

WHS Add-In Idea Challenge '09 – Finalists

The following finalists in the WHS Add-In Idea Challenge are deliberately listed in a random order. This is not a ranking!

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Automatic Add-In Updater

by Erik Madsen

Category: Administration

Short Description

An add-in that can automatically check for updates of add-ins and inform if there's an update with a button to update the add-in.

Target Audience

All WHS Users

Features

#1 – Automatic update

Helps to keep add-ins up to date, both for features and security - many people find it confusing and difficult to uninstall an add-in and to update an add-in.

#2 – User friendly

Helps both experienced and and inexperienced users

#3 – Simple GUI

A simple GUI is not confusing and helps many users, the more simple the better. Heard a lot of users don't install add-ins, because they are unsure about uninstalling an add-in to install an updated version.

Detailed Description

Gather all add-ins in an official place, where they are tested for viruses etc. From here everyone can update their add-ins with a click, something like Windows Update. This way it will be even more easy to keep add-ins up to date, and very simple, because people knows how to update the computer and are familiar with the procedure.

Research (Similar applications)

Not to my knowledge.

Windows Live Skydrive Add-In

by Anonymous

Category: Administration

Short Description

The main idea of this add-in is to provide an automated way to monitor folders on the Home Server and automatically back them up to Windows Live Skydrive which provides 25gb of free storage.

Target Audience

This add-in will help anyone who wants an extra layer of protection for their most important files.

Features

#1 - Automatic backup

The add-in would automatically upload files to Skydrive so that they are backed up in the cloud.

#2 - Automatic Folder Monitoring

The add-in would monitor user selected folders for changes and then backup the folder as defined by the user. This could be on a schedule, on demand or when files change in the monitored folders.

#3 - Monitoring of files on Skydrive and space available

A small page that shows important information about your Skydrive account such as space available, what files are on it, is it in sync with your monitored folders etc. If a user doesn't yet have their Skydrive account linked then show them how to link or register. The status page could be extended further by adding minor administrative tools like delete certain files from Skydrive etc.

Detailed Description

Basically, the idea of this add-in is to add an extra layer of protection for the most sensitive files by automatically backing up users' files to the Skydrive cloud. There are alternatives already such as Amazon S3 backup and others. However, Skydrive seems to be an ideal medium for cloud backups. It provides 25gb for free. The add-in would have customizable settings so the user can configure exactly what files and folders he wants monitored and how he wants them to sync. The add-in would take care of the rest by monitoring the files and folders, and backing them up to Skydrive. The add-in would have a status page (perhaps a console tab?) that would display all relevant information such as space available on Skydrive, last sync, monitored files and folders and more.

Research (Similar Applications)

The Amazon S3 backup is an add-in that is similar to my idea. However, it does not allow synchronization to Windows Live Skydrive which I feel to be a more viable service due to its price and available space. There is another piece of software called Gladinet Cloud Desktop that mounts your Skydrive account as a drive. You can then copy files and folders over to it and they're automatically uploaded.

Home Calendar, Tasks, Contacts

by Jared Finkenbinder

Category: Administration

Short Description

This should use universal data stores such as ical and vcards to share data to multiple productivity suites such as Microsoft Outlook, Microsoft Entourage, etc. This does not need to serve email, it is simply a way to have a centralized database for shared, common items for the family or home office.

Target Audience

Homes and home offices with multiple computers and users needing to share contact lists, task lists and calendar scheduling without having an elaborate exchange server.

Features

#1 - Shared, accessible, centralized, calendar and task data

Should use the ical format to enable productivity clients to subscribe to single family calendar with events and tasks.

#2 - Shared, accessible, centralized, contact list

Should use the vcard format to enable productivity clients to view and subscribe to single family contact list.

#3 - Administration and Email change notification

Easy administration of who has access to shared data, who can add update, change, delete, information, etc. Setting to email change and update notifications to selected addresses.

Detailed Description

This would be a family database containing centralized family scheduling and contact information that users with the specified permissions given by the family administrator could subscribe to in their productivity software such as Microsoft Outlook. The ability to share scheduling and contact data with the family would be a big time saver without duplicating efforts on each users machine. Mom can know when the band concert is or when the jv basket ball team is from her kids; the kids can get the contact information of their grandmother so they can send her a birthday card; mom can know when dad is going to have tat late meeting at work so she can hold dinner; Mom can schedule a task for dad to get the car's oil changed this weekend.

