

# IncreMentalAdvantage

## Eric Hoffert: ShareMethods LLC



### ERIC HOFFERT

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**ERIC HOFFERT** has twenty years of leadership experience in enterprise software, collaboration, and rich media. Mr. Hoffert is CEO of ShareMethods, an Office 2.0 service with customers BusinessWeek, CNET, Agile Software, etc. Eric also serves as Chairman of Versatility Software Inc., a digital media consultancy with clients Disney, TiVo, Stanford University, etc. Previously, he was CTO for Magnifi, a digital asset management ASP and managed Apple Computer's Multimedia Communications Group. Mr. Hoffert co-founded the QuickTime project now used on more than 500 million computers. Prior to Apple, Mr. Hoffert was at AT&T Bell Laboratories; he holds fourteen US patents, has authored ACM and IEEE papers, lectures around the world with work covered by the Wall Street Journal, Forbes, New York Times, Fortune, CIO, ComputerWorld, InfoWorld, and Who's Who in America (2007).

**IA:** Hello, Eric. Thanks for taking the time to speak with us today. Let's start by you giving us a brief overview of your company.

**Mr. Hoffert:** My pleasure. ShareMethods is focused on making it easy, cost effective, and timely to deploy solutions for the creation, management, and sharing of documents on demand. Our business is strongly focused on supporting the needs of sales, marketing, and support teams, both with their internal communications, for example between the marketing and the sales team, and also with their outbound communications. That includes moving materials and content from a channel group or a headquarters sales group as well as the selling partners, resellers, integrators, or distributors.

**IA:** Can you give us an overview of your products?

**Mr. Hoffert:** Yes. We have a family of products, and the products that we sell include ShareMethods, a namesake service, which runs as a standalone service; and ShareNow,

which is a product that is integrated with salesforce.com, called ShareNow for AppExchange. ShareMethods, our namesake service, allows a sales, marketing, and support team to set up a centralized access point where all of the different team members, wherever they may be located, have the ability to post, tag, and share the key sales and marketing best practices and the documents that they need to do their job well. They can also communicate with their outside business partners that help them sell their products and solutions on a regional, national, or international basis.

**IA:** What do you mean by tag the documents?

**Mr. Hoffert:** End users can associate descriptive text and categories that relate into the document itself. They can also apply Web 2.0-style community ratings, a one-to-five star rating, and user reviews. This helps people within the community understand what the good stuff is and what the gold star content is, for example content that is used by the sales team to go out and pitch customers and win business. The product at its core controls and determines

which users get to see which content based on rules that are set up in the system. So, if you're on the sales team, you'll see newly posted sales training; you'll see newly posted selling materials, and sell sheets. If you're on the marketing team, you might see newly posted press releases, and new creative aspects that you're supposed to use for brochures. Essentially what you see is a function of who you are and the role that you have in the system. The different roles in the system include a content reader, a collaborator, a distributor, content manager or content administrator; and that determines what you can do in the system.

**IA:** What is AppExchange?

**Mr. Hoffert:** AppExchange is an on-demand marketplace for applications that are delivered via Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) as a delivery model. AppExchange is operated by salesforce.com. It's a platform where end users can go to try and test drive and then install and purchase on-demand applications in a variety of different application areas like sales, marketing, human resources, and financial services. Users can take those services and combine them with their salesforce.com implementation. So our application, which is called "ShareNow for AppExchange," has the capabilities of our namesake service ShareMethods, as well as a set of salesforce.com integration capabilities. For example, it allows you to take the documents stored in our system and to select an appropriate set of content you want to send out to prospects or customers. When these documents are sent out, it tracks the activity history per sales person so that they can go back at any time and see which materials they sent to which individual on what date, and what version. ShareNow has analytic tracking capabilities that allow sales people to clearly know exactly what's being sent out, when, where, and to whom. That's just one example of the integration. Additionally, ShareNow integrates the ShareMethods application using single sign on, which means that the end user only needs to log into one application.

**IA:** What are the most important features of the product that set it apart from other remote access tools for sales people?

**Mr. Hoffert:** One of the things we really prioritized was ease of use. I spent seven years at Apple Computer working on the birth and development of Quick Time. At Apple the intent, mantra, and design aesthetic was, and is, all about ease of use. We tried to take that approach and bring it to the world of delivering sales and marketing documents and content on demand to large audiences. Ease of use and prioritizing it is the thing that makes or breaks your product because it determines whether people can use it. The content and documents need

