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What Is Community Server?

The following chapter introduces you to Community Server as a platform. You will learn about the various applications that make up this platform and about the different editions of Community Server that are available. Many of these editions are available for purchase, and this chapter covers how you can go about purchasing them. Furthermore, you will also be introduced to some of the add-ins that are available for Community Server. This chapter is intended to provide you with a good basis as well as a basic history of Community Server. The following list is an overview of what is included in this chapter:

❑ Definition of Community Server

❑ History of Community Server

❑ Overview of available editions

❑ Feature roadmap

Introduction to Community Server

Community Server is a software platform that can be used to easily activate an online community of any size. The platform consists of several complete applications that include a web log engine (blogs), forums, photo gallery, and file gallery. With this combination, it's easy for online communities to collaborate and share their knowledge with each other and with people outside the community. In addition, the platform is extremely extensible, offering developers the source code used to create Community Server as well as a straightforward API to create additional applications and features.

Community Server is an established and proven software product, which is well recognized by industry experts. Its success is highlighted not only by the awards it has received but also through the appreciation that its users bestow upon it. For example, it was selected by readers of the

asp.netPRO magazine as the best forums solution for 2005 and 2006. This is a telling indicator of the usefulness of not only the individual applications that compose Community Server but also the platform as a whole.

Community Server is a community product, meaning that its source code is freely available. The core product is also available at no cost in a special personal edition. There are other editions that are available for purchase, which are all geared toward meeting different requirements. That being said, Community Server is definitely a platform that is viewed as meeting the requirements and needs of almost every community imaginable.

Telligent's Role in Community Server

The company that owns Community Server is Telligent Systems. Telligent maintains the source code for Community Server and also provides outstanding support for it. While the source code for Community Server is maintained by Telligent, it is also open to the public. This means that people outside of Telligent are free to contribute source code and feature suggestions. Telligent provides amazing support to those who use Community Server. When you combine this high level of support with an award-winning product like Community Server, the results are phenomenal.

Telligent's main office is in Dallas, Texas, and currently employs more than 50 outstanding people. In addition to those who work in the main office, there are also several other individuals who telecommute to work. These other individuals span all of the time zones in the United States as well as some in other countries, which further improves the level of service that can be offered to customers.

It is also important to understand that Telligent goes beyond Community Server by delivering custom solutions to clients. Telligent also has other products that they have released and are currently in development. One of their more recent and popular products that can be used with a Community Server installation is blogmailr. This tool allows for people to freely post to their blog simply by sending an email.

Previous Versions

From its early releases, Community Server has maintained the goal of enabling online communities to be created quickly and easily. As a result of this goal, people are able to accomplish more with less difficulty with each successive release of Community Server. This goal has been advanced by the addition of new features and the simplification of existing ones. In addition, the feedback provided by community members and customers has helped to shape Community Server through its different versions.

The version numbers of Community Server are tied, in some ways, to the version of .NET that they are able to operate on. Community Server 1.1 runs on .NET 1.1, while Community Server 2.0 and greater are able to run on .NET 2.0. However, it is important to note that Community Server 2.0 and 2.1 can both run on the .NET 1.1 Framework.

Throughout the time that Community Server has existed, it has become more stable as well as more targeted at enabling online communities. For example, with the release of version 2.0, master pages and skin files were introduced. As a result, communities were able to customize the look of their community

site with ease. Now, with the release of 3.0, Community Server has simplified the theming process, thus making it even easier to customize the look of a community site. In this way, newer versions of Community Server are constantly improving on existing features and processes. One of the main focuses of each revision of Community Server is simplification. This does not mean that features are removed but that each new version of Community Server is easier to use than the previous one.

Exploring the Applications

The main applications that Community Server offers are a complete blogging engine, forums, photo gallery, and file gallery. All of these applications combine to create a complete community platform that is easily set up to activate online communities quickly. In addition, Community Server also offers a complete way to manage your community members with an enterprise-quality membership system. There are also many features that Community Server includes that are offered across a site, such as searching and syndication. There is a wealth of features that Community Server provides for each application, but for the purposes of this introduction, only the applications themselves are explored here.

