

SAE Gets High Octane Boost from SiteScape Forum



No wonder Ed Wittmann, Web developer at the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE), sometimes feels like he is walking on a tightrope. As a non-profit standards organization, SAE has to balance its multi-million dollar budget with serving the needs of some 80,000 members, 400 employees and 760,000 unique customers in its historical database.

"Because our standards activities touch everything relating to the automobile, we currently do lots of mailings to members in industries as varied as oil, electrical connectors, brakes, etc. We needed a way for our members and affiliates to easily share information with each other," says Wittmann. "This criteria essentially dictated that we choose a Web-based collaboration tool that required no client software other than an industry-standard browser."

To save money and improve efficiency in distributing information to members, SAE chose SiteScape Forum team collaboration software from SiteScape, Inc. as part of the organization's strategy to create an Internet portal. Forum will facilitate the sharing of industry information with and among customers, and allow contributors to collaborate on the development of new standards.

"Users will be able to log in once and access multiple services, like the membership roster or member benefits programs, as well as SiteScape Forum," Wittmann explains. "Each customer will be supplied with a customer number and SAE will build a profile around it and create automatic membership in a team."

Saving Members Money

In addition to improving information dissemination, SAE expects SiteScape Forum to save lots of money. Several times a year, the Society sponsors standards development meetings. Members attending these large conferences often are required to pay part of their transportation costs. Now, by facilitating effective Internet collaboration via SiteScape Forum, SAE can reduce the number of development meetings it sponsors, saving money for itself and dramatically cutting travel expenses for hundreds of people—both SAE employees and customers alike.

Solaris Platform, Customization Big Winners

According to Wittmann, SAE began searching for a collaboration product to replace net.Thread about eight months ago, after finding that the net.Genesis product was very administration-intensive. One feature that really tipped the balance to Forum was that it runs on Solaris (as well as NT, TRU64 and Linux).

"We are a big Solaris shop with lots of investments and skills in that area," explains Wittmann. "Forum's functionality and ability to be customized is better than most of the products out there—including the NT products—but SiteScape Forum is the clear winner in the Solaris space."

Organization: Society of Automotive Engineers

Industry: Manufacturing

Business Problem:

Needed a web-based solution to streamline and reduce cost of communication among trade association members

Website: <http://www.sae.org/>

Problems Solved:

- Improved membership services
- Reduced meeting costs for SAE, and travel costs for SAE members
- Facilitated information sharing for standards development

The Forum Implementation:

- SiteScape Forum, with 80,000 users

The Bottom Line:

SiteScape Forum has improved collaboration between SAE members and has reduced communication costs for the SAE administration.

Customization Made Easy

Only four months after installation, SAE is well into its project to customize SiteScape Forum for the organization's specific needs. According to Wittmann, his team has modified the user interface to match SAE's look-and-feel. In addition, the Forum software has been modified to interface with SAE's Oracle database to input and retrieve user and team information.

"The ability to customize Forum is very important to SAE," says Wittmann. "All the files are in text so it's easy to edit. Also, most other software companies don't ship the source code. SiteScape's willingness to do this gave us a lot of security and confidence. We knew we could do minor customizations and fix any bugs if we had to."

Since Forum is written in an open language (TCL), information about customizing Forum commands can be found at any TCL programming resource.

Increased Mileage for Forum

Wittmann foresees an expanded role for Forum at SAE. The SiteScape Forum software is in beta test with several standards committees, according to Wittmann, and the consensus is that the functionality is "great."

SAE's Professional Development Organization is investigating the use of Forum to provide distance education classes.

"With the ability to easily customize Forum, we probably haven't even thought of all the ways it can help disseminate and collect information," says Wittmann