to be accessible by users all over the world and, in many cases; these users need to be able to figure out how to use our solution in an intuitive and quick manner, without any training. So ease of use is really fundamental, and it's been a strong selling point. We are winning larger deployments. We recently closed a 450 user global deployment for one of our customers. Many of the users are outside the firewall at these partner or reseller companies and the adoption rate has been very high. We wanted to try and take some of the Web 2.0 user friendliness of ratings and reviews, tagging, fast access, expedience, and ease of posting content in a collaborative way into the system as key differentiators compared to cumbersome, expensive, hard to deploy, enterprise scale document management systems. These enterprise systems are often prohibitively expensive, take too long to deploy, or are too hard to use for sales and marketing teams. So, I think that Web 2.0 ease of use experience is a differentiator too. The next thing that we considered as a differentiator was to build a solution that was really focused on the needs of sales and marketing teams. The more you can create solutions that are really tailored to the workflows and your target audience, the more powerful it is and the better the adoption. So some of the workflows we have that are specific to what you might find in a sales and marketing team are the ability to support review and approve workflows for multiple users, multiple departments, and multiple documents, for example, a set of marketing materials or collateral for graphics, and creative assets. We also enable a sales team to be able to review and approve sales proposals or contracts before they go out to customers. So we have workflow support on top of the ability to support documents on demand as a core part of our solution. The second key-point that I would like to highlight is what I mentioned to you previously of prospects and customer communications. This is where you're sending out documents, content, and selling materials and then being able to track that and run analytics around it. The third area of differentiation is our whole approach to software-as-a-service and being able to deliver on that with excellence. We have no products that we sell that require any type of server side installation or extensive work with an IT group. So sales and marketing teams can buy our products like they would any service from a creative agency or otherwise. It can be paid for on a monthly, quarterly, or an annual basis. It's very easy to add new users. So, in summary, I would say ease of use, sales and marketing workflow enhancements, and then software-as-a-service is very much at the core of the delivery model, which means also it's cost-effective, it's quick to deploy, and requires minimal IT resources

**IA:** I believe it says on your website that the tool provides the ability to preview rich media. How is that an advantage to sales and marketing people?

**Mr. Hoffert:** Next week we are formally launching a new product called, “ShareDrive OnDemand.” ShareDrive OnDemand solves one of the biggest problems facing online document services. One of the concerns users have is, “What if I need access to all my data or all my documents and there’s an Internet outage?” The other concern is, “How do I integrate these kinds of tools and services into the natural, day-to-day experience of end users working on the desktop, while being able to drag and drop files to a natural looking file folder structure to do batch upload or batch download?” ShareDrive OnDemand delivers all of these capabilities and more. ShareDrive OnDemand lets you drag and drop files as well as batch upload and batch download content between your computer and ShareMethods online service. It also lets you synchronize your online documents to an offline local server or laptop. So, if you need to get a snapshot of some of the files that are online, you can do it, you can schedule it. And on the visual preview topic, we provide through this service, the ShareDrive on Demand capability, the ability to see thumbnails and previews of your content, including video and other media, integrated completely into the desktop as part of the natural file and folder structure. So, the rich media previewing is just to help you when you’re trying to figure out which content to access and pull down from the network.

**IA:** Are the products based on downloads from the Internet? Can people download them from the Internet?

**Mr. Hoffert:** The primary service that I described to you, ShareMethods, which is the foundation of the solutions we provide as well as ShareNow for AppExchange, are both delivered purely through the Internet as a subscription service without any downloads required. You just launch your browser, and type in the URL either for ShareMethods.net or for salesforce.com. When you do that, it then takes you into our application, and it’s delivered to the end user as a mixture of HTML and Java Script. And then the back end server, which we manage, own, and operate as a high-performance data center, is SAS 70 Type II compliant, which is an important standard in the hosting industry. ShareDrive OnDemand includes a small applet, which you download to an end user’s desktop. And that’s required because the application supports offline synchronization of your documents. So you need a local application to bridge the online and the offline world working with your documents, and it’s the secret sauce that lets you support offline synchronization or local backup to a server of all your key content. The typical user, though, I think would be running in a web browser. But some users, particularly users who are managing content and hosting a lot of materials on ShareDrive OnDemand, I think would get a lot of benefit from ShareDrive OnDemand and its small downloadable applet. They would typically be your marketing

or product management or marketing communications or creative services groups.

