

FAQ on Intranets and Web page serving on NetPilot

Q: Can I put my External Web Site on NetPilot ?

A: Possibly, but this would be rather unusual and there are some issues to be aware of before contemplating this option. Web Sites are normally hosted at an ISP within the infrastructure of the Internet. NetPilot is known as a CPE device (Customer Premises Equipment) and is installed at the edge of the Internet often with non-permanent connection such as ISDN. While it is possible to run an external web site from a NetPilot (indeed – Equinet’s own Web site is currently hosted on a NetPilot unit with a high speed leased line) it is often not a practical proposition by virtue of location, connectivity, or security restrictions imposed by NetPilot’s architecture. A far more usual and often more practical application is serving web pages to LAN users attached locally to NetPilot – i.e. an Intranet.

Q : Can I run an Intranet on NetPilot?

A: Yes, this practical application for NetPilot’s web serving capabilities, as NetPilot is often deployed using dial-up connectivity to the Internet. Equinet’s customers have a number of highly successful Intranets running. For example includes a large network of Internet Kiosks, which utilise NetPilots to host local Intranet data. A NetPilot serves information to the local LAN connected kiosks, and also act as a secure WAN gateway to the Internet, to access data held on remote web servers. Conventional office applications with Windows PC can similarly make excellent use of NetPilot’s Intranet capabilities.

Q : What is an Extranet, and can I run one on NetPilot ?

A : This is a term applied to something mid-way between an external web site which any external Internet user can access and a local Intranet designed to service internal needs. Often Extranets are designed to deliver information to a restricted number of remote users typically not within the same workgroup or company as the information provider. A good example would be a Motor manufacturer offering information to its dealers about its range of vehicles. The dealers would be geographically remote from the manufacturer and the data accessed would not be publicly available. NetPilot is deployed in a number of Motor dealer networks as a CPE (Customer Premises Equipment) access device to a remote Extranet server. However, it is not deployed as the actual Extranet server itself for the reasons discussed above regarding external Web site hosting.

Q : Can I run CGI scripts on NetPilot ?

A: Basic CGI scripts involving non I/O activities can be successfully run on NetPilot. There is a Perl Interpreter which runs in a protected environment within the NetPilot software environment. This allows basic CGI scripts to be run without the possibility of impact security or integrity of the NetPilot system. Compiled, executable CGI scripts, cannot be run from NetPilot.

Q : Can I see example of an Intranet ?

A : Yes. See <http://www.help4intranets.com/>

Q : Can I create Web Pages with MS FrontPage ?

A : Yes. HTML web pages can be created for NetPilot by all the standard packages including MS FrontPage. The sample Intranet discussed above was created with MS FrontPage 2000.

Q: Is it easy to load Web pages onto NetPilot ?

A : Yes. This can be achieved either using FTP or copying files from your PC to the target directory using the MS file sharing capabilities of NetPilot. Appropriate access rights must obviously be established to undertake this operation. Features are also available in NetPilot for it to automatically FTP pages from a remote FTP server site at predetermined intervals – using this mechanism the NetPilot updates its self automatically ! Thus numerous Intranets can be updated regularly – each NetPilot pulling updates – rather than the traditional mechanism of one central site user having to undertake numerous push actions.

Q : Does NetPilot support Front Page Extensions ?

A : No – but please read on to see what this really means ! ‘Front Page Extensions’ has a mechanism to allow Front Page created pages to be downloaded loaded onto a remote web server. This mechanism is extremely insecure and is open to abuse, and thus would adversely impact NetPilot integrity and security, and NetPilot would consequently lose accreditation such as Checkmark™. As there are excellent (in some cases free) and easy to use tools using FTP and File Sharing to distribute pages. This is in fact in practice a very minor and sensible restriction.

Q : Can I get root privilege access to NetPilot ?

A : No. Equinet’s philosophy with NetPilot is to provide a secure, reliable and supportable Internet Appliance that is easily configurable by an Administrator via a browser interface. This cannot be achieved by allowing those with some technical knowledge, who may wish to modify the inner workings of the product, to jeopardise or compromise these core security strengths of NetPilot.

Q : I understand NetPilot uses Linux and Apache so why can’t I just use it like my Redhat PC ?

A : Equinet does use as some of the underlying components of NetPilot, both the Redhat distribution of Linux, and an optimised version of Apache. In addition, some 200 other packages developed or enhanced by Equinet are incorporated. To protect Equinet’s IPR and the security and integrity of the product, Equinet does not provide access into the innermost parts of NetPilot. NetPilot has sold in thousands of units, into environments that praise its attributes of functionality, reliability and supportability.