

Virtual Office Technology: Easy way gets your business online

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Abstract

Why small and medium businesses have turned to virtual office technology? This all because of virtual office technology required very low investment cost and its affordable technology solution that can obtain more competitive advantages by making your businesses run online in more efficiently.

The virtual office must offer secure identification single sign on to access all services. The major services offer are included, secure online internet file sharing, businesses web hosting & secure email services, online announcement / alert , online contact list and calendar, SMS or messaging system and finally track data inside virtual workspace with your business partner, customer, suppliers and contractors.

The useful and impact of the virtual office are everybody can work anywhere, anytime with their laptop and internet connection.

Introduction

The Internet made business happened to customer electronically, 7 days a week, 24 hours a day, and cross geographical boundaries. It also offers a cost-effective means for organization to reach overseas markets with the need to incur extra costs on staffing. The organization also can used the internet as a mean of redefining their business, creating new products, fining new distribution channels and creating new market, and business become the fastest-growing segment on internet. More tangible products (for examples, books, CDs, etc) were among the most popular on the Internet, but less tangible products from service-based industry (for examples, travel industry, online banking/financial industry, education and training industry and etc) were also becoming readily available on the Internet.

The impact of the drivers and growth business over the Internet, there are various business models to generate revenues and to earning more profits. Most popular Internet business models to consumers; E-shops, which on-line store that sells and support products and services (e.g. amazon.com). E-Malls, which consists of a group of e-Shop, usually by a common umbrella like AOL Shopping Channel (<http://shopping.aol.com/main>). E-Auctions, is an electronic implementation of the bidding mechanism on the Internet

Do you really know how many worldwide Internet users are online? The World Internet Usage Statistics [6] report were updated March 31, 2006 total world Internet users online are **1,022,863,307**

and world population 2006 estimate are **6,499,697,060**. Pie chart below shown top ten language used in the Internet, which English user were about **30.6%**, Asian users (mostly Chinese, Japanese and Korea) were about **24.8%**, Europeans users (mostly Spanish, German, French, Portuguese and Italian) were about **23.5%**, Russian were about **2.3%** and other is the rest of world language [6].