Research (Similar Applications)

There are WHS Outlook and Outlook for WHS, but these both require running a copy of Outlook on the server. My proposal would be to make the data independant of, yet accessible by the program installed on the client machines. It would also allow accessibility by other softwares besides Microsoft Outlook.

Microsoft Web Platform for WHS

by Anonymous

Category: Administration

Short Description

The Microsoft Web Platform for WHS add-in allows anyone to have easy access to some of the best website management systems on the planet. Microsoft even worries about the updates for you. (See <http://www.microsoft.com/web/default.aspx>)

Target Audience

Anyone who wants to use their WHS as a true website that can handle more than a few pages and a slow image gallery.

Features

#1 – Provides a way to install and uninstall the Microsoft Web Platform installer.

This add-in will provide a way to download and install the latest version of the Microsoft Web Platform Installer as well as a way to uninstall it.

#2 – Provide an interface to install the individual web apps

Once the Microsoft Web Platform is installed it is then necessary to install individual applications. Doing this safely will probably require some modifications to the existing WHS website. (Perhaps creating a non default app for it?) For this install a simple embedded web browser may be sufficient.

#3 – Create a share that provides file level access to the web app's web files

In a standard webapp install C:\inetpub\wwwroot is the folder that contains all of the files used to make the website run. Make that folder into a share so the file access can be controlled and done safely.

Detailed Description

The idea of this add-in is that many users of WHS may desire a nice website for their home or business. However, doing that currently is very difficult. By itself WHS provides no help in this pursuit, and while Whiist is a wonderful help, the functionality it provides does not even come close to competing with what is available with many existing Web Apps. By integrating the ability to access the cream of the crop that Microsoft has collected on their Web Platform site into WHS we suddenly gain the ability to share our love of WHS with the whole world, with a website that makes us look good, and in many cases has a huge community of people helping to improve the capabilities of that website.

Research (Similar Applications)

I was looking for a simple way to get a website up using WHS, and was surprised to find that nothing was built-in to help me. I eventually found Whiist which got me started. However, I am familiar with Drupal (<http://www.microsoft.com/web/gallery/AcquiaDrupal.aspx>) and the power it provides. Having used that, the options provided by Whiist seemed unbearably limited (and in the case of the picture gallery slow.) So I went looking for a better solution. Eventually I discovered the Microsoft Web Platform, and it appeared to meet all of my needs. I could install Drupal or many other popular Web Apps. However, I could find no add-ins to integrate the Web Platform installer into WHS. Then along came this competition. Lucky me. :-)

Run TV cards on WHS, controlled from MCE clients

by Sven Halling

Category: Media/Streaming

Short Description

Allow the WHS to run (MCE compatible) TV cards to record TV straight to the WHS storage, and be played from any client (MCE or other) connected to the network. Scheduling of recording shall be made from any MCE PC connected to the WHS. With this we get a truly networked TV function that also saves energy (as the WHS is the only machine that needs to run all the time).

Target Audience

Any Media center users with more than one client in their home network.

Features

#1 - WHS to run TV cards

Allow connection of TV cards (such as FireDTV etc) directly to the WHS, and do recordings directly to the WHS share.

#2 - Control recordings from any connected device

The WHS need to be able to receive the MCE EPG feed so it can control recordings. Any device connected to thebWHS network shall be able to be used as user interface to manage recordings. For MCE devices it shall be via the usual MCE interface, and for others via web interface, and for DLNA compatible devices perhaps there is possibilities within the DLNA standard?

#3 - Play recorded TV from any connected device

Any (compatible) device connected into the WHS shall be able to play there recorded programs.

Detailed Description

See above. Can't really think of any more details...

Research (Similar Applications)

Photo Manager

by Anonymous

Category: Administration

Short Description

A photo app on the home server that helps you organize your photos so they are easy to sort and easy to find what you are looking for. This would include face recognition software to find all the photos for a certain person that you would have to go through all your albums to find.

Target Audience

The plug in will help families better store their photos in a way that makes them easy to find for the future.

Features

#1 - Face Recognition in Photos

This feature would allow you to automatically set up a friend/family member on the server and would then look through all your photos to try and find that same face. This is very advance but would be huge in helping people organize their photos. For instance, I could identify "Sarah's" face in a photo and then the software would scan all my other photos for Sarah and put them in a "Virtual folder" (shortcuts). As I add new directories to the photo section they will automatically be scanned for Sarah or any other faces that I have set up.

