Webalo can keep your mobile data behind a firewall

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[1] <u>Webalo</u>, a company that wants to make it easier to navigate spreadsheets and other business information on your mobile device, is releasing the Mobile Dashboard Appliance, which allows your company to keep its data behind a firewall.

Security concerns are a major reason why the latest wave of new applications — both online and mobile — aren't being adopted more quickly. The applications are flashier, and more nimble in general, but companies don't like the risks. That's why Google's Web applications, while extremely handy and cheap, have been slow to grow in large companies, for example.

Previously, companies using Webalo's service had to let Webalo host the data. Webalo chief executive Peter Price told me that some companies — particularly in finance and health, as well as government agencies — said they were interested in the service, but were worried because the hosting arrangement created some security concerns.

The new appliance solves that problem, Price said — install the server, and you can host the data yourself.

The mobile application field is crowded, to say the least. For example, Google says that the Team Edition of Google Apps will allow you to access those applications on a mobile phone, although there's no indication companies will be able to host the data. ([2] <u>our coverage</u>) Price said Webalo is taking a different approach to the field. Most businesses either build mobile applications in-house, which Price said is costly or time-consuming, or they use the mobile versions of products created by software developers like Google or Oracle. The problem is that each mobile application then has a separate interface, Price said, and making the mobile software is often a hassle without much payoff for the developers.

Webalo, on the other hand, can access "80 percent" of the data created and stored by any business software, and deliver it to a Blackberry, Microsoft Windows Mobile and other smartphones under a single interface. Using a Blackberry emulator, Price gave me a demo of the product. Not having used mobile spreadsheets in the past, I can't speak to how the usability compares to other applications, but it does seem easy to set up and explore — and that's a real necessity and accomplishment when you're trying to navigate a spreadsheet with 100-plus columns on a tiny screen.

Using a basic Q&A format, companies tell Webalo what part of their data they want to share, then click-and-drag to lay things out on the mobile phone. Mid-level managers in the field (Webalo's target audience) can then navigate the data on their mobile devices, pulling out specific sections for more detail and jumping around large documents using bookmarks.

Webalo also allows companies to set up easy interactions with Web sites through their phones. That functionality isn't available for the Mobile Dashboard Appliance yet, but it will be in March, Price said.

The Los Angeles-based company raised $6.5 million in its first round of funding and is working on a second, he added.