

: How does a Web-based DSS differ from a Web-enabled DSS?

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In 1998, I noted that “when vendors propose a Web-based DSS they are referring to a computerized system that delivers decision support information or decision support tools to a manager or business analyst using a 'thin client' Web browser”. I still often use the term Web-based DSS in such a broad, all-inclusive fashion, but vendors and MIS practitioners are making some distinctions about the technology platform used to deliver decision support that need to be noted. Most notably the phrase “Web-enabled” has crept into the DSS lexicon. It is important to understand how a Web-based DSS differs from a Web-enabled DSS.

To highlight the difference in a simple, straightforward manner, I'd say the enabling technology differs. As I've noted previously, “When the enabling technology used to build a DSS is the Internet and Web, it seems appropriate to call the system a Web-based DSS. (Power, 2000)”. Web-based should mean the entire application is implemented using Web technologies including a Web server, HTML, CGI, and possibly database products like Oracle 9i or SQL server; Web-enabled means key parts of an application like a database remain on a legacy system, but the application can be accessed from a Web technology component and displayed in a browser.

Some legacy DSS can be Web-enabled much faster and at a much lower cost than would be involved if the DSS was redeveloped using Web technologies. Also, many of the benefits of a Web-based DSS can also result from a Web-enabled DSS. So a Web-enabled DSS may be the best choice for making an existing DSS more widely available. Web technologies can be used to implement any category of DSS including communications-driven, data-driven, document-driven, knowledge-driven, and model-driven DSS. At one point, most systems labeled “Web-based DSS” were linked to a data warehouse, but that is certainly no longer the case. A model-driven decision support simulation developed in Java can be delivered via the Web and so can a large HTML/XML text repository that is part of a document-driven DSS.

With a Web-based or a Web-enabled DSS no particular decision support software needs to be on the client computer. A Web browser and an Internet connection delivers the decision support functionality to the user. So do you want to "start from scratch or build on top of an existing DSS application?"

References

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