

Holly Sugar's use of the Internet as an Intranet.

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The Internet and e-mail serve as powerful mediums for sending and receiving information. The Internet is a network linking computers throughout the world to each other. This same network can be used for internal communication and, in this manner, is referred to as an Intranet. Holly Sugar has launched a site on the World Wide Web to help growers receive current information about sugar beet varieties, pests, diseases, and pesticides. In addition, growers are able to link to the National Agricultural Library, sugar market sites, general weather sites, and other sugar company sites. Agricultural support is provided to growers via an e-mail link on the homepage. Holly Sugar is using e-mail and telnet to distribute sensitive harvest information, data from the AgTrak® agricultural information system, and weather information provided by in house weather services. Growers are compelled to access information which assists with timely and interactive agronomic decision making. Because the Internet is not limited to specific hardware or software, the network allows rapid communication at a very low cost when compared to traditional means of communication.

Discussion:

Although the Internet has been in existence for several years, it is only recently that computer hardware and software have advanced and made utilizing the Internet practical. The Internet infrastructure allows integration across a variety of platforms and access to the system access is straightforward. This ease of use and the ability to access a wide variety of topics and information makes the Internet a powerful medium for networking. By utilizing this networking capability for internal purposes, the Internet effectively becomes an Intranet.

Intranets have key advantages over traditional means of communication. Besides accessing information across the World Wide Web, Intranets allow users to interact with private databases, send communication rapidly and inexpensively, and obtain updated internal information. Essentially, the user is able to access technical information from just one location.

Access to an Intranet via the Internet is accomplished through the use of a security measure. In most cases, a password is assigned to the user and access to the appropriate information is granted. Less secure forms of an Intranet include distribution of information via e-mail and access to "orphan"

sites (sites not linked to public files on the Internet). Because the Intranet is established on the Internet backbone, the user is able to access world wide information at the same time.

Recognizing the value of improving communication with our growers, Holly Sugar established a site on the Internet at www.hollysugar.com in October of 1996. The site, which continues in operation, offers growers access to weather as well as sugar and agricultural related sites. Growers are also able to access a grower's resources page from which they can obtain sugar beet seed variety information and copies of articles from Holly Sugar's Sugarbeet Update publication. A plant population calculator has been added to aid growers with their seed purchasing and planting decisions. Finally, links to sugar beet related information including sugar beet pests, pesticides, and soil sampling are included on the grower's resources page. Currently, an Intranet has been established with growers utilizing e-mail and telnet. Growers e-mail Holly Sugar and receive proprietary information, order services, access databases, and obtain technical support in this manner.

For an Intranet to best be utilized, it is important that users are compelled to access the information contained within it. Value is added to information by allowing interaction with the data and the use of visuals. To serve this purpose, Holly Sugar is providing a means for growers to access the AgTrak® database system and to put data into it. Growers input data using on-line forms and interact with the data with on-line calculators and spreadsheets. Visual interpretation of the data is enhanced through the use of maps, charts, and graphs.

Holly's current Intranet activities include getting all of the selected databases and other printed media on-line. An internal newsgroup is being established to provide growers with conferencing capability. Holly Sugar is also developing the tools necessary to provide near real time access to electronic data from our laboratories and field activities.

Summary:

The Internet makes the establishment of an internal network or an Intranet possible. This is because user preferred hardware and software can be utilized to access information even from home computers. Utilizing the Internet, users obtain information from the World Wide Web and access the Intranet for internal information. Holly Sugar Corporation is establishing an Intranet to provide internal information to the growers with whom we contract. Growers use on-line calculators and internal databases to aid them with production decisions regarding growing sugar beets. Holly Sugar compels its growers to utilize the Internet by allowing growers to interact with the data. Tools are being added to aid data interaction and interpretation; provide near real time data on-line; and to improve conferencing capabilities.