

What you need to know about...

# “Seat” management and “Live” documents

**T**REASURY BOARD IS indicating an interest in a standardized desktop management approach, which is regarded as a better means of controlling, improving and organizing the computer services environment.

The United States government has seen a growing trend in this area with bundled service contracts that are charged by the vendor on a per-seat basis – an approach called seat management. The US Treasury Department's Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms pioneered its use 1997, and more than a dozen other federal agencies and organizations have since contracted for seat management services. With seat management, a single vendor is tapped to handle all desktop and network support encompassing hardware, software, help-desk and telecommunications support allocated on a per-seat basis. The customer purchases the right to use the equipment and services with a subscription fee while the vendor retains ownership and takes responsibility for its upkeep.

Positive results were reported to the US General Accounting Office (GAO) in a detailed analysis in March 2002 ([www.gao.gov/new.items/d02329.pdf](http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d02329.pdf)). The GAO reviewed six agencies, which saw improved IT management and more timely upgrading of technology. But the agencies performed virtually no analysis of the expected costs and benefits before implementing seat management. The GAO recommended they look a little closer at whether they are actually saving any money.

One of the early six adopters of seat management involved the Outsourcing Desktop Initiative developed for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). The software used to help manage NASA's computer and communications equipment in four space centres was developed by a small private software company located across the Ottawa River from Parliament Hill. Provance Technologies Inc., of Gatineau, Quebec, provides the management tool used by Lockheed Martin Information Technology, under contract to track the deployment of NASA's desktop and network operations.

Additionally, Lockheed Martin Information Services Solutions uses Provance's seat management solution for the US Office of the Secretary of Defense – the Pentagon. In fact, Provance does about 93 percent of its business in the US and now is partnered with Northrop Grumman to provide IT seat management services to the Peace Corps and Wright Patterson Air Force Base.

“Seat management environment became a very flexible way of finding out or controlling the financial aspect of an engagement,” says Gilles Lalonde, Provance's president and CEO. “Pre-bust was outsourcing. Post-bust, a lot of companies are going into the same thing, but they still need to control all the financial aspects of their IT spending – who is spending it, and a charge-back model [needs to be developed] to track exactly how their money is being spent. Seat management was developed just for that.”



**A**Dobe SYSTEMS INC. is packing a new business unit into its continuing ePaper revolution, and directing it towards the company's ever growing enterprise market. The Intelligent Document Business Unit, now located in Ottawa, is part of Adobe's push in enterprise solutions.

The second-largest software maker in the US, Adobe acquired Ottawa's Accelio (formerly Jetform) about two years ago, took its own business solutions, mixed in Accelio's electronic forms solutions, developed new technologies and renamed the business unit about eight months ago.

Adobe has built interactive and live fields into electronic versions of paper documents so electronic transactions can be quickly executed and shared. “That's why government is such an important market in general, specifically on the enterprise solutions side,” says John Hogerland, Ottawa site leader at Adobe.

Adobe's Acrobat reads electronic versions of paper documents. But the Adobe Document Server for Reader Extensions allows a user to retrieve a PDF document and make it live. That means interactive documents with features for adding information, marking, carrying out calculations and returning it to the sender with the changes intact.

“You can have a government organization that has the ability through standard PDF to share transactional documents with their citizens, for example, with something as mundane as a driver's licence application or maybe a student loan application or a grant,” says Hogerland. “You can fill in your name; you can click check boxes. But, what if you had the ability to do digital signatures and complete that transaction online? That's the vision of what we're doing with government organizations and other corporations.”

The Intelligent Business Document Unit is creating the innovative architectures around ‘intelligent’ documents that have the look of a paper document. But users can take it offline to work on an application or document.

“They don't have to go to a website and sit there for three hours and fill it all out,” says Hogerland. “They can actually get the document, download it, fill in as much as they want, save it, go get information they had forgotten, continue and submit it later.” The technology is being used by the US Internal Revenue Service and Inland Revenue in the United Kingdom, he adds.

*Marlene Orton is a freelance writer based in the Ottawa area.*