#2 - Ability to share your photos easily with friends and family via the web.

This would automatically set up a web page on your home server that would create a slide show of the photos for the public to view. So if Sarah wanted to see all the photos of herself you could setup a webpage based on Sarah and you would get a full list of photos with Sarah in them. You could do this for any directory in your photos section and easily be able to share them with anyone. The problem we have is that once we upload our photos we then have to also upload them to Flickr or web shots before we can share them. This would allow us to just share them right away.

Detailed Description

Really this idea is very simple in that it's just a better way to organize / display your photos. My wife and I are always having issues trying to find the photo we are looking for. Even though we currently have it on the server by date / event it would be nice if the server did a little of the lifting for us. This is where the face recognition software would come in. The software would allow you to setup friends/family and the "faces" associated with them. This is very similar to what iphoto does. Once you have setup a face the system then would scan all your images looking for that face. All the faces that it finds it will add a shortcut to them in a directory of your choice. As you add new photos to the server the new directory will automatically be scanned to look for faces that it recognizes. This app would also let you easily share your photos with family and friends. Very similiar to how whiist works it would allow you to easily create a webpage of photos. The problem with Whiist is that it's too many steps, it should be easier than that. It would allow you to share any directory and create a slideshow for it. The ability to pick a theme for the page would be nice as well. A final feature for this page would be the ability to password protect the page in an easy manner. Nothing too complicated just some way to give it some protection. Finally after you have selected the directory you want to

create the slideshow for then have the ability to email it out to family and friends right inside windows home server. If you created a username and password this would be included in the email.

Research (Similar Applications)

Whiist is sort of similar in setting up webpages but it doesn't do the face recognition that this software would do.

WHS Undelete

by Andrew Carr

Category: Administration

Short Description

Transfers a copy of any file deleted from the WHS into the recycle bin of the computer it was deleted on

Target Audience

First time WHS users and their families who are unfamiliar with the workings of WHS and how files are managed

Features

#1 - The process of retrieving a deleted file on the server is as familiar as retrieving a deleted file on a PC

Most users unfamiliar with WHS would expect any file that was deleted to be in the recycle bin of the PC they were using when they deleted the file.

#2 - Does not require extensive knowledge of WHS

Using the recycle bin on the desktop to retrieve a deleted item is easily performed

#3 - Keeps the main purchaser/administrator of the WHS safe from harm

By keeping copies of deleted files in the desktop recycle bin the WHS administrator is protected from harm if the wrong file is deleted by a user and reduces the harm from insults such as "what do you mean you cannot get the picture of my mother back that

Detailed Description

Server 2003, on which WHS is based, does not have an undelete function. The recycle bin on the home server does not keep copies of deleted files and these are not placed within the recycle bin of the computer on which they were deleted. Of course you can use Diskeeper Undelete 2009 but this is a hammer to crack a nut with lots of features designed for server techs. All I want to do is to make sure that somewhere on the PC that I am deleting the file on is a WHS recycle bin. Ideally, for convenience sake and familiarity, it should be the existing Windows recycle bin, but if not then somewhere equally obvious. The add-in should place a copy of the file somewhere I can retrieve it later should I need to. The connector could give a message that the file has been saved or that the undelete file was getting large and give the option to review files and then delete them permanently

Research (Similar Applications)

Diskeeper Undelete2009 has a number of tools for managing deleted files, but is a bit over complicated to install and setup, requires a client to be installed on each PC (<http://www.wegotsserved.co.uk/2008/10/10/diskeeper-undelete2009-server-edition/>)

Time Machine

by Simon Needham

Category: Administration

Short Description

Total turnkey, out of the box, it just works storage support for OS X Time Machine.

Target Audience

Anybody that owns a Mac and (or) runs OS X

Features

#1 - Seamless easy support of OS X's Time Machine

Allows any WHS & Mac owner running any WHS platform to enjoy seamless Time Machine intergration with their OS X clients.

#2 - Full audit history

Expressive and easily navigable audited history of Time Machine back ups per time & machine.

#3 - Disk space management

Very easy to configure how much disk space can be devoted to Time Machine back ups in total and/or set disk quotas for specific OS X clients.

