

THE

SEYBOLD REPORT

ANALYZING PUBLISHING TECHNOLOGIES

North Plains Now Can Show You The Money

Skeptical CFOs want evidence that a new system will pay off, so asset management vendors are developing tools help buyers demonstrate ROI.

In tough economic times, potential hardware and software investments are scrutinized more closely than they are when businesses are thriving. Part of that scrutiny focuses on being able to show how the investment will pay for itself, either in hard dollars or in other ways, such as increased productivity or automation, new product development, time savings, etc. Determining the return on investment (ROI) can be a complicated task. It is even more complicated when the purchase in question is a system that spans multiple departments and disciplines. The task of finding ROI (and thus, getting purchasing approval) usually falls to the in-house champion of the project, who may or may not have the insight to understand how a system might be utilized across multiple departments and reap benefits beyond just the hard dollar costs.

The ROI topic was highlighted during the Gilbane Conference on Content Management at Seybold San Francisco. In the session on enterprise content management, FileNet's Martin Christian said, "Vendors bear some responsibility for showing ROI." That sentiment was echoed by Steven Ashley, a financial analyst for W. Baird & Co. Ashley noted in the same session that during the pre-Y2K buying

frenzy, companies did not think much about ROI, nor did they during the Internet gold-rush years. But in 2001, when the dot-com bubble burst and the economy started to slow, those same companies looked around at what they had bought and discovered, to their dismay, that much of it didn't really work well.

Acknowledging this, vendors are stepping in to help buyers with the ROI puzzle. The vendors know that if the customer can't show how a positive ROI will be realized, the scope of the implementation (and possibly the entire sale) are jeopardized.

ROI Dashboard. One company that is taking a step toward helping customers document their ROI is North Plains Systems. The company has announced a new feature, called the ROI Dashboard, for its TeleScope digital asset management system.

The ROI Dashboard is an extension to TeleScope's Web-based interface by which users can search the metadata of assets to generate reports on how the assets are being used. Users can search by type of asset, file type or user group. Reports can be generated on system usage patterns, such as what percentage of work is spent editing assets, moving assets, importing assets, etc. Finally, the Dashboard can track user behavior, such as time spent in TeleScope, average session length, etc.

The Dashboard comes with some generic report links already in place, but users can create their own reports via an SDK. Reports can be saved or exported to a spreadsheet for further analysis. North Plains also says the program's user-reference fields enable the Dashboard to search data in other systems (such as PeopleSoft), although that functionality was not set up in the demo we saw.

Ideally, we think, the Dashboard would be used in a TeleScope departmental installation. Its reports could then be used to justify expanding the installation to multiple workgroups or the entire enterprise.

Finding the dollars and making sense. There is little doubt that the information the ROI Dashboard gleans from the TeleScope system is potentially useful. However, it will take some

effort on the user's part to turn the raw data into meaningful numbers to show a CFO. For example, a report can tell you that your users spend an average of two hours on the system and that most of that time is spent importing assets—but how does that translate to money saved or productivity increased? The ROI Dashboard doesn't tell you that directly. Interpretation and extrapolation are needed; the user has to assign some values and do some math. However, the ROI Dashboard can accept CFO-based input to relate events and statistics to dollar values, according to North Plains.

North Plains says it is working with a number of consulting firms to develop training programs on how to interpret the raw data into meaningful ROI calculations. Those consulting firms will in turn train TeleScope users. We look forward to talking with some customers who are successfully using the Dashboard to track ROI and savings.

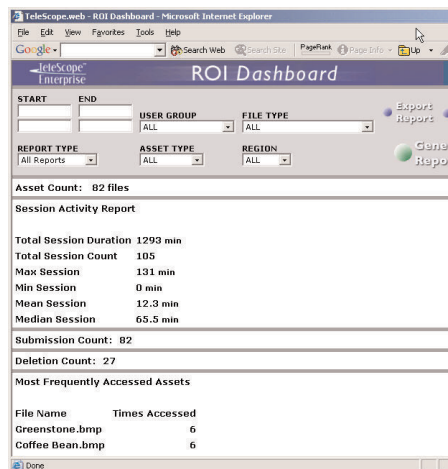
Our take. The ROI Dashboard is notable, not because of the current excellence of the reports it generates, but because it likely signals the beginning of a trend. We expect that other asset- and content-management systems will add similar functionality. And as is always the case with good ideas, each iteration will learn from the one before.

New customers. North Plains also announced the addition of some new customers to its lineup. In the publishing market, North Plains recently signed HarperCollins as a TeleScope Enterprise customer. HarperCollins will use the enterprise system to track assets across various departments and divisions, according to North Plains. The publisher cited TeleScope's native development on the Macintosh, its XML support and scalability as key requirements for the purchase.

In the architectural market, North Plains has installed TeleScope in three of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP's four main office locations. SOM is using TeleScope's open API to integrate legacy systems into the TeleScope Enterprise installation.

Finally, from the entertainment industry, North Plains has installed TeleScope at a Warner Bros. division. The system will be used to track the reuse of Warner advertising and publicity assets.

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Who's using what? The ROI Dashboard can generate reports from TeleScope that show users' access patterns as well as information such as which assets are used most frequently.