



New RAF application takes off with SMS



Customer agenda

- Continuous Improvement/Innovation

Services

- Proof of Concepts
- IMAC
- Desktop Migration

Technology

Microsoft SMS 2003, 1E SMSNomad Branch, Microsoft MOM 2005

Customer overview

As part of the UK's Armed Forces, the Royal Air Force makes a vital contribution to Britain's security policy; it helps to prevent conflicts and responds to emergencies across the globe. The largest Command in the RAF is Strike Command, which is responsible for the majority of the Force's frontline aircraft. Strike Command has an established strength of more than 28,000 service personnel and nearly 6,000 civilian staff.

Business need

The management of Human Resources (HR) for the entire RAF has always been a considerable undertaking. To help simplify core HR processes, such as requesting holiday and updating personal information, the Ministry of Defence decided to introduce a new HR system across the UK's entire Armed Forces from 1 April 2006.

As a result, the RAF needed to find a fast and cost-effective way to roll-out the new application to more than 20,000 workstations across 40 bases and numerous additional remote locations. As Flight Lieutenant Dave Marshall explains: "A previous operating system upgrade took approximately four months' worth of desktside visits before it was completed - and that was for a much smaller number of workstations."

Due to the tight project timescales, eliminating the need for a manual implementation was paramount. The RAF therefore decided to utilise the application deployment capabilities of Microsoft's Systems Management Server (SMS) 2003.

Solution

However before it could install SMS, the RAF needed to deploy a new backend server infrastructure to support the management tool and develop a customised architecture that would enable both local and central IT support. "We had limited internal resources and a very aggressive roll-out schedule," comments Dave. "Computacenter was the only company that could meet our deadline and still offer a competitive price."

How Computacenter helped

To ensure the RAF had time to implement the new HR application and carry out user testing, SMS had to be live on the majority of desktops by the end of February 2006. Despite having just five months to complete the project, which also involved installing a server at each of the 40 bases, it was essential that there was adequate time for proof of concept. "We had to make sure that we got the SMS roll-out right first time, as any problems would have had a major impact on the deployment of the new HR application," comments Dave.

Computacenter's project management skills helped to ensure that the schedules demanded for the implementation were achieved. As well as coping with the tight timescale, Computacenter and the RAF also had to overcome a number of technical challenges.

As Alan Evans, a Technical Architect for Computacenter, explains: "Although the RAF wanted to use SMS as a central management tool, it also wanted to retain some local control at individual bases. This, combined with legacy Windows technology, differing builds, no Active Directory, and the additional remote locations made the project quite complex. By using SMSNomad Branch from 1E, we were able to extend the solution to the remote sites where a local server was not justified."

As part of the project, Computacenter also rolled out Microsoft Operations Manager (MOM), which will help the RAF monitor and maintain the new SMS infrastructure.

“By deploying SMS, we were able to dramatically reduce the manpower needed to roll-out a new core application.”

Dave Marshall
Flight Lieutenant
RAF

Results

Despite the project's challenges, the SMS deployment was completed within the deadline, with the first users of the HR application going live at the end of March. "Without SMS, the HR roll-out could have taken up to six months - instead it took a matter of days," adds Dave.

As well as speeding up application implementation time, SMS will also help the RAF simplify ongoing IT management tasks. As Dave explains: "Previously, a software audit for a single base could take two people three weeks - now it can be done at the press of a button."

By simplifying the IT audit process, the Microsoft solution will also help the RAF improve asset and patch management across its estate. "It is now much easier to identify any unauthorised software on our systems and monitor the patch status of individual workstations- both of which will help enhance our security protection," comments Dave.

This central view of its systems is a key benefit of the project, and will provide the RAF with greater control of its IT infrastructure, which supports around 40,000 users. "We now have full visibility of our network, which will help enhance our governance of IT," adds Dave.

“The project has helped to simplify IT support and improve governance. The RAF and Computacenter worked closely together to achieve these results and were very much part of a single team.”

Dave Marshall
Flight Lieutenant
RAF

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