Detailed Description

I'm sure you've got the idea already but just to really clarify. What we're talking about is a very polished & professional server end to support OS X's Time Machine feature. HP have cooked up something for their latest Home Server range but that leaves all other WHS owners out in the cold. Microsoft would be too stubborn to produce this feature so I believe it's really going to be left up to the WHS community to fill this gap. The WHS front end wil one simple addtional WHS tab with a grid of each OS X Client, last time a back up was performed, current disk space used and whether the back up is healthy. Double-clicking/right-clicking will provide a songle client specific view with a detailed back up history and status. There would be full intergration with WHS error/issue warning infrastructure so you'll be able to see if Time Machine back ups are out of date or have failed.

Research (Similar Applications)

HP have introduced some Time Machine support into their latest range of Home Servers.

WHS Windows Update Manager

by Rob Cassie

Category: Administration

Short Description

Allow users to centrally manage Windows Update for all connected PC's from the console.

Target Audience

This add-in is aimed at all Windows users, particularly those with multiple PC's

Features

#1 – Added security for networked computers

Ensure all Windows PC's are always fully up to date.

#2 – Reduction in bandwidth used for updates

Multiple machines will be able to use the same centrally downloaded updates, thus saving the number of times a file needs to be downloaded from the net.

#3 – Simplicity of installation and use

Currently the only solution is to manually set up WSUS (and all components) which is overly complex for many users, it should be installable through the console. The interface used is designed for large organisations by system administrators, a cut down set of options for home users should be available through the console.

Detailed Description

The add-in will allow users to manage the updates to all connected machines from the console. Through this interface they will be able to easily select which updates get installed and when. They will also be able to control which updates are downloaded from the internet and when (to help preserve bandwidth during peak/off peak). The interface should be viewable by both computer, and by product family. It will also need to include instructions on how the user can point their machine to the server (rather than the internet), unless this is a client side installer in it's own right. Although this is something which can be done at the moment, and has been blogged about previously, I feel it is something which is too hard for many users, and is the sort of thing that would allow users to gain better control over the security and stability of their machines.

Research (Similar Applications)

Based on concepts/technologies from WSUS. Seen WSUS usage in a corporate environment, and the comparison between a small corporate environment to many home networks is becoming less clearly defined. As this gets harder to manage, a product like WHS can provide solutions that have been proven in the enterprise to overcome these obstacles.

Folder Monitor + Notification scheme

by Adam Swift

Category: Administration

Short Description

This add-in will give the ability to set up a list of shared folders that will be monitored for file changes (adds or deletes) and will send out a notification to a list of registered users detailing the information on what has changed on the shared folders. The notification could be set up as either an email alert or perhaps an RSS feed.

Target Audience

This add in will benefit those people who tend to use their WHS boxes as download machines and often forget when an item was downloaded or want to be reminded of when an item has completed.

Features

#1 – Monitors changes to set list of shared folders

The user will be able to select a list of folders / subfolders that the add-in will monitor for Adds and deletes to the monitored folders. This monitoring will be done on a schedule set in preferences.

#2 – Notifications of the updates

In addition to a user's ability to view the log of monitored changes from the admin console itself, the user may want to be able to see the changes on the go or perhaps relay the information to another interested party. For this we would want to set up a notification scheme. This could be creating an RSS feed from the WHS box that other parties could subscribe to, or by entering in emails of those who wish to be notified on updates and sending emails via the WHS box.

Detailed Description

From the WHS administrative console settings the user will have a page that will give them the ability to set up what folders they would like to monitor. This could be displayed as a 3 panel display with the first being a folder tree where the user can select a folder (or subfolder) to monitor, this could also just be displayed as a browse button producing a tree of the shared folders. The second panel would display the list of selected folders where the user can select again and delete or edit necessary preferences set in the third panel. In the preferences panel, the user will be able to set patterns for files or folders that will be ignored. When the user saves their settings, for any new folders to be monitored, the add-in will run through the folder structure and produce a data file containing information about the contents of the folder that can be used for speeding up the process. General preferences for the add-in could be things like, a schedule on which it will run the monitor among other things. In addition, the add-in would have a tab on the main screen where the user could see something like the last 5 days (configurable) of all updates that have been seen. After the monitor would run, it will fire off notifications in the form of emails or additions to an RSS feed. As opposed to the tab in the admin console, these notification would show any items seen since the last notification was sent. Email notifications could be set up on a scheduled basis, while RSS notifications would be as the monitoring updates occur .

Research (Similar Applications)

The closest item that I have come to, but doesn't provide a notification scheme, is Microsoft's SyncToy which I use for syncing downloads from a common location into specialized locations. I haven't really seen any WHS addins for this functionality and was considering making it myself.