

Get your fax right

In a communications world dominated by e-mail, there's still room for fax. And FaxCore ensures it fits in well with your messaging system

When e-mails first became really popular, it was tempting to use them for everything, and banish the fax machine to the store cupboard. However, in some circumstances e-mails are still not treated as legally admissible documents. For example, companies may refuse to accept a purchase order via e-mail, but will let you place an order via fax so long as you have the correct corporate letterhead. In addition, there are still cases where it's easier to scrawl a diagram, for example, and send it as a fax.

That still leaves the problem that the fax machine is not integrated into the rest of the electronic messaging system. It's also a pain to stand over the fax machine feeding in paper. You need a way of continuing to use faxes where appropriate, while being able to manage them alongside the rest of your integrated messaging system.

The traditional solution was to have a corporate LAN-based fax server that was accessible from anywhere on the network. This was great, but didn't provide any facilities for people working outside the network. FaxCore (Figure 1) uses a web browser-based client so you can view, send and receive faxes no matter where you are (Figure 2). Behind the

scenes, it's based on .NET and XML, which is an added advantage if you want to fax-enable existing business applications. FaxCore also scores because the web-based client means there's no overhead in terms of clients to be installed, or extras to be added to your Exchange server. Your users can sit down at any machine and begin work on their fax inbox.

FaxCore offers close integration with Exchange and Outlook. You can set it up to have a FaxCore fax folder view within Outlook, so your users really do

"Our testers were immediately able to send and receive faxes [using FaxCore] without needing other training or the online Help."

have complete integration between their faxes and their e-mails.

One problem for any fax server system is routing inbound faxes. It's expensive to set up and assign a unique direct dial inbound number for each recipient, but you need some way to ensure the faxes reach their intended recipient. FaxCore offers you the alternative of using barcodes to route inbound faxes by adding the barcode to the cover page.

If you already know earlier versions of FaxCore, the additions to this release include native support for SQL Server; the ability to use HTML as well as text for notification templates; and an improved cover page editor with support for HTML objects such as local and remote images. Code mappings have been added to help automate the rendering of documents from UNIX, mainframes, or other network servers and applications, and translation mappings are now available to support native embedded code formats from Facsys, RightFax, HostFax, HP Digital Senders and Xerox.

This is also the first client print driver to support Internet Printing Fax Protocol (IPFP), which provides LAN and WAN connectivity between the print driver and FaxCore over HTTP(s) without the need for VPN or local network connectivity to your fax server.

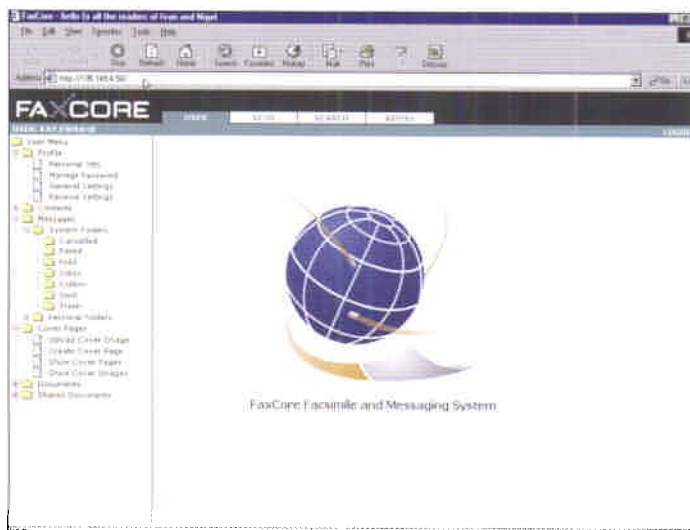


Figure 1: FaxCore...a world away from traditional fax solutions

FaxCore is extremely easy to use. You open the FaxCore server by entering the appropriate URL, type in your username and password, and see a screen with the familiar hierarchical folder view of applications such as Outlook. From there, our testers were immediately able to send and receive faxes without needing either training or the online Help. The different aspects perform as you'd expect them to with features in familiar places.

When you view the FaxCore screen, you see your fax activity organised into folders – inbox, outbox, sent, cancelled and failed. You can also set up personal folders to organise your faxes into more meaningful categories. As well as the fax activity, you can view and edit the details of the contacts you've defined for sending faxes to. Another set of folders shows the cover pages you've uploaded or created.

