by users, and after researching other web scripting environments, we migrated the entire application to a ASP/Visual Basic - Active Server Pages open sourced web scripting environment. The only component where we retained the compiled C++ environment is in our license key mechansim, which is only used when creating new tech accounts to check for license compliance. This ASP development environment is fast, user friendly, and easy to customize with minimal programming experience. The ASP/VB development environment comes standard with MS Internet Information Server (IIS) and it is also compatible with ASP engine from Sun ONE running Linux that we also support. Our programmer's guide includes some references and tutorials on ASP programming language.

Building from the Web+Center Components

Version 5.0 and up now includes functionality that extends well beyond basic IT support and trouble ticket tracking. The Web+Center suite includes 4 applications (Tech+Center, Business+Center, Customer+Center, and Pocket+Center). Each application is filled with numerous functions that can be the basis of a very customized business or organizational mission critical system.

The Business+Center application includes a mini and configurable "accounting" and invoicing/quotes component to handle business functions like product sales as well as sales forecasting. The Tech+Center and Pocket+Center applications have complete and configurable asset tracking, reporting and barcoding functions. The Tech+Center and Customer+Center applications have special knowledge base keyword mapping and search options. The Business+Center has a user group email function to send out personalized HTML user group emails. These components and others can often be combined together in a single customized application to solve multiple support and operational requirements for a company with a single application.

An Example - Using all of the components

Many smaller manufacturing/product companies still do not fully utilitize the web and web-based tools as a way to enter and share information internally and externally effectively. Some companies are using our application to solve multiple business requirements with a single application. Possible Options include:

- <u>Tracking inventory</u> - both for manufacturing processes and sales assignment to customers and returns and repairs using the Asset Management component
- <u>Centralized Customer Database</u> - Web-based customer database allows sales, support and accounting to share a common, accurate database
- <u>Support/Sales/Design Feedback</u> - Returns, repairs, design and feedback can be more formally and efficiently dispatched and processed with the Tech+Center Help Desk
- <u>Self Help for customers</u> - External customer support with FAQ's, searchable knowledge base and methods for customers to create support or other requests
- <u>Barcoding and tracking of inventory</u> - The Pocket+Center and built in barcode scanners on Pocket PC's allow for product/asset tracking for uses throughout the product life cycle.
- <u>Track and record events</u> - Important information and accountability is often lost or unrecoverable when important dialogs, discussions and designs are recorded in emails rather than in a centralized, database driven, searchable knowledge base.
- <u>Customer Feeddback</u> - Clear and accurate feedback using the customer survey builder and reports.
- <u>Tracking customer support resources</u> - With the extended time spent reporting and invoicing/ billing component, support resources can be properly tracked and billed back to customers.

Creating all of these functions from scratch would be time consuming and costly. The Web+Center application and its code base provide a very complete and stable platform from which to develop a custom business process solution.

Conclusion
Although the Web+Center application is primarily designed and used as an "out-of-the-box" IT Help Desk solution, the code design, database architecture, development environment, and documentation have all been designed for the user who wishes to customize it for any set of business operations. We encourage users to explore the customizations options to fully utilitize the Web+Center suite for their organization.

About the Author
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About Internet Softare Sciences
Internet Software Sciences develops and markets Web+Center, a suite of open source, web-based help desk applications that run onsite or in the cloud and that support all browser-based devices, including PCs, Macs, smart phones and tablets. With access to 100% of the source code, organizations can create the ideal customized solution for their unique business needs for applications such as IT help desk, customer support, asset tracking and facilities management. Community colleges, hospitals, small businesses, non-profits and government organizations love Web+Center's rich feature set and ease of use. A full version of the suite is free for up to 2 techs and does not time out, nor is limited by the number of customers or cases.

The Web+Center product suite can be evaluated on-line or downloaded from the Internet Software Sciences website at: http://www.inet-sciences.com