

Other Web Applications

Modern businesses and non-profits find themselves needing a wide variety of software to support business operations. Much of this software needs to run on a server to be accessible to multiple employees.

Corfun can provide you with these great tools to help take your business to the next level.
Customer Relationship Management Software

Corfun has a great deal of experience implementing Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software. A CRM application allows you to keep your leads, contacts, invoices, products, etc. on a server. That allows your salesforce and customer support teams to have access to the data from anywhere on the globe. These applications make managing customer relationships easier and offer too many advantages to even begin to list here.

The two that Corfun has worked with most extensively are SugarCRM and vTiger. SugarCRM is available in an Open Source edition which is totally free. There is also an Enterprise Edition which includes support.

vTiger is purely Open Source. It has some great features as well, and some even better than SugarCRM. The invoicing options in vTiger are a great way to manage receivables.

Which one is best for you depends on your needs as an organization. Corfun has extensive experience with both platforms, and can help you make that decision. Internally, we have decided to go with SugarCRM, and can even provide you with the option to test drive Sugar.

Discussion Forum

Discussion Forums have a lot of uses. They are the de facto customer support tool of choice in the technology space. They are used to answer pre-sales questions, build online communities, and even Evangelize. In fact, online discussion forums and user-generated content represent the largest source of new information on the Internet.

If you are interested in running a standalone discussion forum, then we recommend phpBB. phpBB is the most widely used Open Source discussion forum solution. It has a ton of great features, is easy to work with, and has an extensive library of user-supplied hacks which can be implemented to get even more features.

Corfun has extensive experience with the installation and set up of phpBB. These are very affordable projects and can really complement an existing Website by adding a greater level of interactivity.

On Joomla CMS, we recommend Fireboard. Fireboard has almost all the same features as a stand-alone discussion forum, and it uses Joomla's user manager to allow Webmasters to have a single set of site members. It allows public write with approval, and there are a whole series of modules which work with Fireboard to let you show latest posts, etc. on other pages of your site. To see an operating installation of Fireboard, [click here](#).

Project Management

Most businesses and ministries run projects of some kind. Whether you're coordinating committees to carry out your next Greekfest, or organizing a building project, almost everyone ends up needing to assign tasks, track their completion, and plan for start/end dates on various activities.

Wouldn't it be great to assign a resource a set of tasks using a Web-based tool? That way the users could sign in, see all the work they have due, the project to which the work belongs, the estimated number of hours for each task, etc. Further, it would also be great if all the documents associated with each task were housed in the same environment, and even better if the users had the ability to comment on tasks to provide notes and feedback, track their hours spent on each task, and update the percent-complete on each task. It would also be great if project resources could open up trouble tickets if IT or other support is needed to complete tasks.

All of that is possible using a server-based Project Management application. The best stand-alone application of this type, in our opinion, is dotProject. dotProject is simple enough that a mom-and-pop shop can use it to manage small tasks, yet robust enough to manage the development and testing of multi-million dollar software applications.

On Joomla, we recommend a Project Management application called Project Fork which is a native Joomla component. Project Fork allows you to create projects, assign tasks, manage a group calendar, as well as upload and store documents.

Project Fork is not nearly as robust as dotProject, so I wouldn't go out and invest in Joomla just to run projects. However, if you have already made the investment in Joomla architecture, then we highly recommend reviewing it before you decide to create a stand-alone project environment. Project Fork is very actively under development and new features are being added all the time.

Help Desk and Customer Support

When I first came into the software business, an old manager long since retired told me something that I'll never forget. "Remember," he said, "Service sells the product."

He was right, of course, and the first key in customer support is to have a good support system for handling customer inquiries.

Many companies and non-profits are using a combination of Discussion Forums and direct email to support clients/members. That is a good way to go, but a more professional look and feel is possible by having an actual support portal. The two stand-alone applications which we've had good success with are Help Center Live and osTicket. Both allow you to set up Customer Service Reps, accept user-generated support tickets, generate auto-responses, convert solved tickets to a knowledge base, and more. We usually lean to Help Center Live, however, because it has a real-time chat feature that allows users to talk in private to a support rep. That feature is great.

We are currently monitoring the HCL project, however, because it just lost its main developer. There is a chance it might languish. We are currently still planning projects using the HCL platform, and will keep all of our customers apprised of the situation. osTicket is a thriving application with a great future, and seems to be rapidly catching up to HCL in any case.

Under Joomla architecture, we recommend both Task Hopper and Web Amoeba Ticket System (WATS). For straight customer support, we prefer the WATS system. It's a little easier use overall. However, Task Hopper has a variant that integrates with Joomla's native shopping cart solution called Virtuemart. This variant isn't free, unlike original Task Hopper and WATS, but it isn't expensive and it does allow customers to pull in details to a ticket based on their order number. That's a real plus, and we are happy to do projects with either solution depending on which is better for the customer.

Wrap Up

Most people think business software, and immediately get sick to their stomachs thinking of the cost. Especially if you run a small enterprise or a cash-strapped non-profit. It doesn't have to be that way. The above list only begins to scratch the surface. There are tons of Open Source applications that can be leveraged to make your business run better, faster, and more competitively.

Corfun has extensive experience in working with all of these applications and more. If you are shopping for a technology partner to help you develop your usage of your systems to the maximum, then Corfun is for you.