Chapter II

On Portals: A Parsimonious Approach

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Abstract

In this chapter we present our views and observations concerning portals. We introduce the notion of a portal, review several possible characterizations, and focus our discussion on one type of portal—the enterprise portal. We review what functionality the enterprise portal should provide and discuss, in brief, why interest in portals and associated technologies remains strong. We ponder the ecosystem of the portal components that include wireless applications and discuss why portals might be useful for information intensive small and medium-sized enterprises. We offer a general list of portal vendors supplying a variety of solutions and the most current software, services, and relevant hardware vendors offering solutions for the small and medium-sized enterprises. We conclude the chapter with our views concerning the portals market.

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What Is a Portal?

Let us start with a general definition. The *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (2000) defines a portal as “a gate; an opening for entrance; as the portal of heaven.” The notion of portal discussed in this chapter is not so lofty an opening as that; however, it is an important window to an enterprise and its valuable intellectual assets. The most current edition of the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (2003) available online (http://www.bartleby.com/61/37/P0453700.html) also offers this definition of a portal: “website considered as an entry point to other websites, often by being or providing access to a search engine.”

We need to note that the word “portal,” in a technology sense, is overused and difficult to define. For example, there are portals on the Internet for general consumer entertainment at Yahoo (http://my.yahoo.com), information at Brint (http://www.brint.com), specific population groups like the Austrian Academic Portal (http://www.portal.ac.at/), and regional portal sites for international enterprise such as NEC (NEC global site at http://www.nec.com, or NEC US portal at http://www.necus.com/, or NEC European portal at http://www.neceurope.com/). Each of these portals can be customized by the users to better meet their needs and to fight information overload. All the same, in the most simple of terms, a portal is a window to the Internet. Moreover, the innovative ways of leveraging the Internet for communal and corporate purposes have generated various meanings for the term portal. Let us consider some examples (Collins, 2001, 2003; Goodman & Kleinschmidt, 2002; Strauss, 1999):

- **Corporate Portal**—usually structured around roles that are found inside an organization.
- **Enterprise Information Portal**—expands the corporate portal to include customers, vendors, and other roles outside the organization.
- **Vertical Enterprise Portal**—delivers organization-specific information in a user-centric way. Vertical enterprise portals generally require a login and an authenticated presence for personalization.
- **Consumer Portal**—exemplified by my.yahoo.com. Often includes shopping, weather, stock prices, news, search engines, chat groups, etc. Portals of this type are generally customizable with stock tickers, calendars, e-mail, weather, news.