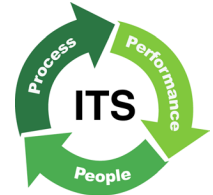




ITS Connections

Volume 1, Issue #5

September 9, 2005



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ITS Calendar

New Fiscal Year

Saturday Oct. 1, 2005

1st Anniversary of ITS

Monday, Nov. 28, 2005

Contact Information

Please share with us your story ideas, comments, calendar items, ingenious solutions, questions or answers. E-mail us at:

ITSConnections@usda.gov

XP Update2, An Update With Destiny- Soon to be on screens everywhere!

If anything represents the deep and broadly placed capabilities and teamwork of ITS, the enterprise-wide deployment of XP Update2 is the perfect example. First, it is a direct response to a product needed by our customers; it proves the effectiveness of the change/release process; it engaged the expertise of ITS staff throughout the country who contributed to the review, testing, and documentation of the product; and it highlights innovation, with the development of new ways to deploy the product to the field.

XP Update2 development began in November 2004, shortly after the deployment of new workstations last year. Because of the way the shared environment is set up, the new computers were running the previous system's XP Update1 image. David Pfaffenberger, team leader/ IO Lab, said, "... there were brand new laptops and desktops in the field but they were running old software applications. This upgrade package was basically the next phase of the first update, but we had to determine what should go into this package. With over 52,000 active workstations among 3 agencies we needed a package that would work for everybody without disrupting any of our customers' mission critical programs."

Key Improvements

The key improvements fell into three categories: fixes to the operating system, updates of existing applications, and some new software (with MS Office 2003 and Adobe Acrobat 6.0.3 Standard as prominent features). The selection of new applications and upgrades was based on what was most needed by the end-users.

For instance, Office 2003 has many improvements to productivity. The new Outlook is efficient, allows users to switch easily between on-line and off-line modes (useful where bandwidth is limited), and has improved calendar and scheduling features. Adobe Acrobat 6 is a full standard version that allows users to create pdfs. And other applications provide improvements such as enhanced multi-media capabilities, better file compression, upgraded virus protection, and support for specific SCA applications.

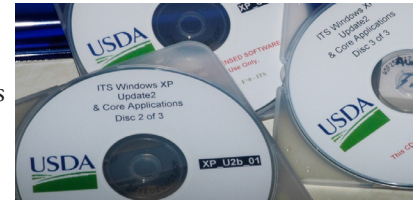


Photo: XP Update2 Installation CDs.

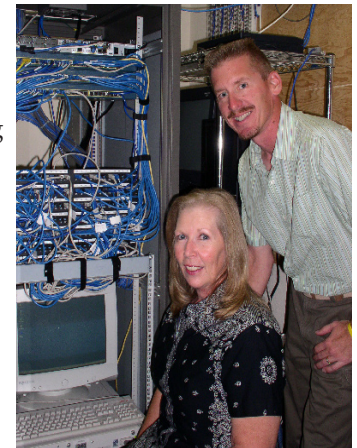


Photo: David Pfaffenberger with Mary Erickson, ITS Manager-NV, at the Carson City RD State Office.

XP Update2 Components

Application	Status	Application	Status
Office 2003: • Word • Excel • PowerPoint • Outlook	N	Dell DMI	U*
Acrobat 6.03 Standard	N	Rumba 7.3	U
Journal Viewer	U	RealPlayer Enterprise JRE 1.5.0	U
WinZip 9.1	U	JRE 1.5.0	UU
Flash 7.2	U	Shockwave 10	U
VirusScan 8.0	U	Platform	U
QuickTime 6.5.2	U	AdminPak 1.0	Option**
Microsoft Publisher	N	Microsoft InfoPath	N

N- New application
U- Upgrade
* for Dell hardware only
** installed by request

(XP Update2, continued from page 1)

“ It was nine months of phone calls, conference calls, emails, and direct contact... good, open communications was fundamental – with agency customers, counterparts at ITS, and ITS/TSD Group Managers... plus the built-in agency experience of my team reps. Their knowledge of how the agencies work and what they use and need was invaluable.”

- David Pfaffenberger

From Project Plan to Field Testing

David, working from his Nevada location, and Marcus Hulings, IO Lab/Integration Team/WDC, began the project plan. Following their work on the initial XP migration (*Escape from NT*) and XP Update1, they already had a good idea of what was required. There was fluid communications with the agencies through direct feedback and proactive-Team Reps and State ITS Managers, concerning specific applications and upgrades (such as Java Runtime Environment 1.5, which supports web-based applications used by customers of the SCA).