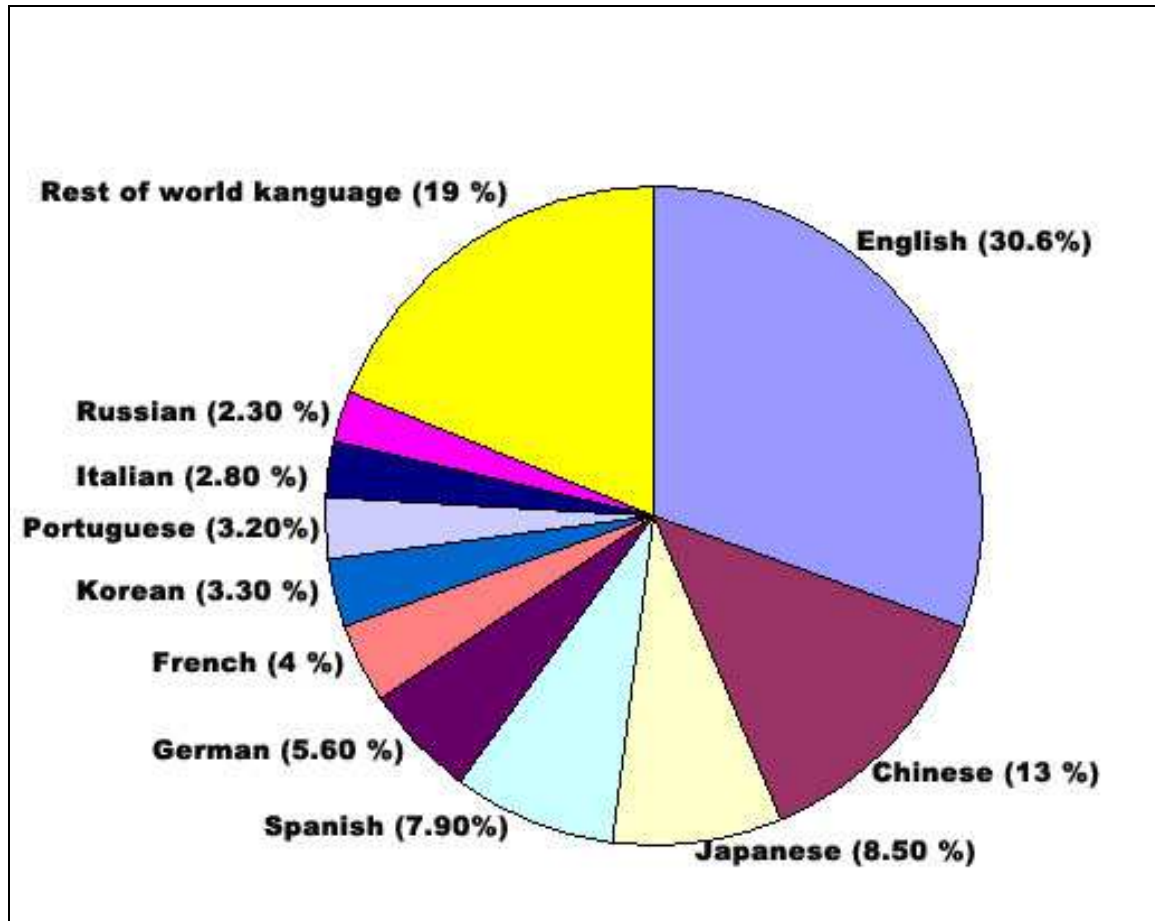


Figure 1: *Top Ten World Internet user by Language*

Top Ten Language Used in The Web (Number of Internet Users by Language)					
Top ten Language In the Internet	Internet Users, by Language	% of all Internet Users	World Population 2006 Estimate for Language	Internet Penetration by Language	Internet Growth for Language (2000 – 2005)
English	312,757,646	30.6%	1,125,664,397	27.8%	128.0%
Chinese	132,301,513	13.0%	1,340,767,863	9.9%	309.6%
Japanese	86,300,000	8.5%	128,389,000	67.2%	83.3%
Spanish	80,593,698	7.9%	429,293,261	18.8%	229.2%
German	56,863,104	5.6%	95,982,043	59.2%	106.0%
French	40,974,004	4.0%	381,193,149	10.7%	235.9%
Korean	33,900,000	3.3%	73,945,860	45.8%	78.0%
Portuguese	32,372,000	3.2%	230,846,275	14.0%	327.3%
Italian	28,870,000	2.8%	59,115,261	48.8%	118.7%
Russian	23,700,000	2.3%	143,682,757	16.5%	664.5%
Top Ten Languages	828,621,965	81.0%	4,008,879,867	20.7%	156.0%
Rest of world Language	194,241,342	19.0%	2,490,817,193	7.8%	421.6%
World Total	1,022,863,307	100.0%	6,499,697,060	15.7%	183.4%

Table 1: *Top Ten Language used in the web*

According to the Computer Industry Almanac Inc, Internet Usage Stats and Marketing Report, Malaysia Internet users reach **10,040,000** March/2005, **36.7%** of the population compare with year 2000 Internet users only **3,700,000**, **15%** of the population. [7]

SMEs/SME in Malaysia majority involve in manufacturing and services sector. In General, the problem facing by SMEs are access to world wide market, access to finance, very low level of technology, lack of labour and skilled manpower and operating on non-designated zones.

What is the challenges confronting SMEs? There are increasing global competition resulting from trade liberalization measures; AFTA, WTO, Bilateral FTAs. Emergence of new technologies and the lack of capacity to absorb new technologies in the manufacturing and management processes. Development in ICT, Internet, e-commerce and impact on global production system. Increase in factor costs and the impact of the entrant of new economies with surplus labour into market system.

