



125 Sussex Drive
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0G2

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Mr. James Travers
Editor,
The Ottawa Citizen
1101 Baxter Road, Box 5020
Ottawa, Ontario
K2C 3M4

Dear Mr. Travers:

I am writing in response to the article by Greg Weston in yesterday's Official Circles column dealing with computer systems projects in the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. A number of Mr. Weston's statements are sufficiently inaccurate that they cannot be left unchallenged.

Despite his comments, SIGNET is a success story. It is, as of today, 92% complete and is coming in on time and below budget. It provides service to almost 7,000 people in 83 missions around the world. The suggestion that it is not being used is refuted by the fact that SIGNET currently carries on average 60,000 messages a day and the volume is growing.

There has been some frustration with the system on the part of a number of employees. This is virtually inevitable when a new system is introduced, and I would be surprised if this had not been the case when The Citizen automated its editorial offices a few years ago. Much of that frustration has been focused on the electronic mail package, IconDesk, which is somewhat cumbersome to use. We are in the process of upgrading it to a much more "user friendly" version, which the vendor has provided to us at no cost.

This new version is now being deployed in headquarters and has been enthusiastically received by a number of users who had been critical of the older version. We would be proud to demonstrate it to Mr. Weston if he wishes to give it a try himself. Having said that, I should point out that — even with the older version — we have been able to exchange an unprecedented amount of information with our missions, such as for example in the run-up to the Prime Ministerial visits to Asia and Latin America. This is clearly inconsistent with Mr. Weston's statements to the effect that it "can't get a memo from the boss's office to the secretary's desk."

Mr. Weston also states that we spent funds last year on two new computer systems. This is simply not true. Our financial management system was put in place seven years ago, and the personnel system is five years old. The technology of the day did not allow easy sharing of information, so we are putting in place a software package which will tie the two systems together more closely. The suggestion that we do not know how many people are on the payroll is a fallacy which is not supported by the statements of the Auditor General.

SIGNET is innovative, on time, below budget and saving money for taxpayers. Furthermore, it was awarded a medal for Information Management Excellence in the Federal Government during last fall's Technology in Government week.

Yours sincerely,

William L. Clarke
Assistant Deputy Minister
Corporate Services Branch

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Units wishing to have a notice published in the *SIGNET Newsletter* should forward the text to STC with a memo signed at the director level. All readers are invited to send to the SIGNET Suggestion Box draft articles they wish to have published.