In January, Marcus had collected the latest versions, licenses, fixes, and patches for the software package and assembled the XP Update2 image for preliminary testing. Once he knew the image worked, he also designed 2 installation methods for the update: a 3 CD set for manual installs and a server-based download for remote and automated installs. Meanwhile Kathy Bashaw prepared the implementation/installation guides and Kathy Deppe drafted the user guide for the various applications, wireless features, and VPN.



Photo: Marcus Hulings, IO Lab Development/Integration Team-Beltsville, MD, with the XP Update2 disc set.

In April and May review teams began testing the image in Agency labs at Kansas City, St. Louis, and Fort Collins. The tests checked installation procedures and how well the update worked on typical end-user computers. They also checked for interference with agency specific programs. The testing teams found some issues that needed fixing and suggested other improvements for the beta version and support materials.

From RFC and CCB to Pilot Testing

The field testing made the XP Update2 image ready for the Request For Change process (RFC). The ITS infrastructure depends on the RFC process to protect the enterprise and all the mission critical applications that our customers use. David prepared the RFC application for the Change Control Board (CCB), stating the purpose of the upgrade, describing the changes, and functional requirements, and providing the image CDs and all supporting documentation.

“We had designed the package, run some beta testing and made sure we had everything in the package that we and our customers needed,” David recalled. “The CCB can be very nerve wracking sometimes, just depends on how prepared you are. The Board has highly technical people on it and they have a broad view of our enterprise and really know how the tiniest change could end up affecting everyone. That presentation wasn’t too bad. I had been working on the project for several months, so I was really comfortable with all of the components and our process.”

In May, it was reviewed by the Change Control Board and approved for IO Lab tests and a final round of field tests. David had to write test routines for every kind of work-station, laptop, and server in use by all ITS customers (17 unique platforms): this included routines for normal and clean installs, plus both types of installation methods. Altogether, there were more than 68 unique test scenarios. The IO Lab Security team reviewed the upgrade for vulnerabilities and the Testing Team ran David’s tests from May through June.

(XP Update2, continued from page 2)

Once the Update passed all the tests, it was ready for pilot tests with volunteers in real field offices in Texas, Tennessee, Minnesota, and Iowa.

More preparation was required. The Documentation team updated all the guides and published them electronically. Marcus produced a set of pilot test CDs. David coordinated with the Help Desks and with the Technical Support Division for their participation. The Pilot Test occurred in the first two weeks of August: during the first week, 300 installs were conducted using both the manual and server based methods; in the second week, the team reviewed end-user experience with the software, operations, documentation, and support.

The Pilot Tests resulted in a few more improvements: minor changes to the documentation; a simple, but significant change in the timing of the installation program; and a simpler conversion process from the old Outlook to the new one.

Deployment

The development team worked with the TSD leadership, Larry Brooks, Pat Cummings, and Allison Campbell, to plan the deployment; and with the Help Desk to clarify any support issues. The final version of the XP Update2 CDs and documentation went to Phil Rendina in Kansas City who coordinated the duplication and distribution with FSA's CD duplication team, and over the week of August 15 a total of 11,000 CDs were produced.

As of now, installations are underway. The documentation is in electronic form with searchable topics. If users prefer hard-copy they can just select specific sections they want to refer to, rather than print out everything in the documentation pdfs.

Conclusion

The 52,000+ installations should be complete by this fall. All told, the whole development process took about nine months for ITS' most ambitious software update. As David describes the experience, "Ever since we started our XP migration from NT three years ago, we've had ongoing upgrades to the O/S as well as the Core applications. This is probably a unique project in that the XP Core image that we used was constantly being upgraded, so our process was really underway. It was MS Office 2003 that made this such a large project, along with the other applications we needed to bundle along with it. And that I had a double role as project leader and change manager."

David also credits the effective working relationships across ITS and with his customer contacts for the steady progress of XP Update2. "It was nine months of phone calls, conference calls, emails, and direct contact... good, open communications was fundamental – with agency customers, counterparts at ITS, and ITS/TSD Group Managers... plus the built-in agency experience of my team reps. Their knowledge of how the agencies work and what they use and need was invaluable."

