

The BlackBerry Enterprise Server (BES)

Other articles in this series referred to a BlackBerry server, which is best suited for organizations with 5 or more BlackBerry users. This article will explain what the benefits of using the BES are, and the things that need to be considered when a firm is deciding to implement a BES.

It is important to note that we are not discussing the BlackBerry Web Client in this article, but rather, an in-house system for relaying BlackBerry messages.

The benefits to using a BES for any organization is that BES users have a much more functional and feature-rich wireless device that can be used to gain access to all of the information in their “corporate” email program as well as any other information on the office network. Let’s explore in detail some of the specific ways that these benefits can be used.

Wireless Synchronization

In an environment where a BES is used, all personal information that is stored in an email program (calendar, contacts, notes, tasks, etc.) is synchronized wirelessly, and in real-time to the BlackBerry handhelds. There is no need to remember to plug in your BlackBerry before leaving the office at the end of the day just to get all of the latest updates to your calendar (and miss a train because you forgot to do it for a few days in a row, so it takes 10 minutes instead of the usual 2 or 3!).

The same holds true for updates that are entered in your BlackBerry. This is incredibly useful, particularly if you have other people entering appointments into your calendar. If you’ve arranged a lunch appointment with a colleague while your assistant is arranging client meetings back at the office, both of you will have a completely updated copy of your calendar (with locations and attendee details) avoiding the need to reschedule either of the appointments.

You will have to remember to plug the BlackBerry in from time to time to charge the battery, but that does not require a PC to be connected – all that is needed for this is a regular power outlet.

Eliminate the Client Desktop

If you’re away from the office and your PC running the desktop redirector fails, you will not receive email until your computer is restarted and logged in. With the BES, because you have all of your servers on a backup power source and your server is configured with redundancy, your BlackBerry service will not be interrupted by common computer problems.

There’s no need for the redirector software to be running somewhere constantly, because the server does it for you (and everyone else with a BlackBerry in your office). And as a bonus, you’re being environmentally conscious too, since you don’t have to keep a computer running continuously for each BlackBerry in your office.

One Step Message Handling

One of the golden rules of efficiency and time management is to handle paper that comes on your desk only once. Well, even though your mail comes on virtual paper in a virtual envelope now, the concept still holds true. After being out of the office and processing your email on your BlackBerry, why should you have to come back to the office only to have to redo all of that work a second time? With the BES, it processes all of your email in your mailbox according to what you’ve done on your BlackBerry – if you’ve deleted it on your BlackBerry, it deletes it in your mailbox automatically. The same applies if you’ve forwarded it, replied to it or filed it, everything

is replicated in your mailbox as if you were in two places at once. It works the other way too, everything you've done in your mailbox is replicated to your BlackBerry. Now that's efficiency at its best!

Enhanced Security

OK, security on the BlackBerry is one topic that isn't real exciting for most of you, since you can't really see this difference between BES and the Web Client, but that doesn't make it any less important. With an Internet-based BlackBerry, the communication that occurs between your email account and your BlackBerry is either encrypted with a shared encryption key based on weak encryption technology, or not encrypted at all. The BES on the other hand, enforces an advanced level of encryption from end-to-end (your mailbox to the BlackBerry and all points in between) – there's no way around it. Since your BlackBerry communicates over a public medium this is extremely important.

View More Attachments

As BlackBerry handhelds are maturing and becoming more feature-rich, you can even review attachments on them. They're no replacement for laptops yet, but if you had to review the content of a document on a BlackBerry, you could. Most documents that you would typically receive from a client can be viewed on a BlackBerry, including Word and WordPerfect documents, Excel spreadsheets, PowerPoint presentations, Adobe files and pictures.

Access the Global Address List

With a BES-enabled BlackBerry, you can have access to any information that your firm or company stores about its users on the network. If your firm is one that stores office phone number, office location, home address, home phone, cell phone, personal fax, etc. all in the network accounts directory, all of that is available to you on your BlackBerry. Can't remember how to spell a person's last name? No problem, use the *Lookup* feature! Never be in a position where you can't contact someone in your own firm again.

