

New Desktop Tools on the Horizon



by Mr. Terry Jones, Staff Writer

Are you expecting the same old desktop work routine in the months ahead? If so, get ready for some change! Defense Contract Management Agency (DCMA) Information Technology (IT) has several new initiatives rolling out that are sure to liven up your computer-using experience. These initiatives will be going into effect as the Agency reorganizes from its present geographical structure to a customer/product-oriented organization of the future.

The most important thing we will be rolling out in the months ahead is the Enterprise/Workspace Portal,” said Mr. Michael Williams, DCMA executive director of IT and chief information officer. “Right now we have it in testing for basic software functionality and scalability. So far, everything seems to be on schedule.” Mr. Williams anticipates that once DCMA

staffers get used to the new Portal, “it will become their de-facto desktop,” the IT term for the computer screen that displays icons for applications and files after you log on.



(Above) Mr. Michael Williams, DCMA executive director of IT and chief information officer, at DCMA Headquarters in Alexandria, Va. (DCMA staff photo)

DCMA IT has several new initiatives rolling out that are sure to liven up your computer-using experience.

The new Enterprise/Workspace Portal is designed to make navigating with your computer easier. To get on your desktop today, you start your computer and enter your identification (ID) and password. To utilize eTools, you have to navigate to the eTools Web site, enter with your ID and password and select the eTools application. With the portal, you log in and are simultaneously logged into eTools. “All you have to do is click on the icon for the eTools application that you want to use and poof — you’re in,” Mr. Williams said.

Another of the many nice features is that users will be able to customize the portal to fit their own needs. For example, users could pull the chat-room icon onto their main portal pages and leave it there. The next time they sign into the portal, it recognizes who they are and the fact they want the chat-room icon in a particular spot on their screens. “Or they can say, ‘I really don’t need to see that calendar’ [and] set it up so that they don’t see it when they first come in, and the portal will remember the settings the next time they log on,” Mr. Williams said. In addition, the portal will have much the same look and feel of the current DCMA Web pages, “so it won’t be a cultural shock to folks,” Mr. Williams said. “There will be consistent DCMA branding across all of our Web presence, including the portal.”

The portal also brings increased capabilities for collaboration and information sharing. Staff members at a DCMA contract management office (CMO) on the East Coast, for example, will be able to share information on a real-time basis with their colleagues in the Midwest or on the Pacific coast. Consequently, Knowledge Management (KM) will be incorporated into the portal from day one. “There are so many [KM] capabilities that are built right into the portal,” Mr. Williams said, such as “a content

library that will likely eliminate the need for office shared drives. For example, if there is a PowerPoint®¹ presentation you want to share with the entire Agency, put it in the content library.” Additionally, “individual offices, CMOs and communities will be able to set access permissions so that only their own people can upload, download or view certain files,” Mr. Williams explained.

The portal will benefit DCMA customers by making information more readily available to them.

The portal will also benefit DCMA customers by making information more readily available to them. Customers will be able to access some reports and database information, depending upon the access permission Agency managers give them. “We will be able to let customers into a lot of areas but also keep them from seeing some areas that, for whatever reason, we deem to be sensitive,” Mr. Williams said.

Wide Area Networks are Being Upgraded

The Enterprise/Workspace Portal alone would be enough to make most DCMA computer users happier, yet additional initiatives being fielded will also have a significant and positive impact on the desktop experiences of Agency personnel. “We are deep into the process of upgrading the Wide Area Network as well as many of what we call the ‘Metropolitan Area Networks,’” Mr. Williams said, as he shifted subjects. “We are taking a lot of the circuits in the network from T1 to T3 speed, which is an increase of 30 times.” A T1 is a specialized telecommunications circuit used for data. [The next two sentences are for you techies.] It passes data at a rate of 1.544 megabytes per second. A T3 is the same kind of circuit, but it passes data at a rate of 45 megabytes per second. The upgrades are being made at all DCMA sites with 50 people or more, “and one of these days, we will catch the smaller ones,” Mr. Williams added.

¹ Microsoft PowerPoint is a registered trademark of Microsoft Corporation in the United States and/or other countries.

The new Enterprise/Workspace Portal is designed to make navigating your computer easier.

To understand Wide Area Network and Metropolitan Area networks, think of DCMA's Wide Area Network as an interstate highway system: the Wide Area Network is the system of "superhighways" between the 17 designated major IT hub sites that DCMA has in the Continental United States. Now, think of the Metropolitan Area Networks as a bicycle wheel: The wheel's spokes correspond to the communication lines radiating out from a hub site to other DCMA offices in the surrounding area. The higher speed circuits will allow most DCMA users to access or "surf" the World Wide Web faster and allow DCMA IT to better support the Agency as it shifts its organizational model from a geographically based structure to one that is product-oriented. "To better serve these organizations as they begin to structure and restructure themselves, we will need to move some of our databases in the field to

The higher speed circuits will allow ... DCMA IT to better support the Agency as it shifts its organizational model from a geographically based structure to one that is product-oriented.

locations that will better serve them," Mr. Williams said. "The T3s will make it possible for us to move the data, in some cases quite a distance from the users." The Agency has completed about one-half of the circuit upgrades to date, and Mr. Williams anticipates that the last circuit will be completed some time in November. "The schedule is driven, in large part, by the telephone companies," Mr. Williams said, because "some companies are faster than others."