XP Upgrade2 Teams

<p>Development Team: David Pfaffenberger, IOL Kathy Bashaw, ID Marcus Hulings, IOL Dan Snyder, IA Kathy Deppe, IA Curt Anderson, IOL</p> <p>Documentation Team: David Pfaffenberger, IOL Dan Snyder, IA Kathy Bashaw, ID Kathy Deppe, IA</p>	<p>IO Lab Teams provided continuous support with testing, documentation editing, support:</p> <p>Change Management- Mary Haygood Beverly Gray Curt Anderson</p> <p>Security- Mary Wilson Ivan Foldvik</p> <p>Testing Groups: Ross LiCausi Lisa Howard Juanita Major Golam Sayeed</p>
<p>Review/Testing: David Pfaffenberger, IOL Kathy Bashaw, ID Phil Owen, KCC Mike Ingle, KCC Marcus Hulings, IOL Carl Nethery, UT Mary Martin, OR Ken Carpenter, FTC George Foster, FTC Brent Todd, STL Bob Bozada, STL Cameron Pursley, STL Brenda Dawson, WDC Gordon Davis, KY Patrick Cummings, TN Michele Beason, NE</p>	<p>Pilot Project Testing: Tom Radermacher, MN (& 18 ITS Mgrs in MN) Bev Minica, TX (and 26 ITS Mgrs in TX) Kathy Hamilton, TN (and 5 ITS Mgrs in TN) Dan Snyder, IA (and 9 ITS Mgrs in IA) Gordon Davis, KY Michele Beason, NE</p>
<p>Other Vital Participants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Help Desks, support during Pilot Project and ongoing support. • Larry Brooks, Pat Cummings and Allison Campbell for implementation planning • NV State Office - Larry Smith-RD State Director and Mary Erickson- IT Mgr/ITS, for their generous access to their production environment for David's long testing regimen. 	

“It was a very dynamic situation heading into convergence... .. we had to think ahead and anticipate what we’d need — staff, dollars, space, supplies, purchase arrangements... and get the agencies to work with us on the transition so our folks had the resources to do their work.” - Lisa Arcure

Behind the Scenes: the Administrative Management Division

This is the 2nd in a series about ITS Branches

The Administrative Management Division (AMD) is the foundation that supports all the other divisions and activities of ITS: it manages the budget, all sorts of human resources (HR) responsibilities (such as paychecks, benefits, and policies),

property (offices, equipment, and vehicles), contracts, staffing and other resources ITS needs to get our work done.

AMD is led by Lisa Arcure, who previously worked as the Resource Manager for the CIO—Scott Charbo. During the months leading up to the creation of ITS, Lisa focused on operational resources in collaboration with Keith Caldwell on HR issues and Gary Collins on finance. After convergence she became Division Director and until recently she was also the acting chief for each of her three branches.

Financial Execution, Employee Services, and Asset Management.

The Administrative Management Division provides administrative leadership and support to the ITS organization. It is responsible for:

- Financial execution and budget management
- Employee & HR services management
- Asset Management (offices, equipment, and vehicles)

“It isn’t easy to create a new organization at the USDA, but it was amazing, once the reorganization package was approved by the Department, how quickly everything came together administratively that enabled us to support our customers right out of the gate,” Lisa recalls, “It was a very dynamic situation heading into convergence... .. we had to think ahead and anticipate what we’d need — staff, dollars, space, supplies, purchase arrangements... and get the agencies to work with us on the transition so our folks had the resources to do their work.”

Administration combines not just the resources employees need to get the job done, but also the resources an organization needs to provide its employees their paychecks, benefits, guidance, and other services.



Lisa Arcure, Director,
Administrative Management Division

The division develops policies and procedures that guide everything from purchasing supplies or arranging travel to helping set a career path or keeping the operating budget under control.

How was Lisa able to provide administrative leadership during convergence? “We had a lot of help. There was no staff, really. We first lined up the Bureau of Public Debt (BPD) in West Virginia, a franchise operation that is experienced in handling payroll services for several government agencies, to handle HR services; and the Controller Operations Division (COD) in New Orleans started handling travel, expenses, reimbursements and training. We also tapped into experienced ITS employees for purchase card support, and timekeeper support. We held three sessions (prior to convergence) to train a select group of employees on the new T&A system - WebTA, and the purchase card management system.