What is Virtual Office?

Virtual office can be defined as an integrated suite of commercialized business Internet applications and services, it's always easy to access the services via any Internet connection, any place, any time, 7 days a week and 24 Hours a day. The virtual office can be accessed via any devices that have an internet connection, such as personal desktop computer, laptop computer, PDA, pocket PC and phone.

The software and hardware needed to make virtual office work is very simple, you might need only a computer with internet connection and web browser. If your work involves traveling and away from home/office location, you may consider buying a laptop computer, otherwise you can just get a traditional desktop computer system.

Other equipment (you might use the existing equipment if you have) and hardware are optional you might consider to include are:

- A printer, if you need to print any document, chart, report, photo and etc.
- A scanner, if you need to scan documents or photos.
- A CD writer, if you want to backup your data yourself but the virtual office also provided auto backup the data / file which you store and save at the virtual office server.
- Web camera, if you want to have a video conference chat.
- Microphone, if you want to have voice chat.
- Speaker, if you want to play any voice / music / sound output from your computer. It may be used for multimedia applications.

How the Virtual Office works?

The Virtual Office working model is to provide one stop center for Internet business applications and services. First, you must subscribe to any available Virtual Office services provider to register as a member who will grant you an administrator privilege to configure, use and access to the virtual office services. Normally it takes a short period time to get your membership activated and start enjoying the services.

With your administrator privilege member account, you can use it to create or open any user account based on your subscribe privilege and entitlement. You can do it yourself open a group of employees, colleagues, vendors or anyone else you want to work with. If you have administrator privilege, you decide who joins; determine what to share and who can share what. Anyone who has access to Internet has access to your virtual office; this is very convenient to all the users to benefit all the features and services.

Virtual Office Feature and Services

There are many virtual office service provider, most of them are try to offer as many as possible products features and services to the subscriber. In the paper, we are describes some important virtual office technology features and services which may consider useful to most virtual office user assist them running their daily business.

User must provide correct matching username and password for the purpose of system verification, authentication and authorized. After that, the system will enable all the features and services by referring the user privilege and entitlement. Below will describes in details the major virtual office technology available features and services.



Web Hosting

This service usually offered by Internet Service Provider (ISP) like JARING or web hosting company. This services is providing space on Internet servers for storage of World Wide Web sites or your company web site (e.g. www.yourcompany.com.my) which can be accessed by others internet users through the network connection.

Website management

Allow members to provide a variety of web templates for companies to design their own web sites and establish a presence on the Internet.



WebMail

This is a web application that allows users to access, compose, send, receive, reply, forward email using a web browser like Microsoft Internet Explorer from anywhere in the world. You can send any documents, such as text document, graph, diagram, multimedia files and etc as a attachments to your recipients. Other WebMail features may include are email address book, email template, email signature, anti-virus and anti-spam.



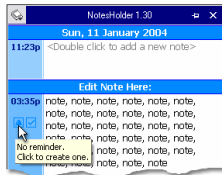
Online Storage

This is the practice of making your files or documents available for other users to share and download over the Internet. You can create a folder which setting the privilege sharing with a group of users. You can enable your private folder which only you can access on it and a share public folder which will share access with your employee, group of user, your vender and any others user you want to share with. You can storage any files and very easy to access direct from you computer also through the web browser.



Calendar

This a great service that able to assist you to keep track of all the events in you daily work, coordinate schedules with your business partner and vendor and also find new thins to do. All this will do with only one online calendar. You can set your calendar as a private & personal view only, otherwise you can enable it to share with your group users to view your events under you public calendar.



Reminders

Usually this feature will come together with the calendar. Always remind users on time for any events including meeting, appointment, birthday and etc. The reminder can displayed by sending email, message, pop-up screen and now can send by sms.



