

Notify Technologies NotifyLink

Get your e-mail delivered to your PDA in real time.

BY MARTIN LAUZON, TEAM LEAD, WIRELESS DIVISION, IMAGINA

As PDAs have evolved, an entire industry focused on keeping them connected to your enterprise has followed right along. Given the personal nature of the PDA, one of the most natural integration points is with enterprise e-mail systems.

But, if you ever wanted realtime send-and-receive wireless e-mail between your corporate systems and your PDA, you were just plain out of luck. A real-time wireless solution needs an "always-open" connection between the PDA and the network data source to push out datasomething incongruous with the traditional, largely cradle-based, intermittent, and user-initiated PDA connection model.

Notify Technologies

<http://www.notifycorp.com>

NotifyLink

US\$10 per user per month.

Volume discounts available.

BUSINESSBENEFITS

Getting e-mail delivered to your PDA in real time can be tricky. In some cases, NotifyLink is just the right solution.

- + One of the few solutions for GroupWise mail
- + Easy and inexpensive

- Only supports wireless devices
- Uses SMS

However, newer PDAs come with integrated wireless networking capabilities that allow an always-connected model. For example, I recently acquired a voice- and data-capable PDA with an integrated GSM/GPRS card. In addition to letting me shed several extraneous pieces of hardware (and the plumberlike gait that comes as a result of carrying around a heavily charged belt), the two-way communication capabilities mean I'm truly connected from anywhere at any time.

What's the first thing I want from my newfound connectivity?

What every self-respecting technophile wants more than love or money: to wirelessly receive my corporate e-mail directly on my PDA. Now, all I need is to find a solution to get it there. Enter NotifyLink.

Basics

Installed in your corporate network infrastructure, NotifyLink Enterprise Server works as an e-mail relay between your mobile users and corporate e-mail server. The process is transparent to both the sender and the message recipient because a single e-mail address is used to reach the user at his desktop or at his mobile device. The product also comes with a custom e-mail client with built-in PIM applications for calendar contacts and tasks.

NotifyLink Enterprise Server runs on Windows NT or 2000 and includes a Microsoft Internet Information Server (IIS) and SQL Server component to manage system data and its administration interface. In line with wireless offerings of many PDA vendors, NotifyLink Enterprise Server supports a variety of wireless protocols, specifically Bluetooth, Wi-Fi, and GPRS/IXRTT on Windows CE, Palm, and Blackberry. It also integrates with a number of messaging platforms including Lotus Notes, Microsoft Exchange, Novell GroupWise, and any IMAP mail systems.

Practical details

The installation package is straightforward and made it possible for me to learn about the product, install it, and make a quick tour within a day (A+ for this aspect). I set it up to relay messages to and from my corporate Lotus Notes e-mail system. I was able to create a profile for each of my users and let them edit their personal settings.

As a user, I really like the personal filtering options that let me-based on sender or words in the subject or body-control what messages are relayed to the PDA and what messages can wait in the inbox until I get back to my desk. I also like the custom message templates that let me send quick notes containing stock text or automatically add a signature to outgoing messages. I also appreciate the simple Web-based administrator and user interfaces.

Mobile E-mail

However, as an administrator, I'm not as happy with the fact that the system relies on its own directory to locally store user names and passwords. This adds to my already charged login management overhead. Although I understand this is a necessary tradeoff to integrate with multiple mail systems, it doesn't mean I have to like it.

The product advertises support for both a push and a pull configuration so you can send messages to the PDA wirelessly in real-time or via synchronization. I assumed I could take advantage of this feature to continue support for my mixed PDA pool (many of which still rely on a cradle-based sync process). So, I was surprised to find out that NotifyLink's solution only supports a subset of Palm and Windows Mobile devices—those that come with wireless connectivity. I say "surprised" because intermittent synchronization has been the bread and butter of mobile middleware products since their inception. It never occurred to me I could lose this feature as the solutions branched out to two-way devices.

A little investigation revealed part of the reason why. NotifyLink's push function, which relies on the server to actively push new information to the device, works with Short Message Service (SMS). Every time there's a new message to deliver to a user, the server sends an SMS message to the device, triggering the PDA client to initiate synchronization. SMS isn't supported by standard LAN network protocols. It also isn't supported by Bluetooth or Wi-Fi, but at least these devices can receive their "real-time" wireless messages via scheduled synchronization.

If you're looking to support a single communication network for your users, you'll have to consider upgrading them all to two-way devices. While you consider the cost of such an exercise, you should also know that most carriers charge for each SMS message.

NotifyLink only works with e-mail and PIM info. So, if your data management requirements extend to other applications, you'll have to maintain a second middleware service. This is probably something you'll want to do anyway because the NotifyLink server doesn't come with remote administration tools to assist with support and administration of the PDA pool.

UpShot

This product won't meet the needs of those who support a mixed PDA pool relying on multiple connection methods. Nor will it replace any mobile middleware you may already have in place to manage your diverse PDA pool or data exchange with other back-end systems. However, Notify Technologies is a good option for companies that need push-based e-mail for their two-way device PDA pool. It's also a good fit for those who want to provide a mixed PDA and Blackberry solution through a single server. **ADVISOR**