



ezboard White Paper:

## CommunityNET

### Plug in the Power of a Community Network!

#### Introduction

For companies that invest in an online presence, a successful web strategy creates customers out of site visitors and engages them in creating relationships with each other under the company's brand presence. There is no doubt that some of the biggest successes on the Web (eBay, AOL, etc.) exist because companies have adopted this strategy and have created vibrant online-communities.

These successes all require an interactive dialogue through an on-line community solution (message boards, email list servers and chat rooms). Message boards, also known as bulletin boards, offer an ideal way to facilitate an online community because they offer a history of conversation threads and open discussion between two or more people. In short, offering a message board solution is the easiest way to facilitate an online community.

A primary purpose of this White Paper is to demonstrate why sites with distributed site networks and models (for example, the multiple affiliated sites associated with portals, verticals, and site builders) will find it very difficult to successfully implement an online community without the right solution. A majority of these sites attempt to develop a community solution in-house (which can be very expensive and time consuming), use a centralized community even though content and customization is determined by local affiliate sites, or try to manage a hodge-podge of disparate communities without connectivity. All of these community solutions are associated with high levels of maintenance, frustration, and costs, and add little value by failing to address the distributed nature of the site itself.

For a company whose online presence is distributed across a network of affiliate sites, integrating an online community requires a solution that is distributed as well. However in the community space, no one has addressed this need... until now. ezboard, the market leader in hosted communities, introduces a total community solution (hardware and software bundled together) that allows sites to create their own network of distributed communities.

#### **So I want to establish an online community. Where do I begin?**

There are a wide variety of community solutions available, but nearly all oriented toward a "single community" model – a single central entity as the focus of the community, with differentiation by discussion only. They represent traditional solutions for traditional online communities:

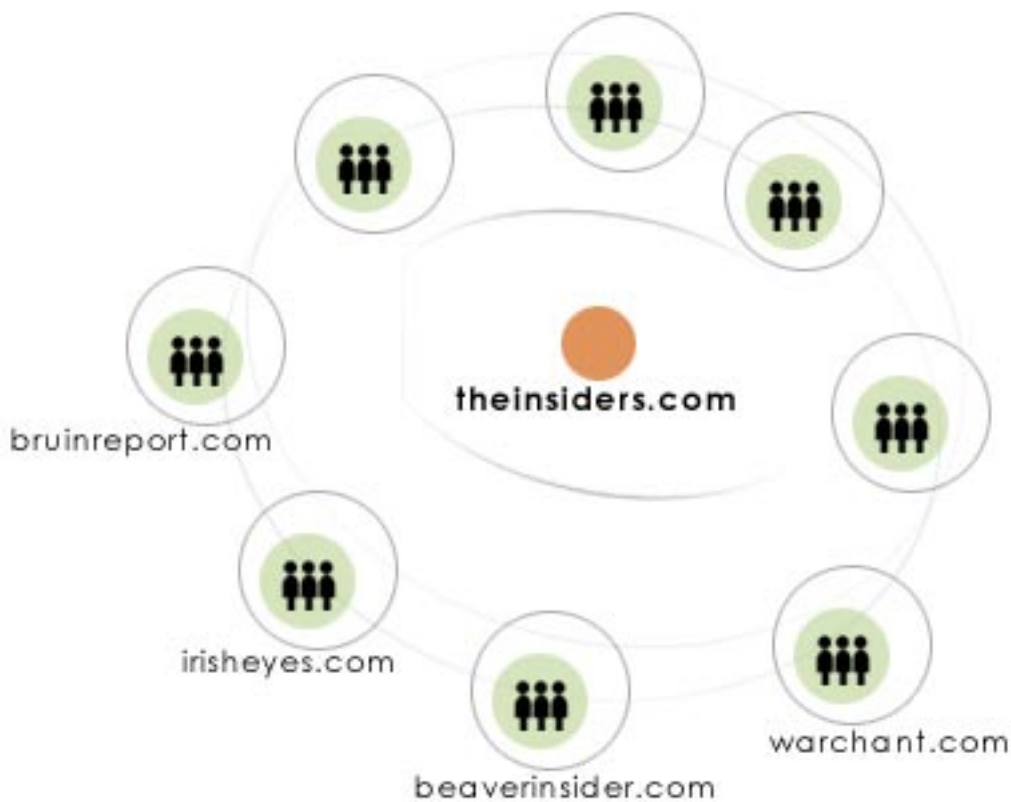
- The single, small community – the primary needs for the single, small community, are a rich user feature set and ease of use. There are many products, both script-based and hosted, that can provide common features and a simple administrator and user interface to manage the board.

