

HERE COMES THE INTRANET

Businesses of every kind have found that the Internet's World Wide Web is a great way to get information to customers, partners, or investors. Now, they're finding that using the same technology internally—on intranets—can dramatically improve communications, unlock hidden information, and transform organizations.

WHAT'S NEEDED? Most companies already have the foundation for an intranet—a network that uses the Internet's TCP/IP protocol. Computers using Web-server software store and manage documents built on the Web's HTML format. With a Web browser on your PC, you can call up any Web document—no matter what kind of computer it's on.

■ Fire wall programs that run on server computers seal off the corporate intranet from the vast public Internet, keeping intruders out.

■ To prepare for a meeting, an executive taps into the finance department home page. There, she clicks on the highlighted word "forecasts," a hyperlink to another Web page with predictions for Japanese building starts over the next 12 months.

■ An engineer interested in relocating to San Francisco can search a company's internal job listings by location and skill required.

■ Employees order supplies from an electronic catalog maintained by the purchasing department. Approvals, invoices, and charge-backs are all handled electronically.

