

Cisco Systems and the **United States Air Force**

When you think of the United States Air Force (USAF), images of speed, power, and flawless execution in the air come to mind. Now, the USAF is making changes that will make those adjectives apply to the way this venerable organization runs its business as well.

Background

The USAF has come a long way since its birth. On August 1, 1907, the United States Army Signal Corps established a small Aeronautical Division to “take charge of all matters pertaining to military ballooning, air machines, and all kindred subjects.”

The Corps began testing its first airplane at Fort Myer, Virginia, on August 20, 1908. On September 9, Lieutenant Thomas E. Selfridge was killed in a plane crash while flying a test mission with Orville Wright. Subsequently, after more testing with a second, improved Wright Flyer, the Army formally accepted this airplane, identified as “Airplane No. 1,” on August 2, 1909.

In March 1911, Congress appropriated funds for Army aeronautics: \$125,000 for

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND: On August 1, 1907, the United States Army Signal Corps established a small Aeronautical Division to “take charge of all matters pertaining to military ballooning, air machines, and all kindred subjects.” Today’s United States Air Force comprises more than 730,000 servicemen and women on active duty, in the Air Force Reserve, and in the Air National Guard.

CHALLENGE: Technology has always played an important role in how the USAF runs its business, particularly its combat operations. In recent years, Air Force leaders recognized the dramatic technological changes shaping private enterprise and decided it was time to harness the power of the Information Age.

SOLUTION: The overall goal is to create a network-centric organization providing desktop access to over 700 information systems and the information needed to conduct both peacetime and combat operations. This single system, or portal, has been dubbed “My.AF,” the linchpin for the “One Air Force...One Network” strategy.

RESULTS: My.AF not only increases mission effectiveness and reduces workload, it will save money by eliminating redundancy. My.AF also reduces the complexity required to support end-users by providing Internet-enabled self-service applications, all accessible through an online browser.

fiscal year 1912. By the end of World War II, the Army Air Force had become a major military entity.

Today’s USAF comprises close to 492,000 servicemen and women around the world, with over 240,000 men and women in the Air Force Reserve and the Air National Guard. Funding has grown significantly—from the initial \$125,000 to billions in annual budgets.

Challenge

Technology has always played an important role in how the USAF runs its business, particularly its combat operations. In recent years, Air Force leadership recognized the dramatic technological changes shaping other industries and decided it was time to look at harnessing the power of the Information Age.

In April 2000, then Secretary of the Air Force F. Whitten Peters, Air Force Chief of Staff General Michael E. Ryan, Chief Information Officer Dr. Lawrence J. Delaney and other executives met with leading information technology firms including Cisco, Microsoft, Sun, Oracle, and Hewlett-Packard to determine what strategies would ensure their future success.

They saw first hand how these industry leaders were applying information technology to solve old problems and create new ways of doing business, and how their products and services were helping workplaces become more productive than ever before.

As a result of what they learned, the Air Force leadership team decided it was time to embrace the latest, most up-to-date practices used throughout “best of breed” scenarios in private enterprise. A key goal was to create a network-centric Air Force with the ability to focus on and use a single point of entry to access an array of vital Air Force information network systems.

The unique challenge was the scope of the organization—the USAF would need to Web-enable a “workforce” of over 730,000 people. While examples of general purpose and e-commerce portals servicing communities of multimillion users exist, there was no Enterprise Management solution comparable in size to this need. And because of its focus on national security, information assurance was a significant consideration.

“We have been given an unprecedented opportunity and a challenge from our senior leadership to leverage IT and improve all our business processes,” Dr. Delaney said. “There are a great many projects in logistics, personnel, finance, medical and other functional areas which will rely heavily on IT to enhance their processes. That will only be successful if we can put in place the infrastructure that will support them.”

Solution

After returning from their Silicon Valley visits, Secretary Peters and Air Force Chief of Staff, General Ryan convened an Air Force IT Summit in July 2000 with major command leaders. They invited Cisco, Sun, and Oracle to participate.

“We shared with them how Cisco uses a benchmark for determining success or failure for Internet solutions, and how we use small, bite-sized initiatives to ensure we get the payback we’re looking for in a short amount of time,” said Wayne Fullerton, Manager, Federal Business Development Group, Cisco Systems. “We also showed them our online directory service, online expense processing system, and other self-service Internet business applications Cisco uses to manage our business for high productivity and cost-effectiveness.”

As a result of the IT Summit, Lieutenant General John L. Woodward Jr., Air Force Deputy Chief of Staff for Communications and Information, chartered 11 focus groups to lead the way in adopting industry best practices. “Our goal is to Web-enable mission and administrative processes and provide desktop tools so people can do business online instead of spending valuable time in transit, waiting in lines, or logging into a large number of diverse systems,” Woodward said.