❑ **Blogs** — The number of bloggers has been growing over the last few years. A blog itself is nothing more than a web log or online journal that a person or group of people can keep. The entries or posts to a blog are usually organized in a chronological way, where the most recent posts are displayed first. In addition, there is also an archive that is kept of posts for each month that they were created. The blogging engine in Community Server allows every user to a site to have their own blog or even collaborate with others on shared blogs. It is easy to aggregate and search the blog posts using Community Server. You also have the option of allowing visitors to rate and comment on blog posts. This provides an entirely new level of community involvement from people who would not typically be able to contribute their thoughts.

❑ **Forums** — Forums are an important way for community members to be able to collaborate on different ideas. It allows members, and potentially nonmembers, to provide content that relates to specific predefined topics. Community Server allows members to be notified of updates to a forum topic by email or through RSS feeds.

❑ **Photo galleries** — Photo galleries provide a space for community members to share any image files that they have. These images can be well organized and can even be displayed in a slideshow fashion. Individual photos can be rated and commented on just as individual blog posts would be.

❑ **File galleries** — File galleries provide a mechanism for files to be published and shared with the community. The files can be organized into a logical folder structure. Similarly to the previous features, viewers can rate and comment on a file.

Understanding the Role of the First Version

The first version of Community Server was an important milestone because it marked the beginning of a platform offering forums, blogging, and a gallery solution in one package. The main goal for the release of the first version of Community Server was to provide a stable platform with all of the previous features. This first version was available in February 2005. It worked out that the next release, version 1.1, provided bug fixes to this initial version so that it was even more stable. Version 1.1 was available to the public in June 2005.

Community Server 3.0

Community Server 3.0 seeks to drastically improve several core areas of Community Server 2.1. This version contains new features and many bug fixes. The input from community members and clients has an enormous impact on the features that are included and excluded from this and other releases. There is a tremendous amount of energy that goes into Community Server and its useful versions not only from the Telligent employees but also from clients and community members.

New Features

There are several new core features that are contained in the 3.0 release of Community Server. They are described briefly in the following list:

❑ *Chameleon* is the name of the new theming engine. This new engine removes complicated skin files and is targeted at making it much easier to customize the presentation of a Community Server site. The themes themselves can be customized from the Community Server Control Panel. This is an improvement over previous releases that required an increased knowledge of web design and skinning. With Chameleon it is easier for nontechnical individuals to alter how their site is presented to visitors.

❑ *Zion* is the name of the new file storage system. One of the main attractions of Zion is that it offers a centralized way to store files. This allows for better support for post attachments and for file support.

❑ *Morpheus* is the name of the new membership system. This feature allows membership providers to be easily created outside of the standard ASP.NET 2.0 membership store. As a result, existing user stores are able to be utilized and integrated more completely.

❑ *Tallyman* is the name of the new Mail Gateway. This new system is important for sites of all sizes as it allows a site to have feature-rich email services. One of the important attractions of Tallyman is that it provides mail list support.

Usage

The new features in Community Server 3.0 will be usable by sites of all sizes. No site is left behind in this release. Existing communities can easily convert their site to Community Server, while new sites can be created quickly and easily with a wealth of advanced functionality.

Choosing the Right Edition for You

To find the most suitable edition of Community Server for your needs, visit the Telligent Store web site at `http://store.telligent.com`. On this site, there is a listing of all of the available editions as well as commercial add-ins that are available for Community Server. In addition, there is a good description of each edition and a feature matrix to help you identify what features are included.

When deciding on the most appropriate edition of Community Server to purchase, it is important to realize the value of the Gold Support option. This added support is a good option to purchase to help guarantee that your questions will be answered by professionals. While the standard support provided

in the open forums is stellar, the Gold Support forums are beyond stellar. Therefore, it is important to consider the importance of purchasing Gold Support with your edition. It is also important to realize that the Enterprise Edition of Community Server includes Gold Support with the license.

Feature Matrix

The following table gives a high-level overview of the features available with each version of Community Server. This feature matrix is available at `http://store.telligent.com/FeatureMatrix.aspx` in a more complete form. If you would like to learn about pricing for each of the editions, please consult the preceding link. Credit is due to Telligent for providing such a useful and well-detailed feature matrix.

