

# The White Papers

## **Closing the Gap: Delivering Fixed Content to Enterprise Portals**

### **A Quest Business White Paper**

**By Doug Daniels & Ken Barrette**

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### **Introduction: The Portal Gap**

Today, a major gap exists between the promise of what an enterprise portal could accomplish and the reality of what enterprise portals provide to business users. The essence of this gap is that much of the production or ‘fixed’ content remains locked in proprietary systems reliant on batch output that is not readily available to portal users. Such production reports are the essential ingredient, or ‘Killer App’ that is missing in portal deployments today to help users derive value in a company extranet or intranet. However, there are obstacles to easily adding fixed content to an enterprise portal.

The primary obstacle centers on the fact that many of the critical business applications in production today were never designed to take advantage of the Internet and do not natively produce business critical information in an easily Web-consumable format. Application-specific software that converts information to Web formats is available, but that approach is likely to result in silos of information, making rapid, responsive business decisions virtually impossible.

An additional obstacle is that desirable, necessary enterprise portal content is often spread among a variety of non-integrated applications. Many large IT shops are running one system for HR, another for finance, and yet another system for manufacturing or customer relations. Integrating them into one portal requires an army of consultants and middleware technologies. The ideal solution is to have one common repository for portal content. However, varying standards, formats and protocols make this solution elusive.

Even with those obstacles removed, IT departments must still concern themselves with other important enterprise portal value propositions, like personalization & security. Without effective solutions to those hurdles, enterprise portal deployments will never realize their full potential.

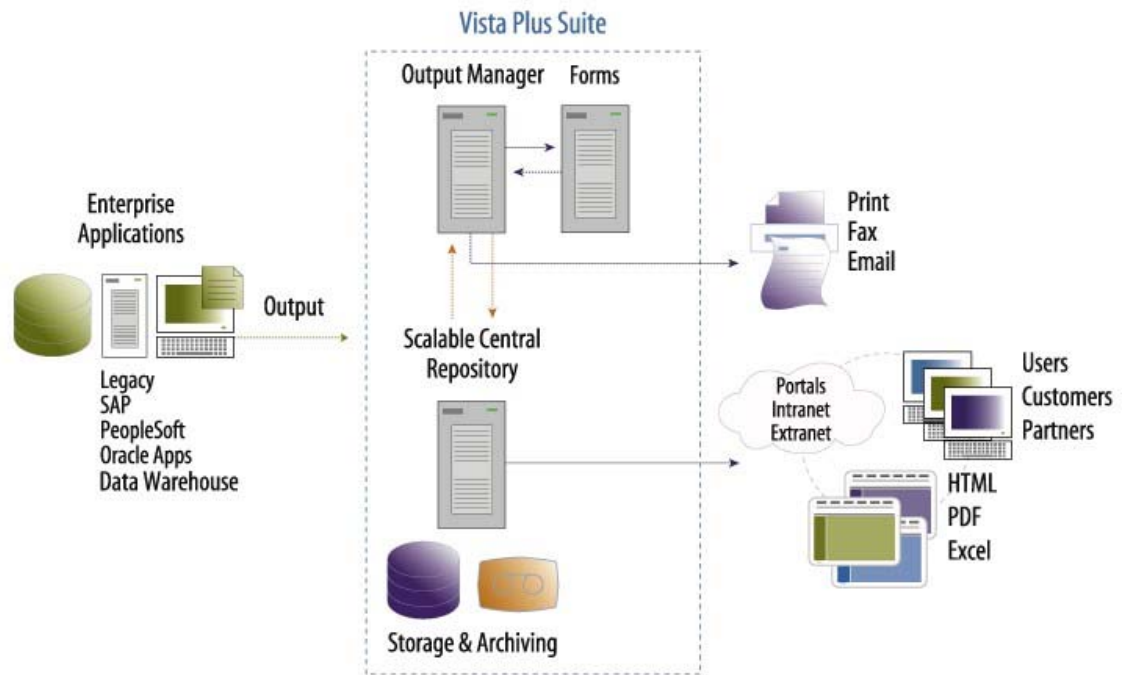
Quest Software’s Vista Plus Suite addresses the critical issues preventing successful portal implementations. The Vista Plus Suite offers businesses a modern, easily integrated platform to capture, store, and deliver production reports and fixed content directly to enterprise portals via a central scalable repository using an Internet standards-based architecture.

### **An Architectural Bridge: The Vista Plus Suite**

The Vista Plus Suite addresses the primary problem with distributing production reports to enterprise portals – the fact that many critical business applications still in production today were not designed with Internet requirements in mind. HTML or PDF conversion utilities, while readily available, only provide part of the solution. Organizations must still build much of their own supporting infrastructure to distribute the information. Consequently, it can be technically difficult if not prohibitively expensive to tie them to enterprise portals.

Firms can opt to portal-enable their existing business processes *without* modifying or re-architecting the underlying application itself. This approach avoids both significant economic commitment and potential disruption to core business operations. The Vista Plus Suite enables this bridge to be built between existing production systems and enterprise portals.