With Cisco’s help, the teams collectively recognized that what was needed first and foremost was a foundation—a network infrastructure and single access point for the Air Force to begin the transformation from a legacy environment to an Internet-based solutions environment.

From this, the “One Air Force ... One Network” strategy emerged.

The first initiative of this strategy was “My.AF,” the Air Force portal that will give users continuous, single-point network access to over 700 Air Force information resources and services.

Self-Help Personnel Support

Many support processes within the Air Force are labor intensive, from both the provider and consumer points of view. For example, personnel support is usually accomplished by a centralized Military Personnel Flight (MPF) at each Air Force base. The MPF consists of a large group of specialists dedicated to providing information and assistance to Air Force members. The MPF was a prime target for customer self-help through automation. The virtual-MPF (vMPF) was one of the first Web-enabled self-help applications available through the My.AF portal.



The vMPF is a secure, Web-based link to each Air Force member's personnel records. Once an account has been established, members can access personal records and conduct personnel transactions via the Web on a self-service basis from any computer with Internet capability, whether at work, home, or on temporary duty.

Self-Help Finance Support

Financial support is another prime target for automated self-help through My.AF. Colonel Gregory L. Morgan, Director of Accounting, Banking, and Comptroller Support demonstrated the first edition of MyMoney at the senior leadership conference in October 2000. This module provides one-stop shopping for financial questions that Air Force military members and civilian employees are likely to have.

"The site has four major areas: military pay, civilian pay, travel, and personal finance," said Colonel Morgan. "For example, by clicking 'civilian pay' a civilian employee can see pay charts, calculate the pay impact of a raise or promotion, check on retirement funds, and gather a wealth of information on pay issues. The military pay link provides a similar range of information. The travel link can take users to per diem rates, phone numbers of all Department of Defense billeting, availability of lodging and meals, and travel regulations."

Other useful travel data such as government airline ticket prices, hotel exemption forms, and even a link to government travel card accounts—requiring a password—are available. The personal finance section contains an even wider range of useful financial information such as loan calculators, personal financial planning tips, mortgages, auto loans, taxes, and savings bond purchases.

"My Money will not only save trips to the finance office, it gives users the tools to make a real difference in their personal financial fitness," Colonel Morgan said.

Self-Help Personnel Locator

Until My.AF, there was no comprehensive source of locator information for Air Force personnel. The Air Force "White Pages" will provide that capability through the Air Force portal by providing access to a

comprehensive data base with the names, duty stations, telephone numbers and e-mail addresses of all Air Force members.

"In the past, finding someone was not a simple task because lists only included those people at your own base and those names you personally added," Lieutenant Colonel Don Greiman, HQ Air Force said. "Now we have access to the entire Air Force."

Results

The vMPF, MyMoney, and the Air Force White Pages are examples of processes dramatically improved through the combination of a network infrastructure and global portal. Enterprise-wide use of My.AF not only increases mission effectiveness and reduces workload, it will also save money by eliminating redundancy.

The rollout is easy because so little training is required. A browser is the only software needed and applications are intuitive enough to be used immediately.

As My.AF expands across the Air Force, new ways to Web-enable day-to-day information sharing and workload are being discovered.

Immediate candidates for inclusion on the portal include:

- Legal assistance
- Medical and dental appointments
- Online training and flight records
- Knowledge centers for key Air Force competencies
- Workflow management

The USAF also plans to use information technology to distribute realistic mission training in real-time across multiple bases, building highly important synthetic mission operations capabilities.

Technology will be a critical success factor in live action, as well. For example, getting needed supplies to the right place at the right time. "With real-time acquisition and logistics data available on demand by Air Force Materiel Command personnel, operational mission needs can be quickly worked with bottlenecks identified, analyzed, and resolved in a few keystrokes," General Lester L. Lyles, Commander, Air Force Materiel Command said.

Air Force Vision 2020 acknowledges Information Superiority as a core Air Force competency. The ability to control and exploit information ensures what the USAF calls “decision dominance”—the ability to make smart decisions faster than any adversaries.

The Air Force is identifying best practices of industry, applying them to military needs, and implementing them on a scale more grand than most commercial enterprises to make this vision real.

“Through ‘One Air Force ... One Network,’ we are changing how the Air Force leverages information technology to improve combat effectiveness and daily mission performance,” said Secretary Peters. “We believe we are taking the right steps toward the decision superiority necessary to protect and defend America’s interests in the Information Age.”



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