

How Can MobileMe Benefit My Business?



Today's businesses are becoming more and more virtual; instead of office spaces, businesses are using technology to enable their team members to work together without physically being in the same place. This is especially true for small businesses, where the expenses associated with maintaining an office are often hard to justify. Implementing technology appropriate to your business is key to enabling a virtual organization to function effectively. While Apple's MobileMe service is marketed toward consumers, it actually provides a number of services that enable businesses to function effectively and virtually without the costs associated with traditional IT support.

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Understanding MobileMe

MobileMe is a set of services that are delivered over the Internet. While Apple markets MobileMe primarily to consumers, it can be a great asset to your small business when you understand how you can deploy MobileMe effectively, which just happens to be the point of this book. Using MobileMe, you can take advantage of powerful technologies for your business that previously necessitated expensive and complex IT resources (in-house or outsourced) that required lots of your time and money. MobileMe services, including the required hardware and software, are all provided and maintained by Apple. All you need to access them is a MobileMe account and a supported device with an Internet connection. And, MobileMe is quite inexpensive to deploy even if you have quite a large small business. Some of the most significant benefits MobileMe provides to your small business include the following:

- Synchronize information on Macs, Windows PCs, and iPhones.
- Store files online using a virtual hard disk (called an iDisk in MobileMe lingo).
- Text, audio, and video chat.
- Publish Web sites.
- Email using email applications on desktop computers or iPhones and via the MobileMe Web email application.
- Manage contacts online via the MobileMe Web Contacts application.
- View calendars on the Web.

Later sections in this chapter provide an overview of each of these capabilities, and chapters throughout the rest of this book are dedicated to the details.

Although MobileMe provides these sophisticated services through complex technology, you don't have to worry about that complexity. You can easily configure, use, and maintain MobileMe for your small business with the information in this book. You don't need to be an IT or technology expert either; MobileMe is well designed so you can focus on using MobileMe effectively in your business rather than spending a lot of time trying to understand how MobileMe's tools work.

To use MobileMe, you must have one or more MobileMe accounts. Chapter 2 contains details of obtaining MobileMe accounts for your business. You can use a number of options to deploy MobileMe for your business, and that chapter helps you choose and implement the option that is best for you.

You can access MobileMe services with any of the following devices:

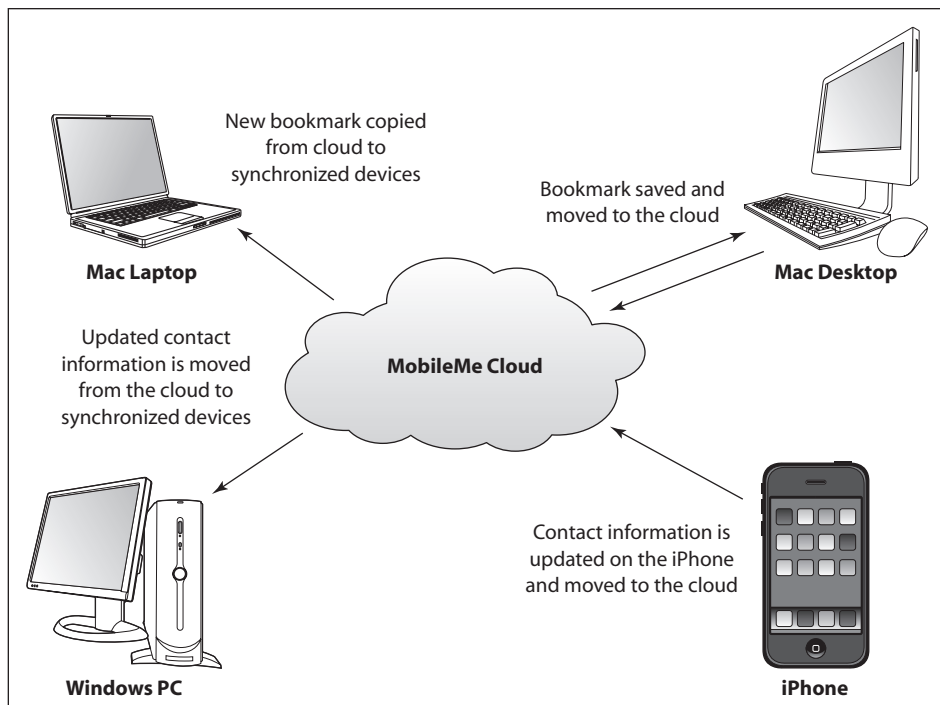
- Macs running Mac OS X with the latest version of Safari or Firefox
- Windows PCs running XP or Vista with the latest version of Safari or Firefox (MobileMe is not fully compatible with Internet Explorer)
- iPhones running version 2.0 or later of the iPhone software