**Online
announcement
/ alert**

Enable publish a formal public statement about something that is happening or going to happen. Usually the announcement will appear in your company main pages.



Contact list

Personal and group contact list, you can pubic your contact list and share with your group of members online. You can also easy retrieve and view other member's contact list.



Bookmarks

Save bookmarks which can be used from any browser, share them with others members.



Track data

The purpose of this is allowing member track the information inside virtual workspace with your business partner, customer, suppliers and contractors. This may be the better way to organize your tasks, manage your tasks, send tasks to other group members and control completion.



Short Message Service (SMS)

Allow company flexible send urgent message to business partner, customer suppliers and contractors. This is a very effective and fastest way to communication between people anytime anywhere in the world.

Why need virtual office?

There are many organizations turned to virtual office, which offers their cross organizational teams and mobile users to work together. Many organization choose virtual office for a lot of reason, here are some of the reasons:

- **Zero or less Investment**
No need to spend on costly servers or expensive software with outsourced hosting. Member only have to pay monthly / yearly subscriber fee.
- **Convenient**
Staff can share and access important contracts, documents and business contacts from an online folder anytime, anywhere, even from overseas.
- **Efficient**
Staff can manage their schedule, meetings and tasks online.
- **Hassle-Free**
Instantly create new users as your company expands. Total numbers of users are based on the subscription eligible.
- **Data Sharing**
The organization team share data and works together on key business processes as if they were all in the same physical location.
- **Customized**
Get your own company email address, both POP and webmail.
e.g. name@companyabc.com. Create your own business website e.g. www.companyabc.com.

Business Case studies

Groove Networks [9] publish business case studies which customer company name MediaThink success story how virtual office technology can help in this organization. MediaThink is an Atlanta-based marketing company that provides strategy and services to small- and mid-sized companies across a number of industries including technology, financial services, hospitality and education. The firm's four full-time employees specialize in consulting, strategy and client management, and work with 12 to 15 independent contractors with expertise in design, research, direct mail, database development and other marketing disciplines.

MediaThink believe virtual office technology has directly impacted his company bottom line. If spend more time in front of our clients and prospects, their business will grow. The only thing that prevents them from doing that is moving information more efficiently. Virtual office technology will help to achieve that, so what are the benefits can provided by virtual office technology:

Time is money. MediaThink estimates that after using virtual office technology help company save about 10 hours per week by not having to do menial tasks, which amounts to about USD 2000 in recovered time.

More time, more clients. With more available capacity gained from virtual office technology, MediaThink consultants are able to serve an additional client that could not have served before, worth about USD75,000 to USD 100,000 per year in new business. Additional, they are able to “move faster” into new client engagements.

MediaThink also claimed that virtual office technology has improved their business from a qualitative standpoint by enabling secure collaboration among their virtual staff:

Less talk, more action. As a small company, speed is critical. Virtual office technology allows MediaThink's consultants and partners to spend less time talking about how work gets done and more time getting it done.

Improved collaboration. At MediaThink, everyone works on every project. Virtual office technology has enabled the four consultants and various partners to communicate, share files and review documents more easily than in the past.

Creative thinking. After seeing how the addition of virtual office technology has improved their operations, the consultants at MediaThink are looking for other ways in which they can be more efficient. That's a big deal when you're a little company because most small companies don't do that".

Delegation of tasks. Because the tools in virtual office technology have improved the management of various projects, MediaThink's consultants are more confident in passing assignments down the development chain, freeing them up for other vital tasks.

The useful and impact of the virtual office are now everybody can work anywhere, anytime with their laptop and internet connection. The important impact is your business especially SME/SMI staff who are lacks of IT specialist; with virtual office, it is possible run business without IT department or hire IT specialist, it can work with what you already have; there is computer and internet connection. With virtual office, no more worry about your company server, network security or VPNs, firewall, software service patching and etc. This is the fastest way to get everyone working together on the same page.

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