

# Synchronized swimming: coordinating schedules and calendars with your colleagues

By John J. Fried

*Unless you run your practice all by yourself, you'll need to coordinate, update, and collate your calendar with other doctors, nurses, and administrators. Some technology tips that can help.*

**D**uring the precious few minutes between patients, you'd like to arrange that long-delayed meeting with two other doctors in your practice, one of whom is in a satellite office across town; check on the schedule of the consulting psychologist working with your practice; and, maybe, determine who among your colleagues is free to cover for you during an upcoming vacation.

Good luck.

There's not enough time to make

calls. E-mailing around to get the answers could get confusing and annoying. And, of course, checking everyone's schedule yourself is impossible, given that all your colleagues keep their Microsoft Outlook schedules on their own PCs or, worse, on the personal digital assistant (PDA) each one lugs around. What you and your practice need is an electronic ringmaster to keep everyone's schedules coordinated and readily available at any time of day to anyone who needs them. Making universally available the phone numbers and e-mails for professional contacts you need would be great, too.

other networked computers.

Also linked to Exchange Server are the computers and related devices Wilshire's doctors have at home. "This means that I have the same e-mail at each of my two offices, my home, vacation home, my laptop, and my PDA," Dr. Linda Bosserman, MD, president of Wilshire Oncology wrote in an e-mail. "My main administrators are authorized to look into my calendar and schedule, which essentially follow me wherever I am," says Dr. Bosserman. "The central staff can look at all doctor, nurse practitioner, and administrator calendars and schedule meetings as needed."

Exchange Server is an elegant solution. It gives users insight into various schedules, moving e-mail, and centralizing important information such as contacts; it also offers strong security measures, filters spam, and allows posting of information in public folders for people not authorized to access your network. The downside, though, is that it is a massive program that eats up a lot of disk space and memory and needs special feeding and caring from a capable IT person.

## Exchange server

One solution is Microsoft Exchange Server, which will do all those things and do them well, according to those who have adopted it such as Wilshire Oncology, a Los Angeles-area group.

Helping the doctors and staff at Wilshire Oncology keep track of all their schedules and other important dates is no small feat, given that Wilshire has 10 doctors and 98 other staffers, is spread around 5—and soon, 6—clinics, depends on a central business and administrative office, and runs clinical trials.

But Exchange, which is now installed on one of the practice's computers and is part of the practice's network, links every doctor's PC to Exchange Server as well as many of Wilshire's

## Resources

**FOR A LIST** of Web Exchange hosting companies:

- [www.crowcanyon.com/Exchange\\_ASP\\_List/ExchangeASP.htm](http://www.crowcanyon.com/Exchange_ASP_List/ExchangeASP.htm)

If Microsoft Exchange is too complicated or costly for your practice, you may want to consider other software solutions. The following three have trial programs:

### CRM Unleashed

- <http://crmunleashed.com>

### OfficeCalendar

- [www.officecalendar.com](http://www.officecalendar.com)

Macintosh-based practices may want to look into SOHO Calendars from Chronos LC

- [www.chronosnet.com/About/PR/soho.html](http://www.chronosnet.com/About/PR/soho.html)

Guides to additional programs (and some other Web-based approaches to sharing calendars and other information) can be found at:

- [www.slipstick.com/calendar/scheduleall.htm](http://www.slipstick.com/calendar/scheduleall.htm)
- [www.slipstick.com/outlook/share.htm](http://www.slipstick.com/outlook/share.htm)

company that runs Exchange on its computers. The company then makes a copy of Exchange available online to your practice. This method takes the cost of buying Exchange and the hassle of updating and maintaining it off your hands.

Whether you will save money by signing up for a hosted Exchange server depends on the fees charged by the company you choose. Unfortunately, determining what the service will cost may be a bit complicated. Some companies charge by the month, others by the year, some by how much space your practice's information takes up on the provider's disk drives, some by

how many of your colleagues use Exchange, and some by a combination of some or all those parameters.

If you sign up for a Web-based Exchange server, you may want to regularly, but gently, remind your colleagues that each one of them does not really need to keep 3,000 e-mails piled up in the inboxes or no-longer relevant appointments on their schedules. Those bytes, and the resulting fees, can escalate.

### The questions to ask

Before you sign up with a company offering a Web-based Exchange server, you should ask the following

questions:

- How long has the company been in business?
- What provisions does the company make for backing up your data on its own computers?
- What security provisions are in effect to ward off intruders and protect data?
- Does the company offer around-the-clock live technical support?
- Can users in your office back up individual calendars and contact information on their own PCs?

Once you have all the information, get references, contact them, and ask if the company backs up its promises.