Synchronizing Information on All Your Devices via the MobileMe Cloud

You probably use more than one computer or other device to operate your business. For example, you might have desktop computers, laptop computers, and an iPhone. As you use each of these devices, you make changes to important information, such as updating a contact's information, creating a bookmark, or responding to an email. Ideally, you want to have the same information available to you on all the devices you use, and even better, you want your devices to be synchronized with as little action from you as possible. MobileMe can do this for you.

When you obtain a MobileMe account, you gain access to the MobileMe cloud; this is an area on Apple's servers where your information can be stored. Each device that is synced with MobileMe connects to the cloud and transfers information to and from it. Because all the devices are connecting to the same cloud, they all have access to the same information. MobileMe software on each device ensures that the most current information is available on each device, as shown in figure 1.1.

You can choose which devices and the specific kinds of information on those devices that are synced with the cloud by configuring each device you want to include in the synchronization process. You can synchronize Macs, Windows PCs, and iPhones. Chapter 3 provides an explanation of how to configure each kind of device for MobileMe synchronization.



1.1 MobileMe synchronizes information on Macs, Windows PCs, and iPhones via the MobileMe cloud.

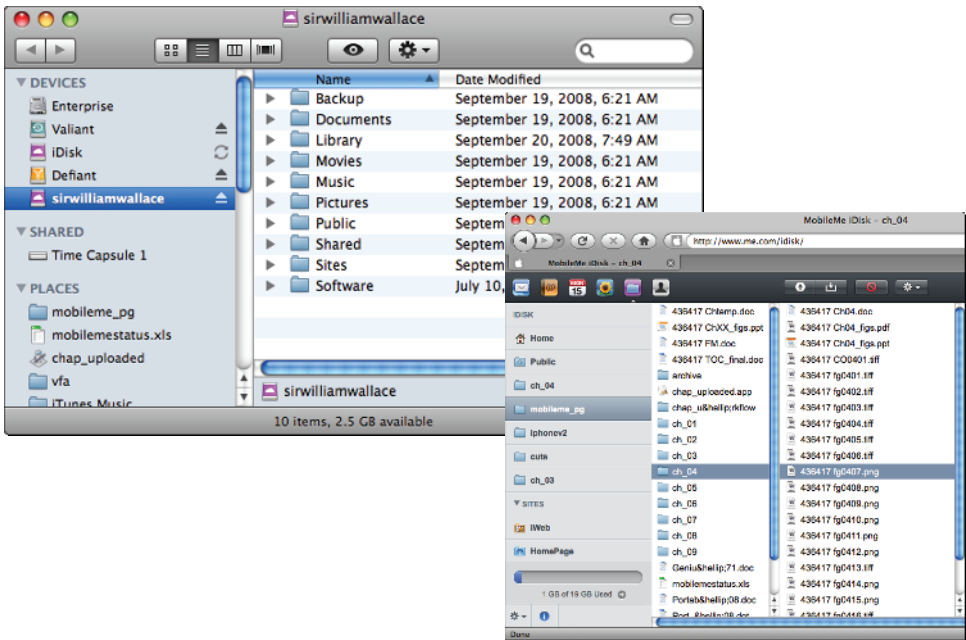
Storing and Sharing Files Online with MobileMe iDisks

An iDisk is a virtual disk space in which you can store files, much like you store files on a hard drive internal to or connected to a computer. The benefit of an iDisk is that it is located on Apple servers that you can access over the Net, which means the files stored there are available to any Mac or Windows PC that can connect to the Internet. This is very useful for working with your own files because you can use file synchronization between the iDisk and computers to ensure that the most current version of any file is available to you. Even better, you can use the Public folder on your iDisk to share files with others. For example, if you are collaborating on a document with one of your team members, you can store that document on your iDisk, and both you and your team member can access it from there. Or you can place documents you want to make available to customers there and send them a link to download those documents to their own computers.

You can access your iDisk from your computer's desktop and by using the MobileMe iDisk Web application, as shown in figure 1.2. On a Mac, you can keep a copy of your iDisk on your computer

so that you can work with its files even when you aren't connected to the Internet, and you have the local version synchronized to the online version automatically or manually.

