Title:
Bringing Architects and Their Partners Together: The Power of a Secure Extranet

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Summary:
Summary: Architectural firms have increasingly been using extranets to send and receive documents in a secure environment.

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extranet, document sharing

Article Body:
An extranet is a private network within which document sharing can take place by specific groups of users outside the organization through a network administrator. An organization may allow authorized customers and partner's access to the system after verifying the usernames and passwords.

The extranet: Enhanced document sharing and collaboration

Architectural firms have increasingly been using extranet to send and receive documents in a secure environment. All the relevant information about a particular project can be made available to all the individuals who are part of the project, be it the clients or other partners in the venture. Construction companies can access the CAD drawings and plans immediately, without much waiting. It also enhances the relationship with the clients who can receive the relevant documents and send their approvals accordingly.

Outsourcing Extranet Services

Some firms have not shown interest in implementation of the extranet because of the complexity involved and the high cost of installation and maintenance. It requires purchase of equipment, the necessary hardware and software for its implementation and training to maintain the system. However, there are hosting companies to whom the implementation and maintenance of the extranet can be outsourced. These hosting companies, also called application service providers (ASPs) not only provide the technical support, they also provide all the security measures required to keep the data secure. An architectural firm need not worry about the purchase and installation of any hardware or software installation or setup. The hosting company also provides maintenance and

training to the staff. The firm just requires paying a fee to the application service provider for all the services it renders.

Advantages of an extranet

Extranets allows all the team members working on the project, be it the employees, vendors, suppliers or clients to share the design plans, documents and hence collaborate online. This aids in a better customer service and prevents unnecessary lengthening of project schedules. A lot of money is invested in any architectural venture and all the delays lead to substantial amount of money going down the drain. An extranet gives a platform to the workers to perform multi- site collaborations. Since all the data exchanges take place in real time, there are chances of less rework. With the usage of extranets increasing, special software packages have been developed specifically for the architectural firms. They support project management, e-mail management, accounting and scheduling. An extranet not only enhances the process of decision-making but also improves the relationship among clients and partners.