CNS /Update Newsletter Feature

UF as an E-Business

UF Information Technology

UFIT

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UF as an E-Business

The term "e-business" is used to describe institutions whose interactions with customers and constituents can be conducted over the Internet from anywhere on the globe at any time of the day or night.

UF is an emerging e-business. Faculty, staff and students use university Web sites at all times from locations around the world. Library systems, course management systems, departmental and college systems are available nearly 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Our core administrative systems, including financial, student records and human resource systems, are not yet available on such a schedule. We routinely schedule "maintenance windows" in which systems are taken down, upgraded, tested and put back in service. "Downtime," the time services are unavailable for university business, may be hours per day if systems are taken down at night, or hours per week if systems are taken down for weekend maintenance.

One of the goals of the UF Bridges project is to reduce the amount of downtime and make university services available nearly all the time. The goal set by the Vision Team is 99.9% service availability. There are 168 hours in each week. 99.9% available services would be unavailable 0.1% of the time or less, meaning an average of 0.168 hours (10 minutes) per week, or approximately 9 hours of downtime over the course of a year.

Achieving this goal will mean that users of university systems can view the systems as generally available. Business processes can then be designed to operate at any time, without concern for a system schedule. Course delivery can be done at a distance in any time zone without concern for loss of university service.

Can such low amounts of downtime be achieved? Consider e-businesses such as Amazon.com and e-Bay. These sites do not experience regularly scheduled downtime. Users of these sites can visit at any time and expect the systems that service these sites to be available. Such sites provide examples of very high system availability.

How can such systems be built and operated? There are three keys-redundant hardware, staggered maintenance processes and system design that is resilient to external events. Redundant hardware supports maintenance procedures that stagger component upgrades, upgrading components one at a time and restoring them to service without the service becoming unavailable to the user. UF's ERP systems are designed with redundant hardware at all levels. The UF portal at my.ufl.edu [http://my.ufl.edu/] is maintained with small amounts of downtime.

To realize our goal of UF as an E-Business, we will continue to improve our maintenance procedures and system design, thereby reducing downtime in order to provide services at all times.

Your Comments are Welcome

We welcome your comments and suggestions on this and all UFIT documentation. Please send your comments to:
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