**IA:** I noticed that at least one of your products utilizes AJAX. What advantages does AJAX provide users?

**Mr. Hoffert:** AJAX provides a tremendous amount of responsiveness in the user interface, and we’re a big proponent of AJAX. In fact, we are co-founders of a new industry standard, which is called, “Open Simple AJAX Mash Up.” We worked on this set of standards because we saw a set of problems that were starting to crop up where end users wanted to interact with a variety of online office applications but had to manually move their documents back and forth between these services. For example, if you create a document in an online word processor, you would have to download it and then re-upload it in another application that might translate that document into another language, for example. We wanted to solve the problem of cross-application document sharing. We also wanted to try and solve the problem of single sign-on when you have multiple applications that an end user would like to access, but they don’t want to have to log into each of the applications one at a time and remember different user names and passwords for each application. So, our proposed standard addresses the problem of single sign-on. The third problem is having the capability to easily cut and paste content from one application environment to another on the Web. That is taken for granted in the desktop world, but there’s a major need for standards to do that in the online world. We’re working on our new proposed standards with another company called iNetOffice. iNetOffice was founded by an engineer from Microsoft who worked on early versions of Internet Explorer and desktop products. ShareMethods and iNetOffice are now working to lead a consortium of companies that are also starting to contribute and build upon this standard to create a whole platform where it’s easier to create, manage, and share online documents and content. We think it potentially could be a very significant development in the industry. The reason AJAX is so powerful, back to your earlier question, is it lets you build a user interface on the Web that has the richness of the experience that you would have typically on the desktop application. Notable examples are what you can do with Microsoft Office and Adobe Acrobat, in terms of offering and content. So it’s taking that richness of the experience you typically have on the desktop application, and letting you create a web experience that’s very rich, very fast, and very complex in terms of the capability that could be delivered through the internet.

**IA:** What type of products or new standards do you think the collaboration with iNetOffice will lead to?

**Mr. Hoffert:** What we foresee is that a lot of the desktop productivity services will start to see more and more user activity online. In the current paradigm, the day-to-day work for that kind of content creation, the desktop is dominant and the online world is secondary. You share files online, and distribute them from there. We actually see the desktop functionality becoming secondary in the next two to five years, and the online document and content creation world becoming primary. It opens up so many new capabilities for real-time collaboration, for community experience, and for speeding up the time that is involved in creating content and doing it in a more collaborative and richer manner. That will result in more powerful output, content getting created more quickly, and content that's of higher quality. It will result in a user experience that is more seamless than it is today, where you have a disconnected single user desktop experience. You're working in that environment most of the time today and then you have sporadic collaboration and communication that happens on the Internet. We are seeing a fusing of those two worlds into one platform that will be far more powerful than what users are experiencing today. We're pretty excited about it. We see Open SAM (Open Simple Ajax Mashup) as a great enabler for this new online platform, and a much richer environment for collaboration around content. As a result, we will have a much more powerful platform at the end of the day for consumers and end users who end up acting as the distribution point for this content. It's becoming a much more integrated environment where content offerings, collaboration around content, the sharing and the distribution which are separate today, can fuse into one consolidated platform with a lot of power.

**IA:** Can you explain the term "mash-up"?

**Mr. Hoffert:** Yes. A mash up is when you combine independent application services, very often into a sum that's greater than its parts. One example that's often used is Google Maps, which has a capability for a mash up. So, in salesforce.com, a CRM tool where people track their customers, people have done a mash up with Google Maps where you can actually look at a map and see where your customers are located. It uses the Google Maps service to display the map, and it pulls the data from salesforce.com to be able to render the names of the customers overlaid on top of the map. That's an example of a two-application mash up. With our new standard that we're developing and promoting in the industry, we envision far richer types of mash-ups. ShareOffice represents a three-way mash-up where you would pull customer information like the customer name, the address, and the dollar amount of a sales opportunity out of salesforce.com for structured data that lives in that application. You would then pull a document template

for a standard sales proposal or a customer cover letter or even a contract from an online word processor, for example, one made by a company like iNetWord. Then you would use a third application service, for example ShareMethods, that has the document management capability.

The mash-up combines the data from salesforce.com describing the customer and the sales opportunity and renders it into a document template online in a browser so you see the sales proposal or contract in its final form. And then when you click "save," you can save the completed proposal as a PDF or a Word document and it gets stored into an online, document-on-demand solution by ShareMethods and it's instantly shareable around the world with all your team members who can review and approve it, or they can send it out as we discussed earlier to a prospect or a customer, and track the analytics and their responses. The mash-up is combining application services from different companies and different vendors to create new and more powerful applications than you can make from these independent services on their own.

**IA:** Is there anything else you'd like to add before we wrap up?

**Mr. Hoffert:** We appreciate the opportunity to share this information with you and your readers and we're really excited about the potential of this area. It's at the early stages, but we think it will result in a very significant set of improvements in terms of the way sales and marketing and customer support teams work today. Ultimately this will save users a lot of time and allow them to focus more on strategy. So, if you're a salesperson, instead of filling out the same customer information day after day, you will have it filled out for you automatically through a mash-up like I described. And a marketing person who needs to build a new press release could easily create a template or work to collaborate with three or four people at a PR firm in real time around the world in a way that's hard to do today. These are examples of the types of benefits available to users in an online office platform when it's fully deployed.

**IA:** Thank you again, Eric, for taking the time to speak with us today.

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