“These employees were and continue to be vital to the organization... it’s their support that allows us all to continue on with our mission to support the service center agencies. The agencies established administrative coordinators in each state to help make sure all records of ITS *employees-to-be* got safely to BPD. Despite a few glitches, the paychecks showed up, insurance got transferred, and employees were officially moved to the OCIO. . .”

(AMD, continued from page 4)

Administrative Team

Lisa now has a team of branch chiefs to take on those tasks:



Kathy Fay, Chief
Asset Management Branch
Beltsville
kathy.fay@wdc.usda.gov

Kathy joined ITS in July and is based in Beltsville, MD. She came over from USDA Departmental Administration.



Steve Ettien, Chief
Financial Execution Branch
Fort Collins
stephen.ettien@ffc.usda.gov

Steve comes to ITS from NITC, where he gained experience in the fee-for-service business model.



Michael Tolle, Chief
Employee Services Branch
St. Louis
michael.tolle@stl.usda.gov

Mike joined ITS from Rural Development, where he supervised a team working with the States on HR issues. His background with a far-flung organization is perfect for his new

Currently, AMD's procurements of \$2500+ are handled by the USDA Office of Procurement and Property Management – a staff of 8 is being hired to specifically support ITS. Delia Downer (delia.downer@usda.gov) of the AMD coordinates all small purchases by managing the purchase card system and has been designated the Local Area Program Coordinator (LAPC). Delia also serves as the IAS Coordinator for ITS.

Employee Services Branch (ES) manages administrative support for all ITS employees, provides guidance and communications to ITS management and employees concerning a broad range of workplace policies and issues, and develops and sets ITS specific regulations and procedures. ES also manages the external service providers that help ITS with payroll, benefits, personnel and HR services, travel, expenses, and other support.

Employee Services Branch

People are at the heart of an organization and they can work effectively by virtue of the administrative support they get, from policies to paychecks. The focus of the Employee Services Branch is on providing or coordinating such support in HR and travel.

Mike Tolle's experience at Rural Development prepared him for a very decentralized, virtual organization. He also has a virtual staff:

- Bureau of Public Debt helps him with HR issues and services, including staffing, payroll, benefits, and position classification.
- Keith Caldwell, USDA HR Specialist, supports development of HR policies and procedures.
- The ITS Section at NFC works with travel issues, such as FedTraveler, travel cards, and travel vouchers.

"I'm excited to join an organization that is relatively new, and is willing to try new things," Mike says. "It's amazing the amount of work that went into forming ITS. Sure, there are challenges that more established agencies may not have, especially related to molding parts of FSA, NRCS, and RD into one cohesive group. There are a lot of opportunities to do something special here, too, however."

Now that most permanent managers are in place, Mike believes a lot more progress will be made throughout the ITS workplace. He looks forward to communicating effectively with managers on a broad range of workplace issues and also to setting up channels – including ITS Connections and the new ITS Intranet pages – for communicating about HR topics and benefits with all ITS employees. "After all, the name of my branch is Employee Services, so my focus should be on supporting all ITS employees," he says. "I still have a lot to learn about ITS, but I'm looking forward to it."

Asset Management Branch (AM) manages and oversees all assets for ITS, including real and personal property, space and vehicles. This includes reviewing our requirements and coordinating with our host agencies to ensure that ITS offices have the space, vehicles, and resources we need; planning for future requirements; and adjusting our balance of payments with the agencies for our use of their space and other support they provide.

Financial Execution Branch (FE) manages the ITS budget, including appropriated and working capital (revolving) funds and maintains the accounts; works with Governance to help formulate budgets and prepare financial reports; and provide cost recovery for the services we provide our customers.

Asset Management Branch

“The Asset Management Branch manages the real and personal property for ITS. Real property is about having offices and personal property is about having equipment, i.e. desks, computers, vehicles, etc. to do your job,” says Kathy Fay, “... we have to keep track of all our locations and who and what we have in them. Since we are in many respects a virtual organization, keeping track is a significant challenge.”

One such challenge is an inventory of office space supplied to ITS by the SCA. We are in the process of conducting an inventory of where each employee within ITS is located. The inventory will show how much space ITS occupies and includes office space and IT facilities such as computer rooms and work areas. We are also looking at any renovations that might need to be done to the space in order to make ITS more efficient and effective.

Because ITS is so dispersed around the country, this study is critical for understanding if we have enough space and the right kind of space for all our employees. This will help us grow where we need to right now, and it will help us plan appropriately as we hire more people. The inventory is also important to make sure we are reimbursing our host agencies properly.