As depicted in Figure 1, the Vista Plus Suite can capture enterprise information from any ERP, CRM, Data Warehouse, legacy, or custom application. By focusing on capturing the output of the production application, the Vista Plus Suite provides a format agnostic method to collect, store and present business critical information from virtually any system.



**Figure 1: Bridging the Gap between Production Systems and Portals**

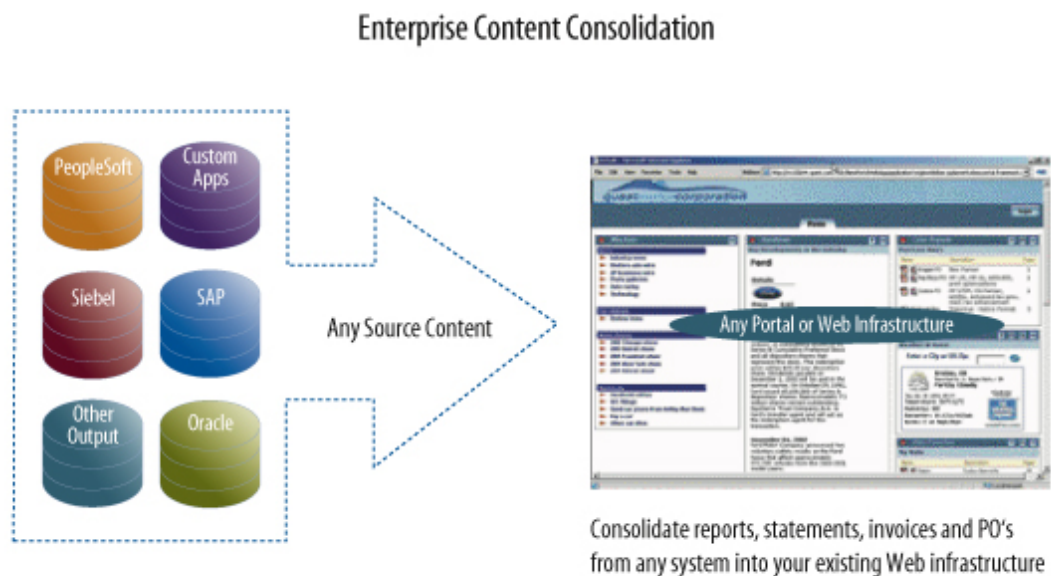
Before capturing content into the repository, the Vista Plus Output Manager can be used to perform sophisticated pre-processing operations on that content. For instance, a company may choose to take a single, large batch report and divide it up into a series of smaller reports intended for delivery to specific users or to be stored in specific locations for easy access. Additionally, an electronic form can be merged with the content to create professional looking business documents or meet regulatory requirements.

Once the information has been pre-processed and captured into the Vista Plus repository, a variety of content presentation and delivery capabilities exist. All of the content stored in the Vista Plus repository is displayed as HTML and is viewable with just a standard Web browser. This makes it ideal for deployment via an extranet or intranet portal without having to manage or maintain proprietary client applications, applets, or controls installed on local hard disks. Thus, the vision of a single Web browser client for all business needs can be achieved even when mainframes or other non-Internet enabled systems produce the source content.

## Content Consolidation

The ability of the Vista Plus Suite to capture and store the output from any application addresses another major issue facing portal implementations—content consolidation. Most companies rely on a complex infrastructure consisting of non-integrated applications and technologies to support core business operations. Many, if not all, of these applications produce important business content that would ideally be distributed via an enterprise portal.

In an effort to lower costs, most large IT shops are looking for consolidation opportunities. Many IT managers and CIOs often overlook one of the most important consolidation points—enterprise content from their production systems. When coupled with the Vista Plus Suite, enterprise portals enable dramatic content consolidation.



