

HOME

ENTERPRISE NETWORKS

SMB NETWORKS

SERVICE PROVIDER NETWORKS

Research centers:

Applications

Convergence

LANs

Net/Systems Mgmt

NOSes

Outsourcin

Routers/Switches

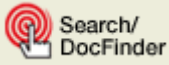
Security

Storage

WAN Services

Web/E-business

Wireless/Mobile



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DocFinder

Go

All channels

[Advanced search](#)
[Help](#) | [Site map](#)

XML

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Daily News
Vendor News
Newsletter Archives
This Week in print

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Tests/reviews
Buyer's guides
White papers
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Vendor View
Webcasts

OPINIONS/FORUMS

Columnists
Forums
Weblogs

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P2P for architects

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By **Ann Harrison**

Network World Peer-to-Peer Newsletter, 01/23/02

A midwestern architectural firm has discovered the usefulness of P2P software for coordinating engineering and construction teams working together on building projects. Balay Architects is using Mangosoft's Mangomind Business Internet File Services to synchronize AutoCAD drawings with external engineering teams and contractors.

In the past, changes to architectural plans were delivered in AutoCAD files via e-mail. Consultants were then told to make the appropriate updates by overwriting their local copies of the master drawing and replacing them with the new version. Of course this didn't always happen and various versions of a drawing could still be floating around. As with any version control situation, this could quickly turn into a project management nightmare.

The problem is compounded by the fact that architectural firms, like Balay, typically work with external engineering teams and contractors over dispersed geographic locations. As Balay points out, communication and project coordination become a major challenge in these situations.

According to Balay, the Mangomind File Service automates this process by creating what the developers say is a secure, shared workplace for project teams. A Balay architect can make a change to a master AutoCAD drawing on the MangoMind Drive and the consultant's drawings are automatically synchronized and updated when they are opened. AutoCAD allows the creation of a master drawing that can be referenced by other drawings. But this function is made effective by Mangomind File Services which allows the drawings to be accessible from the same network location.

Balay reports that the Mangomind collaboration tool reduces time spent on the change and edit process, ensures accuracy, and improves

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productivity and the overall quality of the project.

The critical selling point for many P2P-based collaborative software products is that it offers more file security than say, an FTP site. Balay, like many architectural firms, relies on external consultants and has several concurrent projects. As a result, file security becomes important. The Mangomind product offers end-to-end 128-bit encryption and user authentication protocols. It also lets Balay implement file access controls to ensure that only the appropriate people or groups have the appropriate information.

These are security basics for any P2P-based collaboration product. The challenge for any company using this type of software is determining if the security of these types of collaborative tools is adequate and balancing their risks and benefits.

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