Report to the JA-SIG Board

uPortal 2.0

According to Peter Kharchenko, uPortal 2.0 is "on target" for release at or soon after the Destin conference. This means the final version should be available for the conference.

The release will include a number of performance enhancements made resulting from testing at the iForce Center.

The testing at Sun's iForce Center has been marginally successful. Last week Ken Weiner and Peter Kharchenko attempted to reproduce Peter's original work that test the benefits of certain performance enhancements and the performance costs of certain features. Today Ken is completely Peter's testing. He believes these data will be available before the conference. Ken is also continuing with scalability testing and expects to extend this to Sun's iPlanet server. Last week they are testing with Apache/Tomcat configuration.

There are two lessons from this effort. First, it is difficult to configure a large system and the software to achieve maximum performance. For example, Peter found performance increases significantly with an older version (January 2001) of Apache/Tomcat was used. Server configuration expertise seems to be limited even at the Sun test center. Also it was difficult to generate sufficient load using the WebLoad software to test the system. Second, significant effort goes into identifying limits to scalability. Invariably these are something other than uPortal. Network cards, load distribution software, network capacity, and load generation have all been barriers that had to be identified and corrected.

Ken estimates that two person months will have been used in obtaining the test results. When I suggested returning to the iForce Center for further testing, Ken said results would not be immediate and he recommended uPortal 2.0 be completed before testing in order to focus effort on development rather than testing. In retrospect Ken's judgment was better than mine. I thought with Sun assistance testing would take only a few days.

uPortal Relationships

Peter Kharchenko and I met with infiNet Inc., and Loyola University of Chicago. Loyala is infiNet's test and demonstration site. InfiNet will be issuing a press release saying they will support uPortal and their products will be available as uPortal channels. Later a news release will report that infiNet's QuickPay application is available as a uPortal channel.

Justin Tilton and Ken Weiner were invited to participate in Campus Pipeline's Pillar Client Conference to brief the six colleges and universities on uPortal and to answer questions. Justin is attending and will be reporting on the portal focus session.

Campus Pipeline CEO Tom Lewis will brief the student loan industry on the CampusPipeline portal initiative at the December 2-4 CBA (Consumer Bankers Association)/NCHELP (National Council of Higher Education Loan Programs) Fall Leadership conference in Arlington, VA.

Yet unsubstaniated, Mass Networks is reported out of business. It was the host organization for VES (Virtual Education Space). VES also has found making standard student testing available on the Web by this November has been a more complex task that originally projected. Contractors report that work is progressing on a uPortal implementation for June 2002. It appears this work is speculative since VES has not issued any contracts and may have short-term budget constraints due to the Mass Networks fiscal problems.

Related Activities

The Immigration and Naturalization Service has announced a fast track effort for their renamed and repurposed Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). The original CIPRIS system is morphing into a foreign student tracking system. The system originally was intended to assist colleges and universities in processing student and exchange visitor visas; now it will be used to track foreign students. Currently colleges and universities must provided information *if requested by the INS*. Under the new systems, colleges and universities will be required to report data immediately.

There are three problems with this proposal. First, it has a major impact on current directories. Note that middle eastern names have two or more middle names and it is the middle names that identify a specific person. Second, this system, as proposed by EDS, requires all of this information to be entered manually on the INS SEVIS Web page. And it is incompatible with the Modernization initiatives at the Department of Veterans Affairs and Education Department.

The American Council on Education (ACE) has both pledge support of SEVIS and requested details on the information system. ACE cited the need for student system vendors to be able to support SEVIS. I have identified the opportunity for Educause to take action to "converge" the various federal requirements.

Observations

Support for uPortal continues to grow. Documentation and packaging are emerging as issues for "Tier 2" colleges and universities—those with IT resources, but without the specific skills in the XML/Java technologies.