

Fishbowl Adds Hosted Inventory Geared to Small Business

By Thor Olavsrud

Fishbowl, which provides small business inventory add-on software for QuickBooks, has launched a new, hosted version of its product in an effort to ease the IT burden associated with managing its server-based solution.

The Orem, Utah-based company launched Fishbowl Hosted Services in February. It is a hosted service optimized for its Fishbowl Inventory solution. The service is designed specifically to host small- to medium-sized businesses' servers, allowing them to stay focused on their core business instead of worrying about time-consuming and expensive IT issues.

"Many of the technical problems customers were calling in for were actually hardware issues," said David Williams, chief executive officer of Fishbowl. "Many of our customers don't have the IT capacity or want to go down that road of beefing up a server and managing it. So we've provided a hosted solution for our customers, mainly because our customers were asking for it."

The hosted service comes with Microsoft Office pre-installed. Fishbowl takes care of all the setup. It said customers can simply log in and begin using its software without any IT experience. Customers can access the server from any location with Internet access.

In addition, as a hosted service, Fishbowl conducts backups daily, and once a week the company transfers the backups to a secure granite vault. Fishbowl said restoration is available as needed.

"One of the selling points of the Fishbowl Hosted Service is that on top of [the Fishbowl inventory software], we're also hosting QuickBooks for them, and we're hosting their Microsoft Office suite, and we're providing an enterprise-level backup service," said Kevin Batchelor, vice president of product development at Fishbowl.

On the security front, Fishbowl said the service uses the latest security technology, including biometric scanners, so the servers are protected and up and running 24 hours a day and 365 days a year. The service is PCI compliant and hosted in an SAS 70 audited facility.

Williams explained that Fishbowl sells Fishbowl Hosted Services on a simultaneous use basis. The company designed smallest package for small businesses that only need two to five users accessing the inventory tracking software at the same time. It costs \$375 a month with a one-time setup fee of \$375.

Small businesses that need to give to six to 10 users simultaneous access pay \$575 a month with a one-time setup fee of \$875. Simultaneous access for 11 to 20 people costs \$875 a month with a one-time setup fee of \$875. Customers that need to support 21 or more simultaneous users should contact Fishbowl for a custom price quote.

"Fishbowl Hosted Services is a natural component of our initiative to provide a variety of new business services," Williams said. "It's available at a competitive price point and

based on a simple month-to-month contract, and businesses receive all the benefits of a server in their office without the cost and hassles of dealing with technology."

Williams said about 15 percent of new customers ask for the hosted service. In the meantime, the company continues to see robust interest in its server-based Fishbowl Inventory product.

"They're the same product," Williams explained. "It's just a question of whether the customer hosts it on their own server, or whether we host it for them."

Beyond Simple Inventory Tracking

Fishbowl has been in business for 10 years now, and Williams noted that the product, and the ways in which companies use it, has evolved over that time.

"We've focused all our resources on developing a seamless, integrated, advanced inventory add-on to QuickBooks," Williams said. "As we've built our product out with more breadth and depth, we discovered that we had crossed several micro-verticals. Our advanced inventory product caters to small- and medium-sized businesses in all sorts of industries.

Williams also said that medium-sized companies are looking for solutions like Fishbowl, and that many companies use Fishbowl as a standalone solution. A few Fortune 500 companies have even used Fishbowl as a standalone asset-tracking solution.

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He noted that as a standalone asset-tracking package, Fishbowl inventory can track items by serial number, barcode, lot number, department, bin number and expiration date. It can also subdivide offices or warehouses, track items across multiple locations, monitor and report on item levels and create reports based on custom needs.

"Fishbowl has proven itself as an excellent inventory tracking system for our emergency warehouse operations during large-scale public health disasters," said Meg Pearson, PharmD, MS, director Mississippi State Department of Health Pharmacy. "We would not be able to provide needed medical assistance to our residents in such an efficient way without it."

Thor Olavsrud is a contributor to SmallBusinessComputing.com and a former senior editor at InternetNews.com. He covers operating systems, standards and security, among other technologies.

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