The Most Important Project You're Not Involved In (Yet)

Looking for a place to share your apps? Check out OpenNTF

It's tried for years, but Lotus still hasn't nailed the question, "What is Notes?" What's more, it never really answered the question, "Why do I want to use it, and what can I do with it?" Lotus has responded by letting the media, Microsoft, and even some of its own marketing people "explain" what the product suite is in terms that can terminally pigeonhole the product. Instead, Lotus should have been turning the question around and saying, "Notes is anything you can imagine."

How many of you have commissioned applications from business partners or consultants, and when you got the app said to yourself "I could have done this"?

And how many of your Notes users think of Notes solely as e-mail, an order-entry system, or a product catalogue? If your CIO or senior executives share this narrow view, they'll never realize the real power of the product. When Microsoft comes calling to offer Exchange and .NET assuming that "you're just using Notes for e-mail," you'll have no armor with which to resist. To show users otherwise, you need apps, and Lotus hasn't been a great source of inspiration for new apps.

The OpenNTF Effort

Enter OpenNTF — originally NotesOSS — a simple but surprising movement that appeared early this year. Its mission statement sums up its purpose: "to provide applications for Lotus Notes as open source that may be freely distributed, in order to increase the awareness of the power of Notes." This effort, spearheaded by Nathan Freeman and Bruce Elgort, is amazing, and it's important.

After Lotus announced the removal of the Garnet JSP engine from Notes and Domino 6 (ND6), the OpenNTF crew worked on ways to integrate other JSP engines back *into* the product. This initial Project Crimson effort has been joined by Lookout Express, a mail agent aimed at cloning the look of Outlook in the Notes client; Project Crucible, a flexible Domino-code project-management tool; wEngine, an open-source workflow engine; and most recently, EZContent, an open-source content-management system.

At a time when press releases from IBM/Lotus are awash in market-share numbers, OpenNTF is working on *things you can actually use to solve problems!* It's subtly amazing to see a group of independent developers get together, get off their buns, and actually build applications to share.

Efforts like OpenNTF are important to the ongoing viability of the Domino platform, specifically because they can help show people what this stuff can really do. Lotus likes selling licenses for products, but it doesn't explain what you can do *with* those products (and why). Someone needs to, or the launch of Domino 6 will be greeted by customers asking, "Why upgrade when I'm not even using all the power of R5?" The OpenNTF folks are willing to do that cheerleading and work, and Lotus should give them all the support it can.

Get on the Bandwagon

Recently, the shared submissions from readers at Lotus Developer's Domain, or LDD (formerly called Notes.Net), have gotten very granular and narrow in focus. Never really a collaborative development effort, LDD is more like a karaoke bar than a jam session. OpenNTF offers the brass for a real Domino developer gig, a concert hall to help orchestrate real apps that do really useful things. The OpenNTF folks are thinking up new things every day. If you've got ideas, you can join in.

You can find OpenNTF on the Web at *http://www.openntf.org*, so check it out. But note that the site's not just there for the taking; you'll be expected to bring a dish to pass. Share your brains and efforts to help build the apps that can help us all. Somebody's gotta do it; it might as well be us.

> **Efforts like OpenNTF are important to the ongoing viability of the Domino platform.**

The Turtle, also known as Scott Wenzel, is a longtime net.curmudgeon, Notes/Domino advocate, and CLP who keeps an eye on the high-tech world while rebuilding several Volvos and growing heart-stopping cayenne peppers. You can e-mail him at turtle@fred.net.