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Thursday March 10, 2005
Updated 3:34 PM EST November 7

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ARCHIVES

02/24/03; Vol. 17 No. 22

Sailors ride info crest with iOra

By VANDANA SINHA

When the Navy issues a memorandum, personnel aboard ships at sea sometimes don't have it in their hands until several months later. A Navy base generally waits to collect enough memos or policy changes to fill a 650-megabyte CD-ROM. Then the copies must be burned, labeled and mailed.

By then, said Mike Howard, a Navy assistant program executive officer, "the data becomes vintage."

But starting this year, Navy ships will use Internet portal software to transmit such news by satellite and the Secret IP Router Network.

Developed by iOra Inc. of San Rafael, Calif., the portal will connect land bases to fleets for two-way updates to nontactical documents, such as technical publications, administrative notices, bulletins and maintenance logs.

iOra's Publisher software will scan every document already stored on a ship's server for matches. It will then compress and transmit only the updated bytes, which can save up to half the file size.

Publisher, which runs on Microsoft Windows 2000, communicates with Microsoft SharePoint Portal Server loaded on a ship's server.

Navy officials said the compression of large enterprise files set the iOra software apart from the department's other communications methods, such as the Metcast subscription system for meteorological



"Having outdated data in the business world costs you dollars. In war, it costs you lives." — Mike Howard, a Navy assistant program executive officer

(Image: Olivier Douliery)

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data, the Unix rsync file-transfer program, or the Surface Warfare Officer Network, which lets ships' officers exchange e-mail.

"This is the only one that sends only what needs to be changed," said Howard, who works in configuration and logistics management for mine and littoral warfare at the Washington Navy Yard. "Others send the whole file."

Howard said he and his colleagues didn't believe iOra's compression claims until they conducted an on-and-off, two-year pilot between the Aviation Intermediate Maintenance Department in Norfolk, Va., and the Naval Air Warfare Center in Lakehurst, N.J.

Now the Navy is gearing up to deploy the technology on 300 ships as they pull into port, which could take up to three years, Howard said.

"It's not legacy data we need to be converting. It's legacy people," he said. "The biggest challenge is mind-set."

"The amount of data is growing exponentially, but the bandwidth is not growing exponentially," said Paddy Falls, chief executive officer of iOra, which has 32 employees.

The Navy is iOra's first federal customer, but the company hopes that will lead to other contracts. "The Navy project lets us [demonstrate] this to other agencies," Falls said.

"The iOra technology "shortens the time frame from when something is happening to when you can respond intelligently," said George Schussel, CEO of Digital Consulting Institute, an Andover, Mass., company that tracks the information technology industry. "The benefits of pulling a human out of the loop are cost savings and better decision-making in real time."

Falls said future applications could include distance e-learning or sending targeted Web content to individual sailors.

He said a nondisclosure agreement kept him from revealing the contract value, but pricing for the Publisher software starts at \$7,500 for a single server license, plus \$15 a month per client.

Howard said leaving things as they are would have cost even more.

"Having outdated data in the business world costs you dollars," he said. "In war, it costs you lives." *

Vandana Sinha is a staff writer with Government Computer News. She can be reached at vsinha@postnewsweektech.com.

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