

Document type: Reference

Bulletin Board Review for the WARP Advice Brokering Service

(V1.0) September 2006

Keywords

[Filtered warnings application,
infrastructure, software]

Version control

This document may be made available in more than one electronic version or in print. In a case of existing or perceived difference in contents between such versions, the reference version is the version available for download from the WARP Toolbox site <http://www.warp.gov.uk>

If you find errors in the current document, please send your comment to editor@warp.gov.uk

Disclaimer

Reference to any specific commercial product, process or service by trade name, trademark manufacturer, or otherwise, does not constitute or imply its endorsement, recommendation, or favouring by NISCC. The views and opinions of authors expressed within this document shall not be used for advertising or product endorsement purposes. NISCC shall also accept no responsibility for any errors or omissions contained within this document. In particular, NISCC shall not be liable for any loss or damage whatsoever, arising from the usage of information contained in this document.

Copyright notification

The copyright and the foregoing restrictions, extend to reproduction in all media. The rights to modify and reproduce are described in the WARP Toolbox terms and conditions described on the WARP Toolbox site.

© Crown Copyright 2006

Contents

1	Scope	2
2	Definitions and abbreviations	2
2.1	Definitions	2
2.2	Abbreviations.....	2
3	Bulletin board systems compared	2
3.1	phpBB	2
3.2	Windows Sharepoint Services	3
3.3	Mailman.....	3
4	Operational comparison	4
5	Functional comparison	5
	History	6

1 Scope

This document compares three bulletin board systems that have been used to support discussion-based services by current WARPs. The main use for such products is in the deployment of the Advice Brokering service, where the WARP community requires a way of raising and discussing security issues.

2 Definitions and abbreviations

2.1 Definitions

For the purposes of this document, the following terms and definitions apply:

Internet: The public Internet – as apposed to a private IP network to which the general public have no access.

2.2 Abbreviations

For the purposes of this document, the following abbreviations apply:

IP:	Internet Protocol
MSDE:	Microsoft Data Engine
NISCC:	National Infrastructure Security Co-ordination Centre
PHP:	PHP: Hypertext Pre-processor (a recursive acronym)
WARP:	Warning, Advice and Reporting Point

3 Bulletin board systems compared

3.1 phpBB

Web site	www.phpbb.com
Version assessed	V2.0
Operating Systems Supported	Virtually any Linux/Unix/Windows web server platform that supports PHP V4.0.3 or higher.
Databases Supported	mySQL, PostgreSQL, MS SQL Server

phpBB has become the standard bulletin board amongst the online community. Whilst its interface may be considered somewhat quirky, it has become so familiar to those that frequently search for free support and advice that most will already be familiar with it.

The appearance can be customised using templates and styles, however it is noticeable that many phpBB administrators leave the default appearance in place.

It has been commented by WARPs that have already tried phpBB that software updates can be difficult to manage, which, coupled with some serious security vulnerabilities identified in the past, leads to some unease with its use. That said the user community is very large, and the community development effort well supported.

3.2 Windows Sharepoint Services

Web site	www.microsoft.com
Version assessed	V2.0 SP2
Operating Systems Supported	Windows 2003 Server
Databases Supported	MS SQL Server (automatically installs MSDE if no SQL Server is available).

Microsoft produces two versions for its Sharepoint product, Windows Sharepoint Services and Sharepoint Portal Server. The former is licensed with Windows 2003 Server (there is no additional charge) and is the version examined. Sharepoint provides more than just a bulletin board, and many of the additional features could also be very useful to a WARP. A notable benefit is the document repository, which can facilitate the creation of a knowledge archive to which all members can contribute.

Sharepoint is very easy to customise within certain boundaries - ultimately it maintains a very Microsoft like look and feel that people will be very familiar with.

The use of Windows accounts for authentication is, however, very limiting in an Internet based deployment scenario, leaving the system administrator to either expose Windows accounts to the Internet using a web based account management system or to manually handle password changes and expiry.

3.3 Mailman

Web site	http://www.gnu.org/software/mailman/index.html
Version assessed	V2.1.7
Operating Systems Supported	Requires Apache and Python, plus either sendmail or exim as a mail server. Only runs on Linux and other Unix type systems.
Databases Supported	N/A

Mailman is a list server rather than a bulletin board. List servers have been around on the Internet for a very long time, and the bulletin board systems were originally developed to overcome what were perceived as shortcomings of e-mail based lists; the lack of threaded discussions, which lead to confusion when handling high volume groups.

That said, where volumes are low mailman is easy to use, instant and unobtrusive. Subscribers can also choose to receive digests - daily compendiums of mailed information, that reduce the frequency of mails in higher volume situations.

Mailman is supplied with pipermail, an applications that produced archives of posts in a threaded, web format.

Generally speaking list servers are considered rather old fashioned these days, and users may not understand how they operate.

4 Operational comparison

Table 1 shows a comparison of products used so far within the WARP program from an operational point of view. The following characteristics have been compared:

License

Denotes the licensing terms for the product. *Commercial* indicates that a corporation's commercial terms apply. *GPL* indicates the GNU General Public License applies (see <http://www.gnu.org/licenses/licenses.html#GPL>).

Software Cost

Indicates the purchase price of the software.

Can be rented?

Indicates if it is possible to rent access to the packages as an ASP deal, rather than implementing a private instance.

Commercial Support?

Indicates if software support can be obtained on a commercial basis, rather than community support.

Table 1 - operational comparison

Product	License	Software Cost	Can be Rented?	Commercial support?
phpBB V2.0	GPL	Free	Yes	No
Sharepoint Services	Commercial	Free *	Yes	Yes
Mailman	GPL	Free	Yes	No

(*) Windows Sharepoint Services is included in the Windows Server 2003 license

5 Functional comparison

Table 2 shows a comparison of products used so far within the WARP program from a functional point of view. The following characteristics have been compared:

Authentication

The system used to authenticate individual users.

Authorisation

Describes the level of access to which an authenticated user may be restricted.

Threaded Discussions

The ability to create discussions that are based around a common subject or topic.

Sticky Topics

A discussion thread that can be locked to the top of a forum, regardless of how old the thread becomes. This technique can be useful for placing common questions or information into a forum.

Document Repository

Denotes if the product includes an area where shared documents can be stored, classified and updated.

Attachments

Denotes if it is possible to attach documents to forum postings.

Calendaring

Indicates if the product supports calendaring to allow members to indicate periods of availability etc.

E-mail Alerts - new topics

Indicates if forum members can choose to be notified by e-mail when a new topic is added to a forum.

E-mail Alerts - topic updated

Indicates if forum members can choose to be notified by e-mail when a topic is updated.

Table 2 - functional comparison

Product	Authentication	Authorisation	Threaded Discussions	Sticky Topics	Document Repository	Attachments	Calendaring	E-mail Alerts - new topics	E-mail Alerts - topic updated
phpBB V2.0	Built-in User Management	Restrict by forum; Admin or user	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Sharepoint Services	None - Uses Windows accounts	Restrict by site, forum and item; four levels of access	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mailman	Only for admin functions	Restrict by list; owner, moderator or member	Only in archive	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

History

Version	Date	Description
V0.1	August 2006	Work in progress
V0.2	September 2006	Document curtailed in light of CMS investigations
V1.0	September 2006	Added to the toolbox