FaxCore has its own HTML cover page editor. You create the page by adding 'elements' such as free-form text, lines, barcodes, images and tokens. Tokens are information that is taken from FaxCore. For example, you can add the name of the sender; the company address; the creation date of the message; or the tracking key to identify the message. The final set of folders shows the documents that you've uploaded, or that have been uploaded as shared documents. In both cases, there's a default set of folders, but you would undoubtedly define your own structures.

To send a fax, you can use a variety of sophisticated options. Faxes can be sent to recipients from your address book or you can enter the details directly. You can choose to send the fax as a fax or as an e-mail. You can be notified on message failure and/or success, and you can choose to delay when the fax will be sent to a specific time and date. The fax contents can be drawn from one or more documents, from your own document folders or from the shared documents.

The final aspect of the web interface allows users to search the faxes that have been sent and received, and you can specify search criteria from pretty much all the details of faxes, such as recipient, date, country code, e-mail, faxes that have failed, and tracking number.

You can also use the web browser interface to administer the software. Any user has access to their own personal profile settings, but those users defined as administrators get more choices. As an administrator, you can edit domain and user settings, set up shared document management, and define inbound fax routing rules. You can also carry out system level monitoring of the FaxCore workflow queues and fax board activity, and manage the FaxCore server nodes in your network. This gives you the ability to start and shut down FaxCore services on your network.

FaxCore uses the domain model to organise

users and groups of users, and you define security, fax priority, processing rules and so on at the domain level.

Now we're in business

The ability to use FaxCore can be added to a variety of common business applications, including Microsoft Exchange, Outlook, and the rest of Office, Lotus Notes, Oracle and SAP.

In an effort to eliminate any IT concerns about installing third-party software on the e-mail server, the Microsoft Exchange Fax Connector is installed within FaxCore and a new 'Route' is created on the e-mail server. The Route, created with native Connectors in Exchange, simply forwards messages destined for a fax address to the IP address of the FaxCore server. The desired result of fax-enabling the e-mail system is achieved without installing any software on the mail server.

You need a fax board to run FaxCore. We tested FaxCore on the board the company recommends, the Brooktrout TR-1034. Brooktrout is probably the best known developer of fax boards, and its boards are used in applications ranging from LAN network fax to more exotic uses such as broadcast fax, unified messaging and fax on demand services.

The TR-1034 is a V.34 intelligent fax board with V.8 fast hand-shaking and a line speed of 33.6Kbps, twice the transmission speed of older 14.4Kbps fax boards. The TR-1034 comes in configurations between 8 and 30 channels, and offers facilities including error correction, MMR fax compression, and adaptive call progress. This essentially means that a communications library is used to identify line and fax machine conditions and adapt to them.

FaxCore is easy to use with a clear, well-designed interface. It works well and can be integrated with your e-mail system and other business software.

System requirements

OS Windows 2000 or higher.
Memory ≥512Mb RAM.
Hard disk space ≥40Gb.
Processor ≥1.8GHz.

UK supplier

Techland Group
Tel 01628 852000
E-mail info@techland.co.uk
Web www.techland.co.uk

Price

£1,463 for standard server with two fax channels (includes Exchange connectors).

Bottom line

Pros Easy to use, well designed.
Cons Cover page editor not very visual.

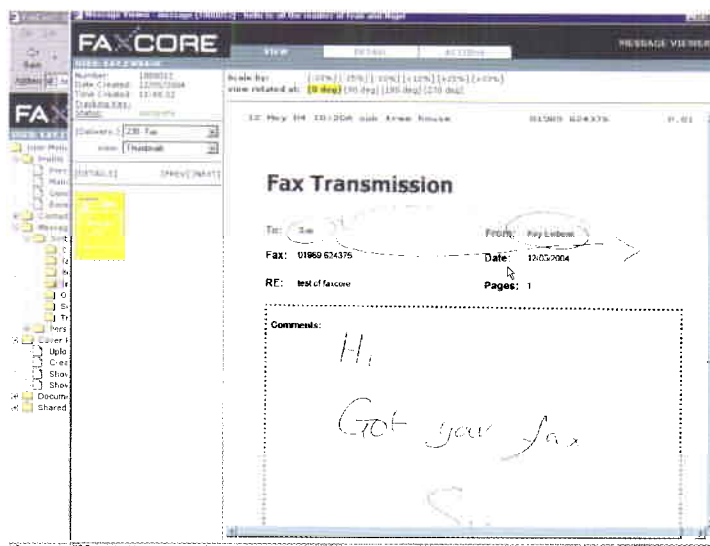


Figure 2: With FaxCore you can view, send and receive faxes from wherever you are