



NEWS AND NOTES

Getting More From An Internet Service Provider Than Just Connectivity

by Jon Reischel

(NAPSA)—Industry experts expect 2002 to be a volatile year for Internet Service Providers (ISPs), complete with intrusive new legislation regulating access, consolidation of small and medium-sized ISPs, and an anticipated turnover of subscribers of nearly 30 percent.

Subscribers typically look to their ISP for connectivity—they want simple and reliable access to the Web without “issues” and hassles. As the Internet matures and connectivity continues to become less of an issue, what separates one ISP from another? Cost does not vary widely, so overall, based on price and service, are most ISPs simple “me, too” operations? Far from it.

According to Jeff Biggs, chief technology information officer of ASP (application service provider) enabler Vobix, ISP consumers are no longer satisfied with connectivity alone, and it is the ISPs that have adopted ASP-type services that will survive and thrive in 2002. He says the model essentially works by offering software applications in a hosted environment, supported by knowledgeable technical support representatives. The result is that small and medium-sized businesses keep capital expenses low, while gaining access to the same software as their larger competitors.

“This will especially be the case for those ISPs who try to compete with large enterprises to achieve the latest resources but for which information technology (IT) services are becoming too complex and uneconomical to be managed



Biggs: Experts suggest ISPs offer hosted software services.

in-house,” Biggs explains. “This will become a wonderful alternative to consumers needing inexpensive and easy-to-manage software.”

Experts agree. As ISPs continue to grow and consolidate, what will separate them from the pack is their breadth of services—the ease with which consumers can access more products, achieve a higher level of business partnerships, and be a “one-stop shop” for consumers’ computer and Web needs.

Biggs advises that, when looking for an ISP, there are two key questions to ask: 1) Do you plan on consolidating with another ISP? and 2) What value-added products and services do you provide?

Because of the increasing cost of software, in concert with such issues as licensing hassles, maintenance fees, technical support, and the fact that software requires constant expensive upgrades, many ISP customers are looking to their Internet providers to solve this costly problem. As a result,

ISPs are capitalizing on the ASP model to offer customers access to a host of software—thus positioning the ISP as a true “partner” to its consumers.

“What we have been able to do is seamlessly integrate a host of software for our customers, enabling them to rely on us for many things other than connectivity,” says Mark Richmond, CEO of USAwebnet, an ISP in Ohio. “It provides our customers access to the latest versions of the hottest software with no internal issues like maintenance, installation or licensing.”

The idea behind the virtual inventory of software services is the brainchild of Biggs.

“What we have been able to do is empower ISPs by enabling them to capitalize on their existing circumstances, and with a little effort, make a significant impact to their business,” he says. “We are able to provide them access to a variety of software, and in many instances add software based on their recommendations, and host it for them. No infrastructure and no inventory issues. It costs them nothing to have access to the Vobix service, and their customers are treated to a wealth of products and services never before available.”

The bottom line is that 2002 will be an exciting year for ISP consumers. If you shop around and find the best solution to fit your needs of connectivity and service, you can expect a solid foundation on which to build a reliable partnership that meets your demands of cost, service, reliability and a virtually unlimited access to software.