Wireless Management

Imagine that you're on an exotic vacation in the French Riviera for a moment. You've slipped your BlackBerry into your shirt pocket as you were leaving the hotel to go to the beach, and forgot to leave it in your towel before crashing waves with your kids.

Without a BES, if a BlackBerry is lost or stolen all IT can do is to call your service provider who will cancel your account for you or issue a replacement. The data on your unit is unprotected (unless you use a password), and can be accessed.

In a BES environment, however, the only concern with losing a device is the cost of the hardware itself. Your IT person can very easily apply a new password to the device, lock it, enter in a "return to owner" message with full contact information on the initial screen of the unit, and if the worst is feared, issue a kill command to it – all from their desk, within moments of being told that it has gone missing.

Policies can also be applied through a BES, such as enforcing a password of a certain length and causing the device to automatically lock itself after a predefined period of idle time. Other useful policies include disabling the Instant Messaging application or Peer-to-Peer (PIN) messages (if your firm's risk management policy requires this) and enabling an automatic backup of some or all units (since most users don't usually think of this until it's too late!). There are many other policies that can be applied, each may or may not be useful in your environment.

Access Corporate Data

Until now, all of the advantages listed in this article are available to any user with an email account and a BES server. However, for BES and BlackBerry in a corporate environment, much more is available. Furthermore, the opportunities for what can be done with a programmer, a bit of creativity and some data to tap into are almost endless. Here are just some basic ideas:

- Does your firm have an Intranet? Access that from your BlackBerry, and keep up to date with all of the firm's news and internal information, including the ability to view and enter data in forms.
- Perhaps you'd like to access real-time financial information from your firm's accounting system on a particular client while travelling to their office. Programs can be written to pull together information for viewing on the BlackBerry.
- Does your firm have a comprehensive CRM database where more than just names and numbers are stored? Tie that into your BlackBerry strategy.
- Docket time on your BlackBerry, and turn your down time into billable time.
- Is your firm using a document management system? Use your BlackBerry to access documents and other information that is filed there.
- Are you in the sales business and need to see the current inventory of a particular item? You could have this information in real time on the BlackBerry, and put a hold on it for the customer who just said he'd buy 10 right now if you could guarantee delivery by tomorrow morning.

Hopefully this short list of ideas gives you a bit of an understanding of what can be done, and perhaps you can imagine a few more ideas of your own. If the data's stored on your network, it can be made available to your BlackBerry.

Cost Considerations

To use the BES, you'll need another server which has the redundancy that we mentioned earlier in this article, and a BES license. The BES server license comes in two versions: small (up to 15 devices) and unlimited. Don't worry, if you start with the small version and find that you need a 16th device, you can upgrade the server to the next level.

And as with any new technology purchase, it pays to inquire about any promotions that your service provider may be offering that could save you money. Examples of such promotions are: if you buy 5 BlackBerrys, you qualify for a free small server license, or if you buy 10 devices you could qualify for a full server license. Even though you'll still be required to buy individual licenses for the users that are to be added, this could save you thousands of dollars.

Conclusion

Hopefully, this article has enlightened you as to the capabilities that the BlackBerry Enterprise Server provides. While both a BES and a Blackberry Server allow you to remain in touch with your office and clients, the BES will allow you to tap into many resources that you would otherwise only wish you could access while away from the office.

Article written by Frank Post who is the Executive Director of Information Services at Lerner's LLP, a leading Ontario law firm, and can be reached at fpost@lerner.ca.

Article edited by Charles Bennett who is the Principal Consultant of Triella, a technology consulting company specializing in providing technology audits, planning advice, project management and other CIO related services to small and medium sized firms. He can be reached at cbennett@triella.com or 416.269.4368. For additional articles, go to www.triella.com/publications.html.

© 2006, by Triella. All rights reserved. Reproduction without permission is prohibited.