- The single large community, or “enterprise”, requires the same basic feature set and ease of use, but other attributes as well. The solution must be scalable and capable of managing high traffic volumes; it must be able to provide additional administrative control features such as board monitoring, moderation and access to board/user utilization data; it must have a strong customer support infrastructure. In some cases, consulting and development services are necessary to customize the community. There are a small number of firms catering to this market.

There is an emerging class of Internet site, however, based on a different model of interaction and customer dynamics. These sites are characterized by the aggregation of local, self-defined groups of interest that share common identification and support. The central entity acts as a coordinator and provides branding and technical support. Examples of such sites include:

- Content aggregators
- Web-hosting providers
- Portals
- Networks

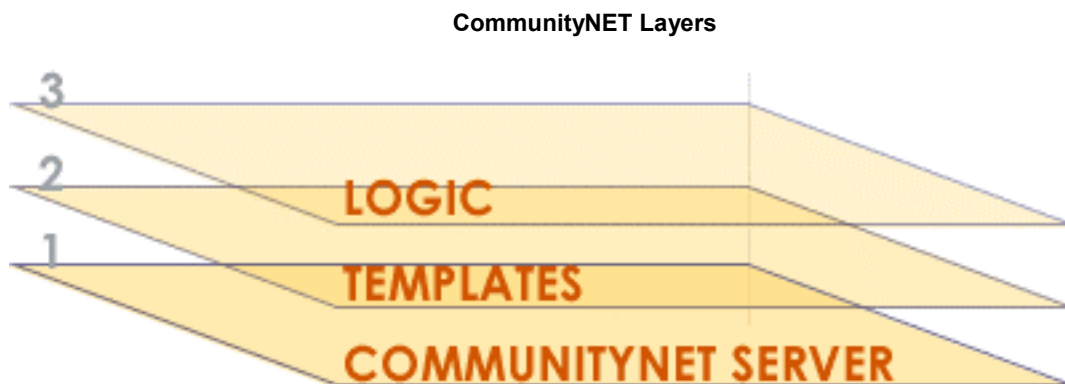
TheInsiders.com is an excellent example of this emerging model. TheInsiders.com (<http://www.theinsiders.com>) is an online sports network that features information on professional, college and high school sports teams and college recruiting for team insiders and fans. A critical element of TheInsiders.com is the ability to generate interaction between fans, which drives a substantial percentage of site activity. The primary point of entry is through a specific team site, like bruinreport for UCLA Bruins fans. However, users often also visit collateral sites – in the case of UCLA fans, this might include other Pac 10 team sites or West Coast recruiting sites. All local publishers benefit from the central administration, branding and aggregate content provided by TheInsiders.com.



Community solutions for sites like TheInsiders.com go beyond the requirements of the single site model. The ideal solution requires another key element – the ability to create and manage highly personalized single communities within a larger, highly scalable and accessible network of communities. In other words, all the features and ease of use of a single small community solution, the scalability and support of an enterprise solution, and the flexibility to create many disparate, personalized communities within a common framework.

Existing community solutions cannot meet this full range of requirements – but ezboard and its CommunityNET solution can.

CommunityNET is based on the technology platform of ezboard, Inc. ezboard (<http://www.ezboard.com>) is the largest hosted online community platform on the Internet. The ezboard site is host to over 400,000 active communities, which are visited by over 10 million monthly unique users who make over 20 million posts per month and read over 600 million page views per month. Each community has a personalized identity/look and feel, user base, rules of operation, and management. All communities are supported by a central ezboard infrastructure that provides for global user accounts (a single user identity across all communities), central registration, global search, and customer support. ezboard is the prototype of high personalization at the single community level, and a robust and highly scalable central infrastructure.