	Express Edition	Standard Edition	Professional Edition	Enterprise Edition
Web sites per server	Unlimited	1	10	Unlimited
Users per license	Unlimited	Unlimited	Unlimited	Unlimited
Forums per site	Unlimited	Unlimited	Unlimited	Unlimited
Blogs per site	Unlimited	Unlimited	Unlimited	Unlimited
Photos per site	Unlimited	Unlimited	Unlimited	Unlimited
Files per site (file gallery)	50	500	Unlimited	Unlimited
RSS Reader	250 users	Unlimited	Unlimited	Unlimited
Logo requirement for footer of every page	Yes	No	No	No
Spam blocker	Included	Included	Included	Included
IP Banning add-on	Not available	Yes	Yes	Yes

	Express Edition	Standard Edition	Professional Edition	Enterprise Edition
Member Points System	Not available	Yes	Yes	Yes
Reports	Not available	Yes	Yes	Yes
Web farm support	Not available	Not available	Yes	Yes
Single Sign-on Authentication add-ons	Not available	Add-on available	One included**	All included
Email Gateway	Not available	Add-on available	25 licenses included	100 licenses included

Table continued on following page

	Express Edition	Standard Edition	Professional Edition	Enterprise Edition
Enterprise Search	Not available	Add-on available	Included	Included
NNTP News Gateway	Not available	Add-on available	Add-on available	100 licenses included
FTP Gateway	Not available	Add-on available	Add-on available	100 licenses included
Email Gateway Microsoft Exchange Connector	Not available	Add-on available	Add-on available	Included
Tier II Premium Support included	Not available	Not included	Not included	10 hours

Licensing Community Server

The preceding editions can be purchased from the Telligent Store, and the licenses can be applied to a Community Server implementation easily. In addition, it is also easy to upgrade your license for Community Server. When you decide to purchase Community Server, you can simply navigate to https://store.telligent.com and select the edition that is appropriate for you. The following sections explain more specifics about these editions, and this can help you decide which is most appropriate for your needs. In addition, if you still have questions you can go to the forums at http://communityserver.org and ask for advice. There are many people who are eager to assist you to make the best decision for your situation.

Once you have purchased a license, you can install it through an existing installation of Community Server. To install the license, simply complete the following steps:

1. Log in as an administrator.
2. Click on the Control Panel link.
3. Click on the Administration link.
4. Expand the System Tools menu on the left and select Manage Licenses (see Figure 1-1).
5. Extract the license file provided by Telligent if it is compressed.
6. Click the Browse button on the Manage Licenses page and navigate to the license file you extracted.
7. Click Install, and your new license will be installed and your Community Server site updated.
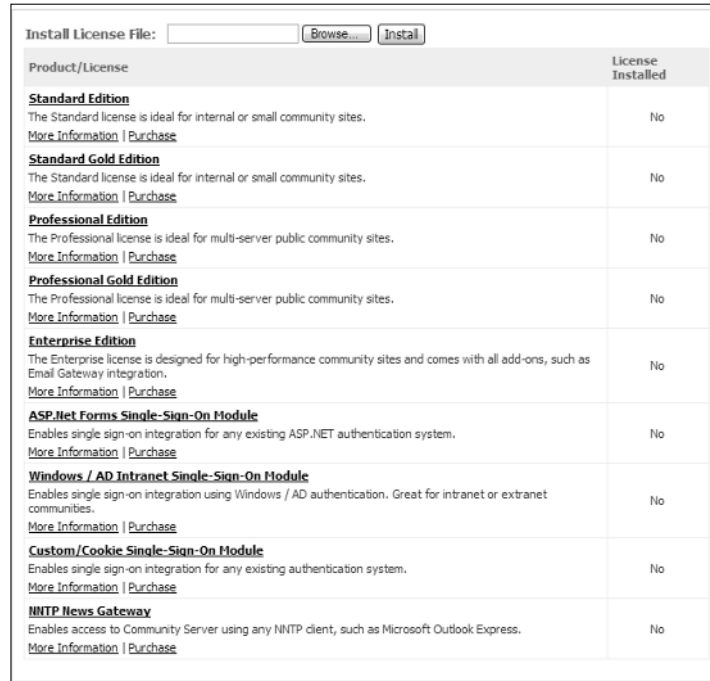
Figure 1-1: Manage Licenses

Express Edition

You may also find that the Express Edition is referred to as the Personal Edition, as it is targeted more at individual users who need only limited functionality. Furthermore, the Express Edition is the only edition of Community Server that does not cost any money. However, this edition is intended for personal use with small communities. This can be a good starting edition for many people who are starting a small community and do not require the benefits of the other editions.

