Mission Energy Corporation: Global Project Management Over Value-Added Network

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Background

Mission Energy is an independent power producer and a subsidiary of SCEcorp (Southern California Edison Corporation). Expanded opportunities abroad led the company to 'globalise' its operations. In addition to its headquarters in Irvine, California, it has offices in Fairfax (Virginia), London, Rome, Jakarta, Singapore and Melbourne.

Each project entails teamwork; in most cases, half the team will remain at home while the other will relocate to the foreign site. Teams need to be able to remain in constant communication with one another in order to keep both halves of the project moving forward around the clock.

The company thoroughly researched solutions to the problem and examined different combinations of groupware and other software. Lotus Notes stood out for its e-mail and information management capabilities. According to Sandy Lalonde, Senior Technical System Analyst for Mission Energy, "Notes offered the whole package instead of just the pieces."

Implementation

Mission Energy's Notes project started in January 1994 and went into full production in June that year. The Notes team developed and implemented numerous project- and company-specific Notes applications. It also developed a comprehensive training programme for users. This covered the use of Microsoft Windows as well as the use of Lotus Notes and the newly developed Notes applications.

Once they had gone through the training, the travelling users took delivery of laptop computers containing a copy of Notes and the relevant applications. They then went on their assignments abroad.

The project began with nomadic users in the United Kingdom and Australia. There were few communications problems with these users, aside from high telephone bills and occasionally unreliable international telephone lines. Technical support was not difficult to maintain; time differences only had to be accounted for in two places, and both locales had English-speaking operators.

Troubles multiplied once Jakarta and Singapore were added to the list. Team members found it harder to keep track of the time differences, and contacting Mis-
Mission Energy’s technical support staff was an increasingly difficult task. Telephone bills soared. The fact that the Jakarta switchboard closed at night inhibited replication between time zones, preventing documents from getting through. This brought entire projects to a halt while team members waited for an overlap in the respective business days in order to address the replication issues. Sandy Lalonde said, “Dialling to Southern California just wasn’t working. Telephone bills from hotel rooms sometimes ended up costing more than the room bill and flight. Communications were out of hand.”

But Mission Energy had invested too much capital and time into Lotus Notes to abandon its goal of simplifying and enhancing team collaboration with groupware.

**The Solution**

With employees working around the globe, the ability to share information in a timely, cost-effective manner is crucial to Mission Energy’s business. Its technical department began to explore the possibilities of ‘outsourcing’ its communications needs to a third-party Notes network provider.

Mission Energy called several companies who offered Notes networks and, after much investigation, settled upon WorldCom. This provider offered project management services, an international X.25 network, unlimited database storage and full technical support.

WorldCom’s local access points in over 100 countries world-wide sharply reduced Mission Energy’s telephone bill. The X.25 network offered remote users a reliable connection at an increased speed of at least 9.6 kilobits per second.

Database storage enabled Mission Energy to house its Notes applications in a central location on WorldCom. This ensured that users could always get accurate and up-to-date information, with no replication lag. This improved collaboration, since team members stationed around the world were now ‘singing from the same hymn sheet’.

Mission Energy’s technical staff now needed to spend less time on technical support and network administration. Instead they could concentrate on other facets of the Notes system, such as creating additional Notes applications as new projects developed.

As well as solving users’ problems, WorldCom’s system gave them new capabilities. They can use Internet and X.400 gateways, outbound fax and a pager gateway, all through a single connection.

Mission Energy’s subscription to WorldCom began in late June 1994. By October that year, Mission Energy had one server and 70 travelling users around the world connected to the WorldCom network. By April 1995, the number of remote connections had expanded to over 100 employees travelling in the United States, Europe, Latin America, Asia and the Pacific rim. That number is expected to increase even further as Mission Energy expands its international operations.

**The Result**

The results of the combination of Notes and the WorldCom service have been encouraging for Mission Energy. A few months after the training sessions on Notes