

ToolWorx

ASP-based solution

Application Services Provider (ASP) is an option whereby the vendor who is providing the software, instead of delivering their software to run on your internal PC or mainframe computer, actually runs the software on a computer server located in their offices or via another company. Then, users gain access to the software using a standard web browser (i.e. Microsoft Explorer) over the Internet through an Internet Service Provider (ISP). All data bases reside on the remote server. Customers pay a monthly access fee which can be based on number of users, number of transactions, number of connects, and other combinations.

The primary disadvantages of this approach are:

- You are essentially renting software and time on another company's system. If you intend on using the system for a long period of time, the total cost of rental fees could exceed a purchased system price, even if amortized over the same period of time. In addition, depending on contractual agreements, you may not be able to control price increases that the ASP assesses over the rental period.
- There is still a "PC in the middle" that serves as a gateway between the scanning network and the Internet, so you have not eliminated any hardware components as compared to an internal system.
- You introduce additional possible "points of failure" not present in an internal system; namely, the communications line to your ISP, the ISP itself, the Internet connection from the ISP to the ASP, and the ASP itself.
- Like any Internet web site, there is always the chance for a security breach by a hacker.
- Depending on your network and communications connections and the number of active users running on the ASP server, response time for each pull of a scanning trigger that has to make its way across your local network through your ISP to the ASP server and back, may be unacceptable.
- If you need to communicate with any other computer system (i.e. ERP/DRP interface), this would be inherently more difficult as your software and data reside on a remote server.
- Since your collected data resides on a remote server data base that you have no control over, it may be difficult to extract information as you need it in the way that you need it.

- As your needs grow and as technology changes, your data collection expansion options may be limited and you may be faced with a significant amount of “throwaway” hardware and software.
- If your ASP/ISP is unavailable for any reason (scheduled backups, system crashes, communications breakdowns, etc.), there can be no further scanning until the ASP/ISP becomes available.
- “Hard-coded” application programs (web-based or otherwise) are inherently difficult to maintain and enhance. This is not the fault of any particular application software provider, but a byproduct of a software development approach that has been a mainstay of programming since the 1960’s. The time to provide additional functionality in a “hard-coded” environment is significantly longer and typically more expensive than using a “configurable scripting” approach.
- If the ASP goes out of business unexpectedly, access to your software and data may be unpredictable.

According to Peter Tripoli, Vice President of Danet, Inc. (www.danet.com), a leading supplier of mission critical solutions for telecommunications service providers, you should ask the following questions of any potential ASP:

- Does the ASP have experience installing, managing and supporting the application you are considering? Are they certified to do so? Does the software vendor offer certification and if so, does the ASP have it?
- Does the ASP employ experts in your applications, or do they obtain this expertise from an outside vendor?
- Will the ASP provide all the services necessary for your application, or will your staff need to help support it?
- Will you need to purchase additional software or hardware?
- Will you own the software and/or hardware at the end of the contract with the ASP? Is ownership an option?
- Will the ASP help integrate the application they provide with other software that they do not manage, such as your legacy applications?
- Are the ASP’s systems sufficiently scalable to support your company’s one-, three- and five-year growth plans?
- Will the ASP allow you to import your key business data into the hosted application, giving you access to it from the moment you begin working with the ASP?
- Once your data is at the ASP’s data center, do you still “own” it? What rights do you have to move or copy it?
- How secure is the ASP’s data center? What measures are in place to prevent ASP employees from viewing data they are not authorized to see, or to prevent outsiders from hacking into the system?
- What happens in the event of a disaster that deletes or destroys data? Are there measures to protect against loss? Is data backed up regularly?