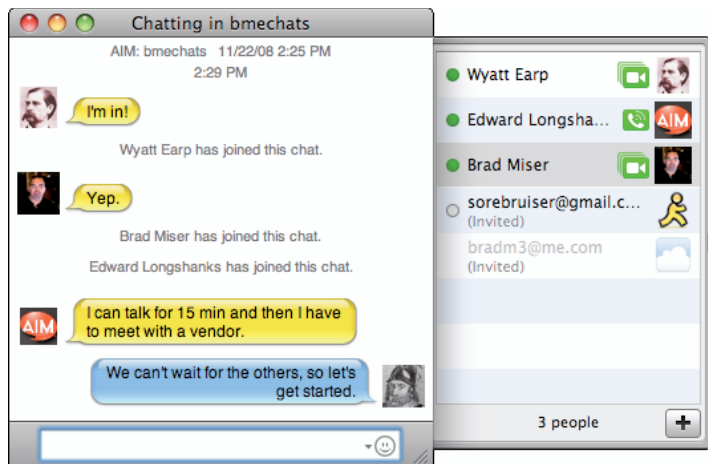
On a Windows PC, you can connect to your iDisk just like other drives and devices available to you over a network. With Safari or Firefox, you can access your iDisk using the iDisk Web application, which enables you to work with the disk similarly to how you use it from the desktop. Taking advantage of an iDisk is covered in Chapter 4.



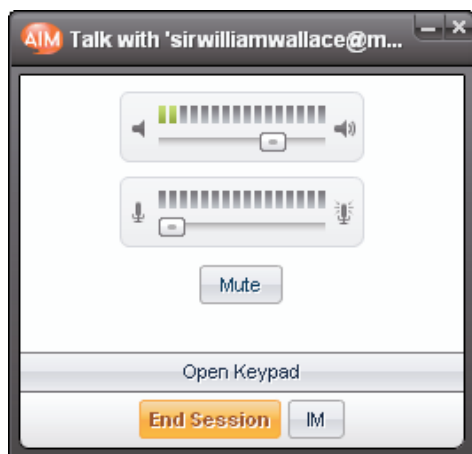
1.2 Files stored on your iDisk are available from your desktop and from any computer running Safari or Firefox.

Using MobileMe to Communicate

A major challenge in running a virtual business is ensuring that effective communication is happening between you and your team members. Your MobileMe account provides chatting capabilities that you can access via the Mac's iChat application or the AIM application on Windows PCs, as shown in figures 1.3 and 1.4. Using these applications, you can easily text chat with team members; for even more effective communication, you can audio and video chat as well. On the Mac, you also can control a team member's Mac or share control of your Mac with her, and using iChat's file sharing, you can conduct online presentations and share files. In Chapter 5, you learn the ins and outs of using these tools to communicate effectively.



1.3 To keep in touch with team members with a Mac, use your MobileMe account and iChat to text, audio, or video chat.



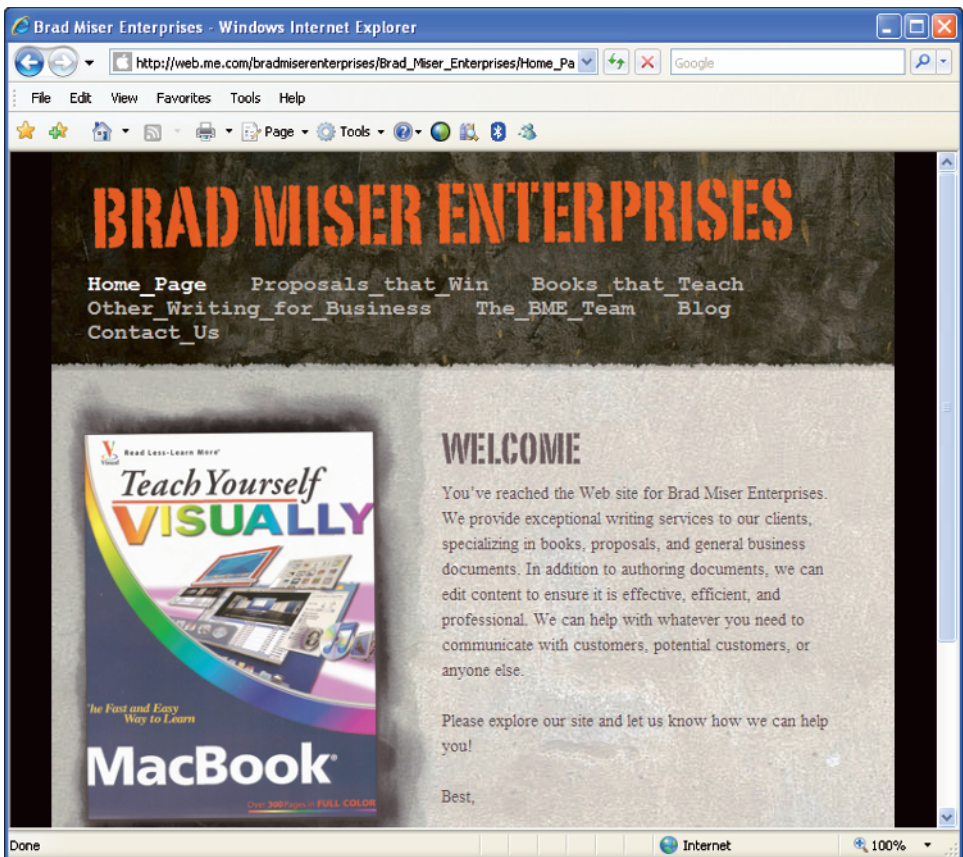
1.4 You can also use your MobileMe account to chat on a Windows computer using the AIM application.