**Figure 2: Content Consolidation from any Source**

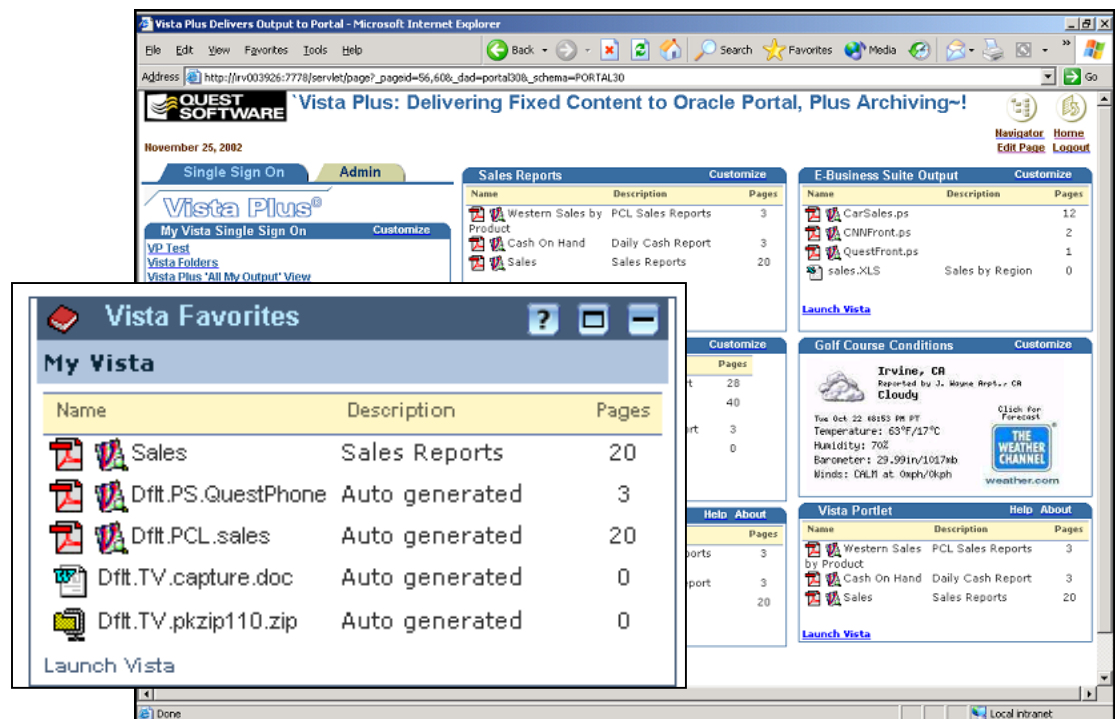
Vista Plus provides a scalable central repository that acts as an information vault for the content collected from all these disparate systems, enabling content to be delivered in HTML, PDF or native file formats to enterprise portals for viewing both inside and outside the firewall. The central repository provided by Vista Plus creates a single source of production reports & other forms of fixed content, regardless of the originating applications. Users can now get any report they need from the enterprise portal and administrators get an easily managed, single repository of all the important production reports & fixed content. The result is less infrastructure to manage, no information silos and less user training, greatly reducing cost and complexity of enterprise portal deployments.

## Secure, Personalized Access to Information

The ability to deliver information into an enterprise portal environment extends beyond just physical architecture and a common source of information. The most effective portal solutions offer companies the ability to present the information they have in a manner that enables efficient access without compromising information security. The Vista Plus Suite offers the deployment flexibility to address both issues.

Companies can deploy Vista Plus seamlessly alongside other important business content within an enterprise portal without disrupting their desired look-and-feel of that portal environment. When deploying within an enterprise portal, customers can choose to display the contents of any Vista Plus folder directly on their portal home page. They could choose their administrator defined default report folder or their personalized list of favorite, most frequently accessed reports.

Businesses generate massive amounts of information daily and Vista Plus provides users with a simple, personalized view of that information to help navigate the excess. With the Vista Plus Suite, users can subscribe just to relevant content; thereby ensuring critical business documents reach their intended audience in a timely and useful manner and avoid information overload. *Figure 2* illustrates Oracle Portal displaying Vista Plus ‘portlets.’



**Figure 3: Oracle Portal with a user’s “Favorite” reports folder from Vista Plus**

Information security is always an important consideration when it comes to business critical reports. With Vista Plus, companies can implement page-level security on stored content to prevent users from seeing confidential or role-specific information. An additional benefit of page-level security is more efficient. Vista Plus stores a single instance of the report with the

presentation dynamically virtualized into multiple reports tailored to the individual security requirements of different user.

Another security-related requirement not easily addressed with existing production applications is integration with common security management solutions. Single Sign On (SSO) solutions have become an important component of an enterprise portal deployment to help eliminate the burden of managing multiple logins. In SSO-enabled environments, users with a valid SSO session never have to login to Vista Plus to access their business-critical information.

## Conclusions: Closing the Gap

IT organizations must bridge the gap between what their portals are today and what they can be in the future. Using the Vista Plus Suite allows firms to go a long way toward achieving this goal by addressing the three most common issues facing portal implementations today.

The architectural gaps between Internet technologies and production systems are addressed with Vista Plus' unique ability to render any output into content deliverable into an enterprise portal system. Content consolidation and personalization are made possible via the Vista Plus Suite scalable central repository which allows firms to deploy a central content vault into which personalized business critical portal content can be placed. And finally, the ease with which Vista Plus can integrate into existing infrastructure and systems makes the solution ideal for firms looking to leverage their existing investments in Internet and portal technologies, and platforms. By providing a mechanism for fixed content distribution, the Vista Plus Suite enables organizations to achieve the promise, value, and vision of successful enterprise portals deployments.

Quest Software is thus able to bridge the portal gap with the Vista Plus Suite. Providing a best-of-class solution to tie ERP, CRM, and custom application information content to enterprise portals, the Vista Plus Suite goes beyond mere promises to provide an easy and efficient method of making the most of a firm's new or existing enterprise portal initiative.

## About the Authors

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