It is important to understand that if you are going to require any of the commercial add-ons to Community Server, you need to purchase at least the Standard Edition. However, as mentioned previously, it is easy to upgrade your editions using the License Management tool that comes with all versions of Community Server.

Another important aspect of the Express Edition is the fact that you are required to include the Community Server logo at the bottom of every page on your site that is using Community Server. Even though the logo is small and unobtrusive, it is important to realize this requirement.

Gold Support is not available with this edition of Community Server.

Standard Edition

The Standard Edition of Community Server is a step up from the Express Edition, as you receive many new features. One of the most important new features is the addition of reports. These are discussed in more detail in Chapter 9, but they basically allow you to learn more about the current state of your community.

In addition, the Standard Edition provides support for all of the commercial add-ons. If your site requires any of these add-ons, you need to purchase the Standard Edition of Community Server or higher.

The Standard Edition is mainly useful for small to medium-sized community sites; this edition is not for use in a web farm. Additionally, up to 500 files can be stored in the file gallery when the Standard license has been installed.

Gold Support is available with the purchase of the Standard Edition license.

Professional Edition

The Professional Edition of Community Server adds several new features and is designed for all sizes of communities. One of the important distinctions between the Professional Edition and the Standard Edition is that the Professional Edition adds support for web farms.

In addition, it is also important to realize that a Professional Edition allows for up to 10 different web sites running on Community Server to be installed. This is extremely important if you plan on developing multiple communities.

With the purchase of the Professional Edition, you also receive a couple of commercial add-ons at no additional cost. These include the extremely powerful Enterprise Search, Email Gateway, and a Single Sign-on Authentication add-on. If you were planning to purchase any of these add-ons, then definitely consider simply purchasing the Professional Edition, which already includes them.

Also, starting with the Professional Edition you get the ability to have an unlimited number of files per site in the file gallery. This is an important distinction to consider when comparing the Professional Edition to the Standard or Express Edition.

Enterprise Edition

The Enterprise Edition of Community Server is the most feature rich of all of the editions. This edition provides support for Web Farms and will run sites of all sizes. In addition, it includes all of the available commercial add-ons.

An important distinction between the Enterprise Edition and the Standard and Professional Editions is that the Enterprise Edition allows an unlimited number of sites to be installed on the server. If you expect to have multiple communities or a large web farm, then consider the benefits of Enterprise Edition when making your decision.

The Enterprise Edition includes Gold Tier I support at no additional cost. Additionally, it includes 10 hours of Tier II Premium Support. This is extremely important to consider when making a decision between the different editions. The Gold Tier I support allows for any questions about Community Server to be asked in the Gold Forums.

The Future of Community Server

The future of Community Server is so bright that you may have to wear shades. It shows great promise, as each version has attracted many new users and customers. Simplicity of use is one of the main focuses of Community Server; therefore, each new version strives to be even easier to use than the previous one.

Future Support

Community Server has always received excellent support from the Telligent employees as well as community members. The ongoing support of Community Server is some of the best that you will find with any product. If you have purchased Gold Support for Community Server you can expect an even higher-quality answer to any of the questions that you have regarding the product. In addition, there is also a focus to improve the existing level of support that exists. As a result of this outstanding level of support, which is here to stay, you should consider purchasing Gold Support for Community Server.

The Roadmap

Telligent made a roadmap available for Community Server at `http://communityserver.org/i/roadmap.aspx`. This roadmap details the planned features in the next releases of Community Server. If you are interested in a new feature in Community Server, consult this roadmap to learn whether or not it will be included in a future release. If you do not see the desired feature, you can go ahead and post your request in the Community Server forums.

Summary

Community Server is an award-winning platform that offers several enterprise applications. In addition, these applications and the features available vary with each edition of Community Server. Furthermore, the platform itself has been evolving throughout the years so that with each release it becomes easier to use, while providing more useful features.

In the next chapter, you will expand on your understanding of Community Server by learning how to install it. As a result, you will be able to complete an installation of a Community Server site in various ways.