Publishing Web Sites with MobileMe

One thing every business needs — no matter what that business's products or services are — is a Web site. With a MobileMe account, you can easily publish one or more Web sites; you don't have to worry about any of the hardware or software that is required to put the sites on the Web because

MobileMe handles all that complexity for you. You can instead focus on creating a Web site that effectively represents your business and enables your customers, potential customers, and partners to get information and interact with you. You can use many applications to create the Web sites you want to publish via MobileMe.

If you use a Mac, a good choice to create your Web sites is the iWeb application because it is tightly integrated with MobileMe and allows you to create Web sites using templates that you can easily customize to design your site. Publishing a Web site with iWeb is literally a one-click operation, as shown in figure 1.5. If you don't have iWeb or you use a Windows PC, you can use another application to create your sites, such as a Web creation application or applications that can save their output as a Web site; for example, Microsoft Office applications can do this.



1.5 If you use iWeb, you can publish your own Web sites with one click.

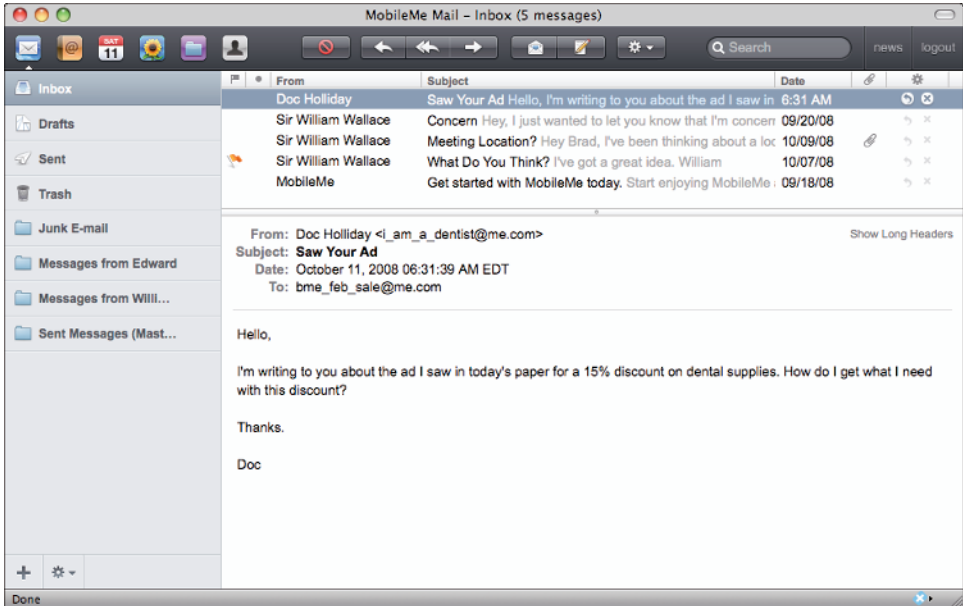
When you publish a Web site, the default URL begins with `web.me.com`; you should register your own domain so that your URL starts with something more identifiable with your business. After you have registered your domain, you can easily configure MobileMe to publish your sites using that domain.

Publishing and managing Web sites via MobileMe is explained in detail in Chapter 6.

