

ComputerWeekly – Taking the Time Wasting out of Scheduling

By Clive Longbottom, Service Director, Quocirca Ltd

Calendaring and scheduling - hardly a topic to get the blood racing, but, nevertheless, a cause of stress for many - if not most - people.

Even if you regularly work across time zones, chances are you keep your electronic calendar set to local time. When a meeting request comes in from somewhere else in the world, it is automatically translated into the local time.

To take a fairly common situation as an example, if you are working in London and need to set up a conference call with someone in Paris, you probably know that the Continent is an hour ahead. A 10am call from the UK will be taken at 11am in Paris. That shouldn't be too difficult for the two participants to set up between themselves.

It is a bit harder if your call is with someone in Seattle, US. If you often make calls to the US west coast, then Pacific time may not faze you too much. But how about a multi-person call taking in London, Seattle, Boise, Lisbon, Melbourne, Paris, Beijing and Mumbai?

Even with everyone on a call saying that it's such and such a time where they are, pulling everything together becomes a bit of a headache.

It could be worse. How about setting up the same call over the period when the clocks are going back or going forwards. For most people, it would probably make better sense to not bother with the call at all.

Standard calendaring systems are badly set up to deal with all this. The teleconference organiser becomes the centre of the universe, and all other participants have to make adjustments based on their understanding of what the time difference is - often a recipe for confusion.

Israeli company ScheduleOnce, has come up with a simple offering that could provide a solution to the problem.

Still in beta phase, Schedule Once is a collaborative website where a teleconference (or meeting, or web conference) owner can set up possible times for the event, inviting other people as required. Each person gets an email that points to the site, and they see the calendar in their own time zone. Therefore, a request for a teleconference set up by someone in London for 10am will be seen by those in Paris as being at 11am, and by those in Seattle at 2am. The underlying web service that powers ScheduleOnce deals with all the conversions based on geography - but also takes into account seasonal clock adjustments around the world.

Attendees can then indicate their preferred times, which would be OK and which are out of the question. They can also indicate other preferred times, if required. The owner can then pull everything together to create a teleconference time acceptable to all.

ScheduleOnce knows that what it offers at the moment is not exactly what people are looking for. A separate website for dealing with this issue is a functional redundancy - most people will already have a full calendaring system within Outlook or Notes. ScheduleOnce is looking to integrate its offering directly in to these clients so that such scheduling actions can be initiated directly.

Furthermore, ScheduleOnce is looking at the providers of on-line teleconferencing, webconferencing and videoconferencing services to embed the service directly within the web environment to make scheduling easier for users.

Quocirca would like to see ScheduleOnce provide a set of mobile clients as well, making it easy to use for owners of iPhones, SmartPhones or Java-enabled handsets.

The system is not yet perfect. Currently, the user has to define their own time zone, rather than it being picked up from the system clock on the PC. However, the service is available free so

that such issues can be found, requests from users for additional or changed functionality can be identified and further improvements can be looked into.

Another issue is around the business model. If the basic service is going to be free, some form of paid model will have to be introduced. Even if websites can be found that are willing to pay for an embedded service, the amount that such companies would be willing to pay will not be high. Likewise, a large organisation may have a global scheduling problem, but per seat pricing for such a focused solution may not be attractive. Per usage is a possibility - but Quocirca has found that this then mitigates against broad adoption, as users see that by not using the service, they will save the company money.

The main problem for ScheduleOnce is that these time zone issues are not seen as being a showstopper by many people. Most users do not have to deal with more than one or two time zones, and these tend to be well known.

However, for global organisations that regularly deal with multiple time zones, ScheduleOnce provides a solid capability. Provided that the company can come up with a functional service that is directly accessible from within existing clients, and define a business model that makes sense to all parties, this is a neat little service.

About Quocirca

Quocirca is a primary research and analysis company specialising in the business impact of information technology and communications (ITC). With world-wide, native language reach, Quocirca provides in-depth insights into the views of buyers and influencers in large, mid-sized and small organisations. Its analyst team is made up of real-world practitioners with first hand experience of ITC delivery who continuously research and track the industry and its real usage in the markets.

Through researching perceptions, Quocirca uncovers the real hurdles to technology adoption – the personal and political aspects of an organisation's environment and the pressures of the need for demonstrable business value in any implementation. This capability to uncover and report back on the end-user perceptions in the market enables Quocirca to advise on the realities of technology adoption, not the promises.

Quocirca research is always pragmatic, business orientated and conducted in the context of the bigger picture. ITC has the ability to transform businesses and the processes that drive them, but often fails to do so. Quocirca's mission is to help organisations improve their success rate in process enablement through better levels of understanding and the adoption of the correct technologies at the correct time.

Quocirca has a pro-active primary research programme, regularly surveying users, purchasers and resellers of ITC products and services on emerging, evolving and maturing technologies. Over time, Quocirca has built a picture of long term investment trends, providing invaluable information for the whole of the ITC community.

Quocirca works with global and local providers of ITC products and services to help them deliver on the promise that ITC holds for business. Quocirca's clients include Oracle, Microsoft, IBM, Dell, T-Mobile, Vodafone, EMC, Symantec and Cisco, along with other large and medium sized vendors, service providers and more specialist firms.

Details of Quocirca's work and the services it offers can be found at
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