

Case Study

COMTek Supports the Military Postal Service Agency in Delivering Mail from Home to the Troops Overseas

Anybody who's ever been far from loved ones knows how important mail from home can be, especially when the recipient is in a strange land or a battle zone. For this reason, the US Armed Forces has made the efficient delivery of mail to military personnel a priority. Mail from home is vital for building strong morale of our troops stationed overseas. But, delivering more than 300,000 pounds of letters and packages to 1,500 military post offices around the world is no easy task.

A Mission Critical System that Tracks Costs and Transit Time

To increase efficiency, the Military Postal Service Agency (MPSA) contracted with Communication Technologies, Inc. (COMTek), a Virginia based, communications network and IT services provider, in early 2000. Noting the company's successful track record in providing innovative solutions and its depth of experience in working with government agencies, MPSA tasked COMTek's systems engineers to develop what is now known as the Automated Military Postal System (AMPS).

Originally conceived as a basic tracking program for monitoring mail delivery costs, AMPS is now a mission critical system that supports many important functions instrumental to the operation of the Military Postal Service (MPS).

Though several legacy software programs for administrative functions already existed, MPSA worked with COMTek to consolidate the existing systems and design a single Web-based automated system to meet future needs. "We realized at the outset that this project would require a very robust system," says Dan Ness, COMTek's AMPS Program Manager. "So we went to Oracle, and built a system from scratch, one that is flexible, allowing the MPS to react quickly in a constantly changing military environment, and scalable, so that we could add functionality as needed."

A Robust System that Adapts to New Challenges and Functionalities

In less than a year, AMPS was tested and implemented. The effects were immediate. Mail delivery was monitored on an hourly basis and mail clerks had many of their day-to-day tasks streamlined. Over the next five years, more functionality was added:

- A module to track financial information
- Automation of many paperwork processes
- A module to track and manage postal supplies and equipment.
- A process to track delivery of overseas voting ballots to and from local precincts for national elections. Mail Comments - an interactive Internet site which allows tracking of packages sent through AMPS that also has a log-in capability for inquiries about a particular package.
- Postal Offenses which alert the MPS about unlawful incidents and the mailing of unauthorized materials.
- Postal Net Alerts which inform the entire MPS of local conditions that may impact the timely delivery of mail

What's more, the system is still growing, adding new modules almost every month as technology changes and new capabilities become possible

Working as a Team Has Led to Continuing Benefits

Says COMTek's Dan Ness, "We're very proud of AMPS, but we can't take all the credit for the program's success." Noting that MPSA's management of the project has been a critical factor, he adds, "A huge part of what makes this program work is the positive working relationship we have the MPSA."

To ensure close monitoring of the system and immediate response to problems, COMTek has staffed AMPS onsite with an analyst who is integrated into MPSA's operations. To further support MPSA's operations, COMTek has also developed AMPS training videos and computer-based training systems.

Says a MPSA spokesman, "They've got the expertise and depth of experience in AMPS to diagnose problems, anticipate challenges and foresee new capabilities. But even more than that, they've got the management structure and attitude that allows quick turnaround."

Underscoring the value of COMTek's culture and management style in projects such as this, CEO Joe Fergus notes, "Our organization is very streamlined and can react quickly. If you call us with a problem in the morning, we can often make the change, test it and have it active by the end of the day."

In the ten years that AMPS has been running, efficiency has increased and costs have been reduced by automating manual processes. But even more importantly, Service men and women, who are putting their lives on the line for their country, get the mail they count on and the morale boost they need from home.