Touring Your MobileMe Web Site

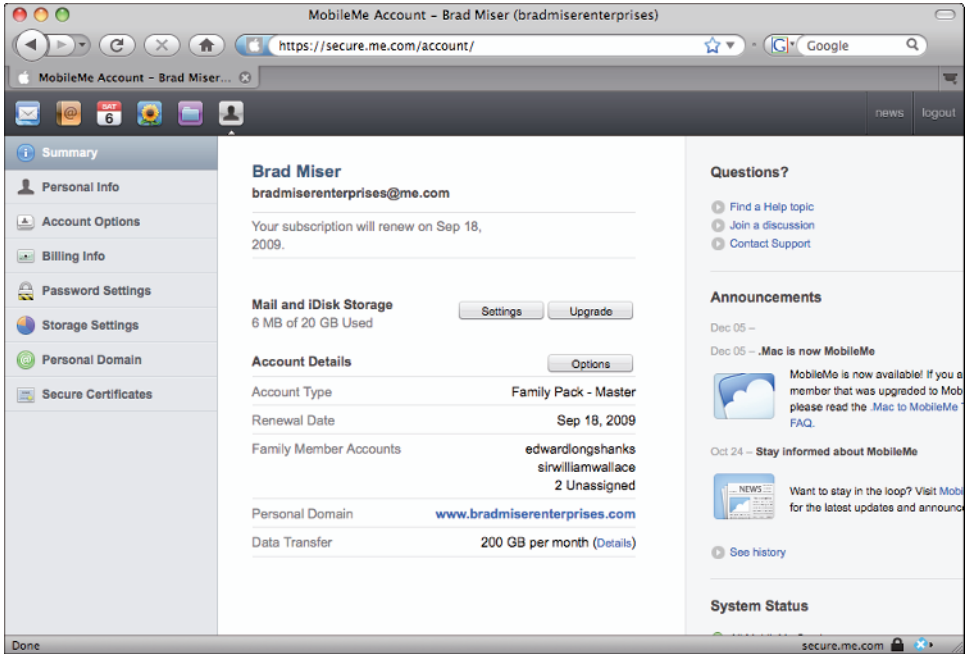
As part of your MobileMe account, you have access to your own MobileMe Web site. You access your site by moving to `me.com` and entering your MobileMe member name and password. Once logged in, you can use the following tools:

- **Email.** The MobileMe Web email application is a full-featured tool that you can use to create, send, read, and organize email, as shown in figure 1.6. The primary benefit of this application — as compared to an email application installed on your computer — is that you can use it from any computer with an Internet connection and Firefox or Safari. You can use this application with your MobileMe email accounts, and you can configure an external email account in it too. Along with the kinds of features you'd expect from an email application, you can create and use email aliases, which are very useful for temporary addresses that you can use for specific business purposes or to limit your exposure to spam or other Internet hassles. MobileMe's email tools are described in Chapter 7.
- **Contacts.** The Contacts application enables you to access and manage contact information being stored in the MobileMe cloud. Like the other MobileMe Web applications, this means you can get to your contact information from just about any computer. (Of course, when you sync computers via MobileMe, your current contact information is always available locally too.) You can create, manage, and organize your contacts using this application within Firefox or Safari. Using this tool is explained in Chapter 8.
- **Calendar.** While a bit more limited than the other MobileMe Web applications, you can use the Calendar application to view your calendars, providing you quick access when you aren't using one of your own computers or other devices. You can post calendars you manage in Outlook or iCal to the MobileMe cloud, and they become visible in the MobileMe Web Calendar application. You also can create and manage calendars within this application. Working with calendars is covered in Chapter 9.



1.6 The MobileMe Web email application enables you to work with your email from any computer with an Internet connection and a supported Web browser.

- **Gallery.** Use the Gallery tool to publish photos to the Web. This tool isn't as useful for business as some of the other MobileMe services (for example, you are better off publishing photos related to your business via Web sites). However, you might find creative ways to use the Gallery as part of your business, and you can always use it for personal purposes. So for details about using the Gallery, see Appendix A.
- **iDisk.** With the iDisk Web application, you can access your online iDisk to manage the files stored there or add new files to it. This works similar to accessing a disk from a computer desktop, except of course, you can use your iDisk from any computer with a working Internet connection and Safari or Firefox. Your iDisk's capabilities are covered in Chapter 4.
- **Account.** Use the Account application to manage your MobileMe accounts. For example, you can add more disk space or create and manage Family Member accounts, as shown in figure 1.7. This tool is explained in detail in Chapter 2.



1.7 In addition to the applications provided on your MobileMe Web site, you can use its Account tool to manage your MobileMe accounts.