**3 Logic**

Community Business Logic and API

**2 Presentation/HTML Templates**

Complete Customization

**1 CommunityNET Server**

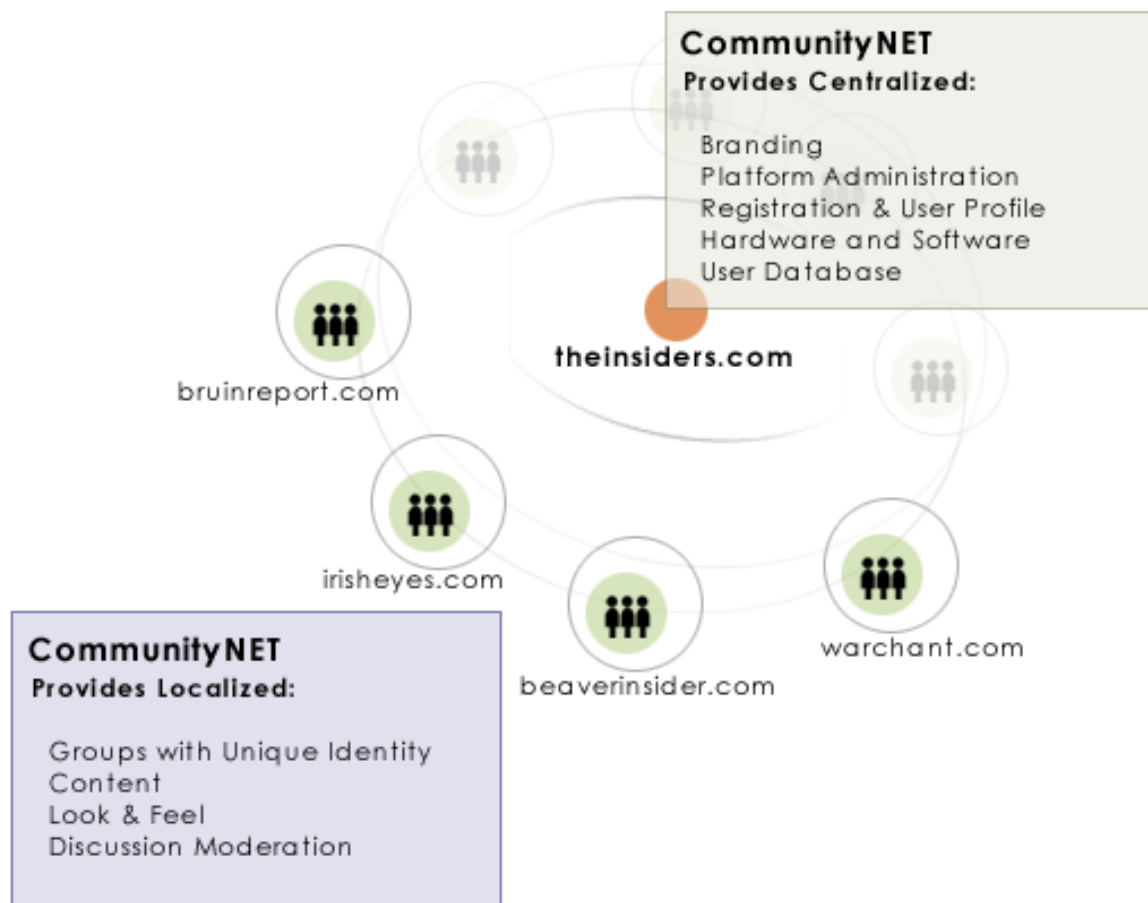
Hardware and ezboard Software (Database included) Bundled Together

The CommunityNET hardware is based on a Linux platform, which offers superior reliability that can easily be configured into your network. The ezboard CommunityNET solution provides a proven community application server, user database and web server, as well as the hardware and operating system necessary to run it. There is no need to purchase additional hardware and software to roll out network communities on your site with this self-contained solution. Additionally, the business logic is separate from the presentation layer, allowing Web developers to easily modify the look and feel without affecting community performance.

## The Benefits of CommunityNET: a Case Study

TheInsiders.com with its distributed network of sport affiliate sites needed a community solution that would add compelling value to its subscription services. That added value offered to its customers was the ability to have private communities where recruiters and team insiders could discuss recruiting information on high school prospects and college teams. The community solution needed to provide a look and feel that was localized to individual teams, while allowing users to maintain a single unique profile throughout the entire site network.

Because each community's content was highly localized and customer data was distributed throughout the entire network of teams, TheInsiders.com needed a global platform for customer data that could be used on multiple individual communities. Although TheInsiders.com evaluated a number of community solutions, they were particularly interested in solutions that would reduce the total cost of ownership by allowing them to manage only one community platform (hardware and software).



TheInsiders.com received the following benefits from deploying the CommunityNET solution:

- Created well over 100 networked communities providing unique content and customization under single branding and management
- Created new communities on demand without installing new software and deploying new hardware

- With central registration, community members keep the same identity and profile over affiliate sports sites
- Increased revenues by charging for a premium service based on select community content
- Increased site traffic
- Reduced the overall cost associated with running a community by bundling an Application Server, Database, Web Server and all necessary hardware/software.
- Centralized contract management – simple payment terms, simple metrics, ease of administration

## **Summary**

The importance of an online community cannot be overstated for the exponential growth it brings to web sites, and for the important relationships that it creates for a site's customers. For companies that have a distributed network of sites where the local affiliate have a high degree of independence (customization, administration and content), providing a robust enterprise community solution that can facilitate this model is key to a successful community strategy. CommunityNET solution provides all of the benefits of an online-community while working within a distributed community and eliminating the high cost of administrating separate communities on different systems.