

## Web Services technology in the post-room Despatch Manager – August 2003

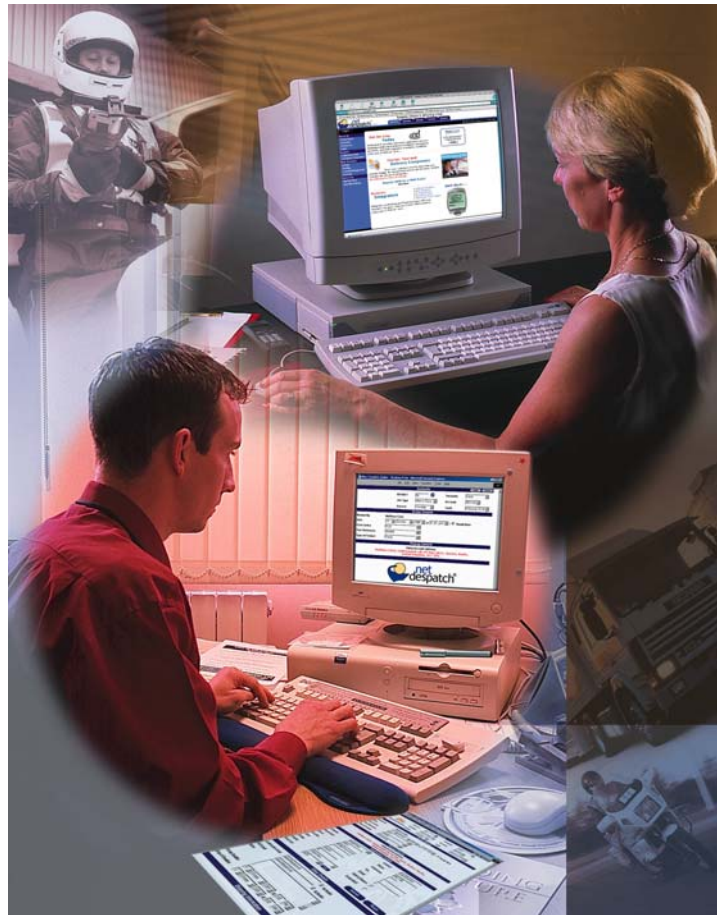
Courier companies have for many years supplied PC based shipping solutions - ('implants') to their premier customers. Post rooms are cluttered with offerings from multiple suppliers - different computers, different operating systems; different screen formats; different printers and stationery - an operational nightmare. Worse still company information, such as address books and reference data, has to be replicated on each system; historical data is fragmented, and the comparison of services and costs is a painful manual process. Access to the systems is usually limited to post room staff, creating information bottlenecks, and data transcription errors.

Although these individual PC systems offered substantial cost savings through efficient production of shipping

documents and transmission of data, they have now been superseded by powerful, but cost-effective, solutions based on web services technology. This allows software from one organisation to communicate with other organisations, in real time, through a standardised XML messaging system. Using web services makes new technology readily available (for instance real time access to heuristic routing and mapping solutions) and also enables seamless integration with both internal systems and those of courier companies and other suppliers.

For example, using a fully managed web services based solution, such as NetDespatch (<http://www.netdespatch.com>), when any member of staff within an organisation wishes to book a courier requirement, whether for sameday, overnight or international service, they just need access to a computer or PDA with a web browser. They use a custom-built web interface to enter collection and/or delivery details, and are able to utilise other web services such as a powerful address book, U.K. Post Office Address File look-up, a comprehensive pricing engine, management reports, and an enterprise bar code labelling application.

Web services are then used to transmit shipping information to the selected courier, in real time using XML messaging. The NetDespatch servers will wait for an XML response from the courier company, to confirm acceptance of the booking,



and later on will process job tracking information, and eventually the Proof of Delivery information. This means that the post room user, and the rest of the enterprise, will always have up to date information, about ALL their courier bookings through a single, central application.

Conversely the NetDespatch XML servers can respond to a real time request for information from another server which might have invoked a request for a price, POD, or even to print a bar code label on a 'returns' web page. Integration with PUDO (pick-up dropoff solutions like BearBox and Chevron Texaco Relaystar) and the new breed of GPRS based mobile communications providers (such as WirelessDelivered and Cognito), is a painless process, with real time XML request/response mechanisms utilised to interchange information in real time.

Today's transport solutions can do more than just reduce operational costs and improve efficiency; they are custom-built, available across the enterprise, aid efficient supplier selection, enable seamless integration of data to ensure accurate information, and allow comprehensive management reporting from a central data source.