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## Intranet shows progress, but users' headaches persist

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Last summer, nearly 40 percent of those who used the **Navy-Marine Corps Intranet** expressed dissatisfaction with the ambitious and pricey desktop communication system being installed in nearly all shore-based commands.

That number is improving -- nearly 69 percent of all users now say they're happy with the system, according to **NMCI's** surveys. And officials say **NMCI**, the ongoing \$8.8 billion effort to give the Navy a shared and highly secure computer operating environment, is making great strides in terms of installations, operations and providing technical assistance.

Users who responded to a request for comments posted over the past two months on navytimes.com, the Web site of Federal Times' sister publication Navy Times, nearly unanimously disagree.

The complaints are familiar ones, with new users -- many of them Marines who only started getting changed over from the Marine Corps Enterprise Network to **NMCI** last fall -- echoing those who were new to the system last year.

"This system is a boondoggle of the highest order," said Gunnery Sgt. Mark Benson, the senior noncommissioned officer in charge of the Special Screening Office at Marine Corps Recruiting Depot San Diego. "Pop-ups abound where there were none previously. Service is slow on the Internet. Attachments that are strictly related to work functions are routinely stripped from e-mails as 'prohibited'."

"I think **NMCI** is terrible," said Aviation Electrician's Mate 1st Class (AW) Greg Kaylor, then at Whiting Field Naval Air Station, Fla., and now at Whidbey Island, Wash. "I find it harder to access military/government Web sites than I do civilian ones. As far as technical support, it's slow." He said he and his co-workers have left trouble call messages on **NMCI** voice mail "and end up getting a call back two to three weeks later to solve the problem."

Another major gripe from users is that uniformed computer techs aren't allowed to work on **NMCI** computers unless they are assigned directly to **NMCI** or unless their units are deployed and off the network. Under the terms of the **NMCI** contract, prime contractor **EDS** of Plano, Texas, and its subcontractors perform computer maintenance on bases.

"My experience with **NMCI** so far has been nothing but a headache," said Lance Cpl. Michiel Byington, an information systems coordinator with Marine Wing Support Squadron 374 at Twentynine Palms, Calif. "With all the guidelines, rules and regulations set forth by these civilian contractors, I haven't done the job I was trained to do in garrison for almost a year."

"The idea of a centralized help desk allows them to track and evaluate problems and establish trends," noted a first class petty officer and sonar technician, surface who asked not to be named. "However, telling me over the phone how to fix a problem pales in comparison to having the [technician] at my station showing me what went wrong and how to fix it."

### Dealing with a sea change

**NMCI** officials say such reaction is to be expected from new users. "If you just got your **NMCI** seat, you're probably unhappy just because you've gotten something new," said Capt. Chris Christopher, **NMCI** staff director. That unhappiness over the loss something familiar tends to dissipate over a period of three to six months as customers get accustomed to the system, he said.

And it is truly a sea change, officials say.

"The Navy is a very independent organization," said Rear Adm. Charles Munns, **NMCI** director. "Think back to the sailing days and the World War II days. The commander of a ship is king. We're now coming in with a system that is

perceived to undercut some of that autonomy. And for the good of the organization. But it's a little bit counterculture. And that's a large thing we're trying to deal with."

And that's the sort of patient explanation **NMCI** hopes will win over its customers. Big Navy, however, minces no words for those unhappy with the network.

"I'm telling you that if you don't like it, leave," said Adm. Michael Mullen, vice chief of naval operations, speaking March 24 at a Navy technology conference. "Because we're going to do it. . . . Resistance to it is costing me a lot of money. It's costing me my future, and I won't stand for it or tolerate that."

But there is unhappiness outside the rank and file, and it lies with other senior Navy and Marine Corps leaders concerned over user dissatisfaction and the pace of installations, which is lagging well behind projections.

"It is not going as smoothly as we'd like," said Lt. Gen. Edward Hanlon, commanding general of the Marine Corps Combat Development Command, during a June 22 speech at the 2004 **NMCI** Industry Symposium in New Orleans. "Implementation is moving too slowly."

That same day, Rear Adm. Anthony Lengerich, vice commander of Naval Sea Systems Command, told the crowd of **NMCI** insiders, "Navy and Marine Corps workers will begin leaving in droves if the **Navy-Marine Corps Intranet** doesn't begin to drive up efficiency and user satisfaction."

**NMCI** installation on all 304,713 so-called seats was supposed to be completed by the end of June, or the end of the third quarter of fiscal 2004. Now, planners say the work will be done sometime in 2005. As of early July, 94 percent of the installed total of 193,000 seats belonged to the Navy and 6 percent to the Marine Corps.

By the day Hanlon spoke, Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va., had since March 2003 received only 1,350 of nearly 6,000 seats required there. Camp Pendleton, Calif., and Marine Corps bases in Japan were still waiting for network circuits before **NMCI** could move in, he said. "I believe that **EDS** was not prepared to execute the implementation," Hanlon said. "Also, I believe that implementation was under-resourced."

That's been fixed, according to Munns; **EDS**, he said, has now developed a more structured roll-out of seats and has significantly improved its rate of installations.

#### Network security improves

Another improvement is in the network's security, a major **NMCI** goal. The network was successfully infiltrated in 2003 by the Welchia worm, which exploited a known Microsoft vulnerability that **NMCI** had not yet patched, Christopher said. Since Jan. 1, however, there have been no infections, according to Christopher. And through late May, the system had detected and quarantined 563,182 viruses, he said.

Another indication of security: Naval Network Warfare Command's Red Team, which tries to infiltrate the network and probe for weaknesses, has failed to do so, Christopher said.

Hanlon and Lengerich both made it clear they fully support **NMCI**. "There's no doubt in my mind that **NMCI** is the right way to go, and I'm confident that we're going to get there," Hanlon said in New Orleans, citing a renewed effort to work together with **EDS** at Quantico that dramatically improved the rate of seat delivery. "Your Marine Corps is deeply committed to the success of **NMCI**. In fact, we're counting on it as a critical enabler of our process of transformation."

And the Navy and Marine Corps, officials say, are transforming their business practices as well as their operational constructs.

"IBM and Microsoft -- the companies that are surviving -- they're doing it because they've gotten control of their business efficiencies," said Munns. "They all have an intranet. That's the notion of taking a thousand local networks, each of which were locally procured, locally architected, locally run and locally maintained, and merging all of those into one intranet. That's the essence of what we're about."

"So our path to that future is this corporate intranet," Munns said. "There's no other choice."

NOTES: 1 COLOR PHOTO.; 1 FACT BOX. FACT BOX HED: **NMCI** Answers.