Kathy has much more on her platter, too. She says, “Another critical area for me is transportation of employees to different work sites. AMD along with TSD is conducting a study on motor vehicle use and requirements for ITS. This will help us decide how many vehicles we need for our fleet and how we should procure the vehicles, i.e. lease vs purchase.”

And then there is need to develop a process for managing over 285,000 pieces of ITS hardware. Kathy’s branch is working closely with the Technical Support Division, which uses EATS to manage that equipment. High on the list in that process is developing an effective way of disposing of excess personal property. “Leaving items in the hallway for someone else at USDA to pick up is not the way to do things”, Lisa concludes, “We need to help our customers change that habit so we can decommission hardware properly, maybe even find it a new home. And save USDA a lot of money in the process.”

Financial Execution Branch

Financial execution is about tracking the ITS budget and, as Steve Ettien puts it, “Making sure the budget is spent appropriately and within our limits. This is not as clear cut as it may appear because we have two kinds of funds – CCE money which goes specifically to hardware and applicable software, and the working capital fund which pays for the services we provide our customers (and covers our salaries and expenses).” FEB is also responsible for various agreements and obligations with organizations like the BPD and COD, and making sure FFIS and IAS function properly.

The Governance Division develops the ITS budget and gives it to AMD to execute. Over time, the procedures FEB uses will help base the budget on carefully documented spending and earning patterns.

ITS is in a very dynamic situation as it evolves from a traditional IT service smorgasbord to a customer focused service line approach. Lots of things are happening simultaneously: a service catalog is being developed that matches the cost of services to a fee structure; service level agreements are being created between ITS and the agencies, and new customers are coming on board.

“This is a very exciting time,” Steve emphasizes. “We are helping create and expand a new kind of fee-for-service government business model. My experience at NITC is very helpful, since I already understand the fundamental principles of fee-for-service. The challenge is helping ITS scale up that model and helping develop the financial underpinning for it, basically a valid and workable cost-recovery process.”

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ITS Management Conference in San Antonio: *Putting Service First*

The ITS leadership – Division Directors, Branch Chiefs, and Service Line Managers – will be meeting in San Antonio on September 12 for an intense week of work sessions and team building. While the broader theme of the meeting is “*Putting Service First*”, the activities are geared to preparing both our leadership and our organization in the fundamentals to achieve that goal. Both Rich Roberts and Dave Combs will preside over getting everyone on the same service page and what that really means – for our customers and for all of us. There will also be sessions where directors and branch chiefs clarify the ITS vision, build rapport, and get to know each other in person – perhaps one of the most important facets of the meeting.

The Service Line Concept is an inherent part of ITS putting service first – it is how ITS works with customers to learn what they require, how we define and catalogue the services we provide, and how we work together across divisions and branches to provide customers the service levels and support they need and expect. Tuesday will be devoted to presenting how the concept will work in the real world.

Another day will focus on the many accomplishments ITS has had in the past year, and the many projects that are underway as we cross into our second year of existence. Meanwhile, there are many basic workplace issues for the leadership to also become familiar with – such as Civil Rights and Labor Relations topics - and the end of the week will be about consolidating skills and setting a unified course for ensuring ITS’ success.

Magic Stats: July 2005 *from the Service Desk*

For the month of July 2005, 17,988 tickets were recorded and 9,275 work orders were generated. The following table shows the subject breakout for the month.

SUBJECT	TICKETS	WORK ORDERS
Software		
• FSA	1715	605
• COTS	1717	561
• General	1699	472
• NRCS	697	237
• OS	430	155
• RD	365	241
• USDA	102	62
Hardware		
• General	1766	1103
• Desktops	853	807
• Printers	846	422
• Laptops	601	477
• Servers	209	190
System Administration	1725	1070
Network	2014	853
Security	958	1544
Self-Service	1040	36
Other	1251	440
Total	1788	9275

CONTACT METHOD FOR SERVICE REQUESTS

Of the 17,988 tickets recorded in July 2005, contact to the ITS Service Desk and Technical Support Division was made in the following manner:

REQUEST TYPE	TICKETS
Automated Alert	85
Call	11,940
Direct Contact	1,345
E-mail	1,702
FAX	41
Other	160
Self Service	2,155
Voice Mail	560