

The collaboration team includes from left, Antonio Antiochia, Sean Mansperger, Michael Powers, Michael Alicea, Bryce Bhatnagar and Joseph Round.

Information Sharing

INTERNET TOOL ENHANCES INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION
BY BRYCE BHATNAGAR



In early 2007, Scott Page, chief of operations for the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs' Office of International Security Operations, envisaged using technology to make the reports of the Political-Military Action Team more accessible to other agencies, promoting awareness of political-military issues. PMAT, a primary link between the departments of State and Defense, provides diplomatic support for military operations during crises and contingencies and provides political-military information to Department and interagency officials.

Page also wanted to improve PMAT's internal administration and management and enable PMAT staff to process classified information from remote locations. To achieve these goals, he

worked with the State Messaging and Archive Retrieval Toolset—or SMART—collaboration team, now the collaboration team in the Office of Verification Operations of the Bureau of Verification, Compliance and Implementation. The team used Microsoft Office SharePoint 2007 technology and made PMAT the first of the Department's 16 interagency SharePoint 2007 pilot-test sites.

Using SharePoint, VCI/VO helped PM build the PMAT Portal Web site on the Department's classified interagency network. The portal's home page (<http://communitiesx.state.sgov.gov/pmat>) provides access to links of political-military interest and to the most current PMAT Situation Report, a classified summary of global political-military events published each weekday morning and after-

noon. Every SITREP item is referenced, and the portal enables readers to click on hyperlinks to these references, allowing them to access source documents such as embassy cables or military reports.

'Great Tool'

"The PMAT Portal is a great tool for pol-mil officers to stay abreast of breaking issues or to use as a launching point for in-depth research," said PM/ISO Director Colonel David Lucia.

The PMAT Internal Management Site is an internal, password-protected Web page developed with SharePoint to facilitate communication among PMAT's different shifts. With SharePoint, PMAT's public operations and internal operations were consolidated into one network, increasing efficiency and accessibility.

SharePoint also allows PMAT staff to access all PMAT working documents such as action folders, contact lists and standard operating procedures from any off-site location that can connect to the classified interagency network. This is important when PMAT supports Department task forces in the Operations Center or when PMAT deploys to support the Department's continuity of operations in an emergency.

PMAT is staffed by retired Foreign Service officers and former military personnel. PM/ISO's challenge was providing training, as well as implementing new information technologies at low cost and without interrupting PMAT's demanding, around-the-clock operations. The solution: Have interns develop the portal, train the staff and resolve technological glitches.

"Several interns, notably Richard Helke and Annassa Corley, worked closely with Sean Mansperger in the VCI/VO Collaboration Team to launch the PMAT Portal," Page said. "This is a credit to all involved and to the simplicity and flexibility of SharePoint."

In the Groove

Originally, the VCI/VO collaboration team was one of six teams in the Bureau of Information Resource Management that worked with the State Messaging and Archive Retrieval Toolset. SMART is a suite of applications designed to help employees share information and collaborate, and is a top-priority information technology project. The team deployed SharePoint and an application named Groove, both major SMART components that had been successfully deployed in the Department of Defense and other government agencies. Groove provides secure, peer-to-peer collaboration for small teams, even on relatively slow networks, and was initially deployed to help coordinate multi-agency operations in Baghdad since Internet communication in Iraq is via satellite, which is slower than other means. When Groove succeeded, the Department expanded its use.

However, for large numbers of users and high-speed networks, the more powerful SharePoint 2007 is more appropriate because it lets users access and share information quickly and easily. It also supports document management, contact lists, calendars, task lists, Web publishing and blogs, and allows users to create collaborative sites called "wikis," as in the Web site Wikipedia.com. SharePoint requires no technical knowledge and little or no intervention from information technology personnel. It also provides control over which document version is in use by a team.

In 2008, management of the SMART collaboration tools was shifted to IRM, which maintains and supports them. More information on SharePoint and Groove are at <http://irm.m.state.sbu/Clearinghouse/default.aspx>. Information is also available at the SMART Web site, <http://smart.state.gov>; and at the VCI/VO Collaboration Team Site, <http://vci.t.state.sbu/sites/vo/CollabTeam/SMARTProject/default.aspx>. ■

The author is the division chief of collaboration for the Office of Verification Operations of the Bureau of Verification, Compliance and Implementation.

Department makes SharePoint available worldwide

The Systems and Integration Office in the Bureau of Information Resource Management is deploying Microsoft SharePoint 2007 worldwide. SharePoint is a tool that allows collaboration throughout an organization and across organizations. It allows employees to access and share information quickly and easily. The software is easy to use, complements the Department's online tools and provides for document management, version control, contact lists, calendars, task lists and content alerts.

Global deployment of SharePoint has been two years in the making. The effort began in 2006. After pilot-testing SharePoint on all Department networks and in 15 bureaus and posts, the Department gave SIO responsibility for SharePoint operations, maintenance and worldwide deployment.

In early July, SIO completed deployment of Microsoft Office SharePoint Server, the latest version of SharePoint. More than 40 new SharePoint user sites have requested SharePoint, in addition to the 15 pilot-test sites. Future enhancements to SharePoint likely will include customizable sites and plug-in applications known as "Web parts."

To manage the SharePoint rollout, IRM has established the Collaboration Clearinghouse, a central place for Department personnel and organizations to request online collaboration tools. It also will advise employees on which tool—such as SharePoint, Diprologia or Groove—is best for a given need. To request deployment of SharePoint to your organization, call the Information Technology Service Center at (202) 647-2000 or send an e-mail to itservicecenter@state.gov.