Another reason for the upgrade to T3 circuits is to accommodate the demand for increased video services. At the May 2005 DCMA Commanders' Conference, DCMA Director Maj. Gen. Darryl A. Scott, U.S. Air Force, expressed interest in broadcasting his opening remarks at future conferences to smaller CMOs, asking Mr. Williams if this would be possible. The use of

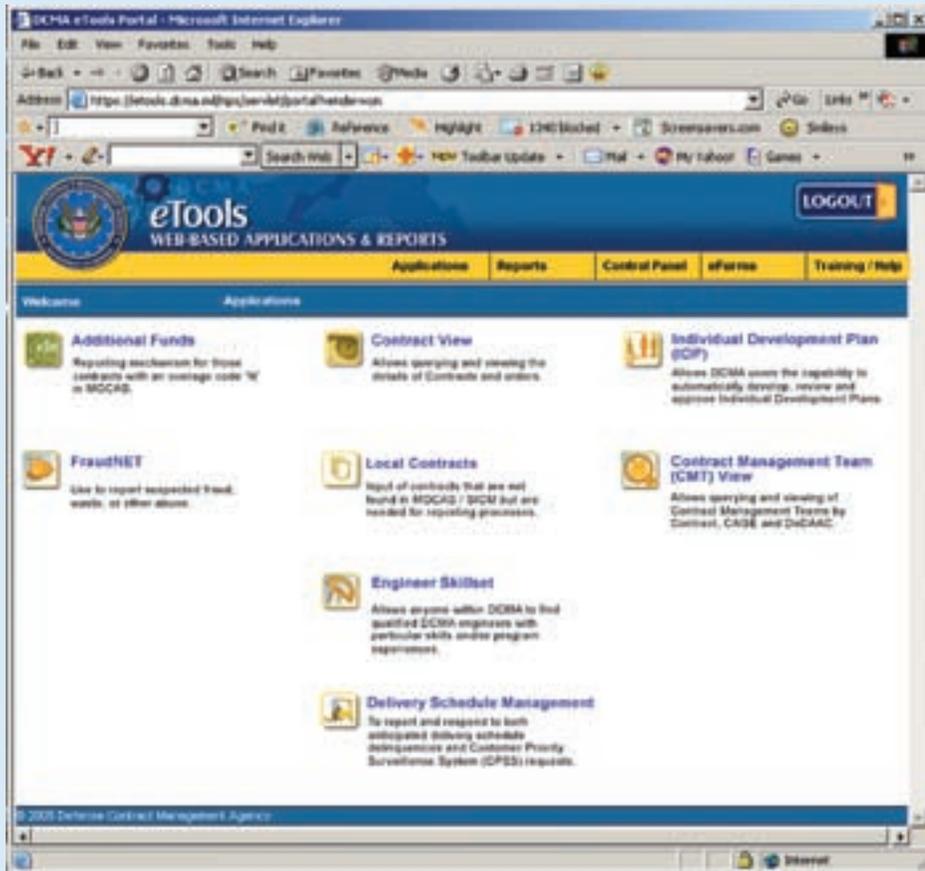
broadcasting would save money by allowing these CMO commanders to participate without having to attend. According to Mr. Williams, this is possible, though it will take some time to select and acquire all of the necessary equipment. "With the network upgrades, we will be able to do that, provided that we buy some specialized video software and a few pieces of hardware," he said. "So we are well into the process of evaluating which software and hardware we want to buy, [and] then the director will be able to broadcast to all of the CMOs on the network." Look for this capability some time in early 2006.

Eventually, DCMA IT will also be able to offer on-demand streaming video. For instance, the DCMA Headquarters Office of Congressional and Public Affairs will be able to put a videotaped message or training on the network and create a URL [Internet address] for it. Employees at their desktops will be able to click on the URL and view the video at their leisure. "We will support the initial broadcast capability, then streaming video will follow later," Mr. Williams said.

Upgrades Continue and Customer Satisfaction Grows

DCMA IT has had a long-standing policy to replace one-third of the Agency desktop computers and servers every year. In fact, new units are being installed in some offices right now. Recently, the new technology flat-panel monitors started appearing on desktops. "The first year we bought them, they were 15 inches," Mr. Williams said. "People in the field who had their 17-inch CRT [cathode ray tube] monitors replaced with these units complained that their screens were too small. However, the viewable area on a 15-inch flat-panel monitor is virtually the same as that on a 17-inch CRT monitor." Accepting the fact that appearance is sometimes stronger than reality, Mr. Williams decided that all replacement PCs will have 17-inch flat-panel

“We are taking a lot of the circuits in the network from T1 to T3 speed, which is an increase of 30 times.”



monitors. “They will be showing up on desktops in the next few months,” he added.

With all of the positive IT initiatives, it is no wonder that customer satisfaction keeps increasing. Mr. Williams has seen a clear and steady increase in positive responses in the last three IT support surveys. “Every six months, we send out an e-mail survey,” Mr. Williams said. “We ask people if they are ‘very dissatisfied,’ ‘dissatisfied,’ ‘satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied.’” Though historically there have been very few “very dissatisfied” and “dissatisfied” customers, Mr. Williams has noted “a steady migration away from the ‘dissatisfied’ end toward the ‘satisfied’ end. We have also seen a migration out of the ‘satisfied’ rating into the ‘very satisfied’ rating.”

(Above) When computer users log into the Enterprise/Workspace Portal, they will automatically be logged into the eTools application, just one of the many great features of the new portal.

In addition, IT sends out a survey after each Helpdesk ticket is closed. “So when someone calls with a problem and we work on it for them, an e-mail comes back to them when the ticket is closed saying, ‘How did we do?’”

The answer is that DCMA IT is doing very well. With the new Enterprise/Workspace Portal, high-speed circuitry, increased video capabilities and new desktop equipment, what is there to complain about? “I don’t know,” Mr. Williams said. “But one thing I do know is that if something is wrong, people are certainly not shy about communicating with you. And we are not shy about striving to make their desktop experiences the best they can be.”