

Case Study Detail

Client
U.S. Marine Corps (USMC)

Project Name
Monitor Assignment Support System
(WebMASS)

Project Description

Overview

The job of a U.S. Marine Corps “Monitor” is challenging. Each Monitor is assigned a requirement of up to 13,000 “billets” – or job openings – and a population of Marines to fill them. Certain Monitors can make more than 4,000 assignments each year, and before the redevelopment of the Marine Corps’ Manpower Assignment Support System (MASS), Monitors had to painstakingly slot Marines into appropriate billets using paper-based manpower assignment processes and numerous outdated and stovepiped legacy systems.

And assignments are only part of the story. Equally important is the management of personnel distribution across the Marine Corps. There are always more billets than there are Marines to fill them. Distribution managers must ensure that Marines are allotted to units in a manner that most effectively and efficiently supports the war fighting mission. Before WebMASS, these distribution personnel had to rely on manual tallies and cumbersome spreadsheets to assess distribution. Assignments happened faster than they could analyze them, and Marines were often assigned where they weren’t most critically needed.

Recognizing these inefficiencies, the Marine Corps turned to Fairfax, Virginia-based InfoReliance to re-engineer MASS and truly transform the manpower assignment process.

Business Challenge

About 200 Marine Corps Monitors are each responsible for assigning thousands of Marines to new billets every three years (or as needed in order to fill vacancies). Effectively managing and filling these ever-changing billets requires each Monitor to comb hundreds or thousands of personnel records within their assigned population. Conducting this process manually, as in previous years, was no simple task. Every member of the Marine Corps has roughly 1,200 pieces of information attached to his or her personnel record – everything from helmet size to performance evaluations. Monitors must review personnel records closely to make informed decisions when filling billet vacancies. In many cases, finding the best fit involves meeting language, security clearance and assignment experience requirements.

Until recently, most enlisted Monitors conducted manpower assignments using a cumbersome, paper-based process. First, each Monitor would print off hard copies of thousands of personnel records. (These reams of paper would often stack several feet high.) Using pencil and paper, these individuals would mark notes on the print outs, assessing the Marines in their assigned populations, and then manually match them to billet vacancies listed on a separate print out. This process would often take a Monitor days to complete.

Case Study Detail

Client
U.S. Marine Corps (USMC)

Project Name
Monitor Assignment Support System
(WebMASS)

Project Description, cont.

“Interestingly, the manpower assignment process was inconsistent across the Marine Corps,” said InfoReliance’s Jeff Crosslin, project manager of WebMASS. “Monitors for the Officer population actually had automated computer systems to aid them in their duties – but with information spread across 13 disparate legacy systems, this did not necessarily mean the process was streamlined.”

One system listed open billets; another listed personnel records; some enabled database searches – however, because the applications were not integrated or built with manpower assignments in mind, Monitors had to jump from system to system and navigate frustrating redundancies and conflicting data.

Distribution management was equally difficult. Distribution managers consulted huge print outs of billets and requirements to help guide Monitors in knowing which billets to fill and which to “gap,” or leave unfilled. This is a critical decision that affects not only quality of life for the Marines, but also military readiness and war fighting capability of the Marine Corps. Relying on legacy systems and homegrown tools, the distribution teams could not keep up with the Monitors. As a result, force allocation became unbalanced and did not always support the greater needs of the Corps.

An integrated, Web-enabled MASS was most in order.

Solution

Working closely with full life-cycle software development firm, InfoReliance Corporation, the Marine Corps launched its MASS modernization project in 2001. It has been growing in scope ever since, with new functionality added continually.

With the latest release, WebMASS, InfoReliance has helped the Marine Corps build an integrated, online military personnel management and budget management system that provides Monitors with the tools and information they need to make informed assignment and career management decisions, and to issue and manage the orders that execute those assignments worldwide.

The new MASS offers automated processes that replace hard-copy reports with up-to-date, online information. WebMASS has replaced a myriad of legacy applications and workgroup databases and now provides a consolidated online database of personnel information to support the assignment process. “Finding an Arabic-speaking communications officer with a Top Secret clearance and a business degree no longer requires days of tedious research,” said Crosslin. “It’s as easy as executing a simple query.”

Case Study Detail

Client
U.S. Marine Corps (USMC)

Project Name
Monitor Assignment Support System
(WebMASS)

Project Description, cont.

WebMASS is also integrated with other mission-critical personnel systems, which reduces duplicate data entry and improves timeliness and accuracy of that data.

WebMASS's effect on distribution managers has been equally powerful. Distribution managers are now able to analyze personnel distribution in real time, drilling down from macro views (such as a Marine Expeditionary Force), to the individual billets, to the individual Marines that fill them. By integrating distribution management directly into WebMASS, these managers are now able to directly control which billets get filled and which are gapped, ensuring that the Corps is best able to meet mission requirements.

InfoReliance helped the Marine Corps develop and review several architectures and technical approaches to meet WebMASS's business requirements. These discussions involved the benefits and cost implications of various architecture solutions, technical approaches, development timelines, end-user usability and system maintainability. The team also considered the specific technologies it would use, including the back-end database management system.

At the conclusion of these discussions, and following a "buy vs. build" analysis, InfoReliance recommended a technical architecture that included an Oracle database, business components in C#, and a presentation tier using Microsoft's .Net platform and an Asynchronous JavaScript And XML (AJAX) approach to rich-client development in a Web-based environment.

Results

As a result of the thorough analysis process and iterative development effort behind this project, today's Marine Corps benefits from a highly tailored application that supports a very specific business process.

The benefits of the WebMASS system are self-evident:

- Today's Marine Corps Monitors can perform their manpower assignment jobs more efficiently and effectively.
 - To the Monitor, WebMASS is accessible from anywhere at any time.
 - Thanks to the time saved by the WebMASS application, Monitors can devote more of their time to meeting the needs of their assignment population.
- By automating and integrating the manpower allocation system, the Marine Corps is saving significant time and money. In particular, the new paperless application maps directly to the aims of the Government Paperwork Elimination Act.

Project Description, cont.

Case Study Detail

Client
U.S. Marine Corps (USMC)

Project Name
Monitor Assignment Support System
(WebMASS)

- Marines, themselves, are experiencing the positive impact of the improved WebMASS system.
 - Because the system is so well automated, Monitors are able to advise Marines of a job/location change with up to six-month's advance notice instead of the previous three-month's notice. This has a major impact on the morale of the Corps and provides Marines with the ability to plan for themselves and their family for their next permanent change of station (PCS).
 - WebMASS allows Marines to interact with their Monitors from anywhere in the world. Marines can view their orders over the Web, provide their Monitors with billet preferences, and advise them of any special needs for themselves or their families.
- The system's flexible architecture can easily evolve as the Marine Corps' business processes change over time.

The WebMASS modernization is a quintessential example of a government IT success story. It furthers the aims of e-government by improving a key internal government transaction, and illustrates the Marine Corps' solid record of excellence in the application of information technology.