

Senior Management's Perspective:

A Word with Michael Bell, ADM, Special Projects

"In an increasingly hectic world with its ever greater need for timely information, COSICS will help us meet the pressure for faster decision-making."

Michael Bell has been living and breathing COSICS since his appointment in October. Shortly thereafter, he visited selected missions in the United States where the first COSICS systems will be installed, to field questions on the project and invite comments on COSICS' implications for the posts' operations. User input, he says, is vital to COSICS' development.

In the meantime, Bell is apologetic about the temporary disruptions and inconveniences that missions will experience in the wake of COSICS installation. He says management has been asked to show understanding as staff readjust and catch up with their workload after training on the new system.

"As we get closer to the actual implementation of COSICS, we want people to be aware of what we're doing, to answer their questions and to deal with their concerns. This newsletter is part of the process and we hope to start a lively interchange," he comments.

He emphasizes the commitment of senior management to the project because of its importance to the Department's effectiveness in today's "global village".

"Information management is the name of the game, the business that External Affairs is in. Every day we're required to handle more sophisticated information at a faster rate. Around the world, events and crises are occurring with greater rapidity, demanding faster reactions from us than ever before. COSICS is a way of addressing the challenge that environment poses for us."

Bell is enthusiastic about COSICS' integrated "ALL-IN-1" system. Not only will ALL-IN-1 provide all word processing, data processing and information management functions, it will also become the most frequently used method of communication within Headquarters, and back and forth between missions, he points out.

"We will be able to generate, analyze, transmit and store information with greater speed, security and certainty than ever before. In addition, COSICS will open up a whole new world of secure informal communications among posts and with Headquarters to further strengthen the process of policy-making advice to Ministers."



Michael Bell,
Assistant Deputy Minister, Special Projects

Why COSICS?

In a nutshell, COSICS is part of the natural evolution of communications in External Affairs. Once upon a time, we depended on diplomatic pouches that were carried from post to post by ship, train and horse, if necessary. Then telegrams came on the scene, and diplomatic pouches were speeded on their way by air. COSICS is the next step. It is intended to be the backbone of a modern communications and information management system that will carry this Department into the future.

On an everyday level, it will mean speed, flexibility and ease. With a few keystrokes, we will be able to speed documents, files and messages from desktop to desktop around the world almost instantaneously.

It will be a secure system, comprising standardized equipment. For rotational personnel, that means not having to relearn the quirks of a new computer system at each posting. Whether you are working at Headquarters, Atlanta or Madrid, you will be using the same type of keyboard and software. With COSICS, officers and support staff alike will be able to do their jobs more efficiently and effectively.

Another important benefit of COSICS is its integration into the Department's resource planning process. In an environment of government down-sizing, COSICS is allowing the Department to respond in a rational way.

A Soft Touch

So you've never touched a computer, and as far as you're concerned, software could mean a cashmere sweater. How will you cope with COSICS?

Ron Kehoe of Fenco Engineers Inc. says the idea behind the system is to make it as simple for the user as possible. "It's very 'user friendly' and easy for a non-typist to work with. You don't have to know anything about computers except how to operate a keyboard, and how to read."

And the rewards, Kehoe says, are many. "It will really make people's lives a lot easier, just for communication. For example, from the same desktop terminal where you do word processing, you can send a telex message to anyone who has a telex machine. The system will put the entire world at your fingertips."

The key to COSICS ease-of-use is its integrated software system. Called ALL-IN-1 and developed by Digital Equipment, it gives you the ability to do office functions, data processing, and communications from a single menu on your desktop PC.

It features three integrated software programs: WPS-PLUS which is functionally comparable to Word Perfect. Those involved with financial planning will be pleased with TEAMDATA, a spreadsheet, and the database program, DATATRIEVE. These programs will all be accessed from menus especially designed for COSICS.

Kehoe, a software engineer, is responsible for adapting ALL-IN-1 software for Departmental requirements. He says that those who are already using PCs may, if they like, continue to work with WordPerfect or Lotus. COSICS will have the ability to convert a file from WordPerfect to WPS, or Lotus 123 to ALL-IN-1, and

back again. Thus, documents can be easily transferred throughout the COSICS network.

Another benefit is that ALL-IN-1 makes it possible to work with several programs simultaneously. You could be word processing a document, call in a section of a spreadsheet or database, and have it integrated into the text.

In the area of communications, COSICS will have a secure system for sending information from desktop to desktop, mission to mission or unit to unit. Messages will be sent almost instantaneously.

An additional feature, Kehoe explains, will automatically route and store and forward messages anywhere in the COSICS network. If a message is sent to an individual who no longer works at the intended destination, the system will report back why the message was never received.

"It will really open your horizons," Kehoe promises.

Show and Tell at Headquarters

In April, a COSICS terminal will be set up in a module in the Headquarters lobby so that staff can get some hands-on experience. In scheduled briefings, COSICS project experts will give an overview of the system, then demonstrate the individual functions — like word processing, spreadsheets, and electronic messaging.

"We will devote a few weeks to each aspect of the system and its use," explains Project Manager Bob MacPhee. "People can ask questions, and begin to see how they will use it in their job. We're convinced it is a very user friendly system, and hope that people will drop by and try it out."

Features of COSICS

Speed

The sending of messages from Headquarters by way of COSICS will be almost instantaneous.

Capacity

Each employee will be assigned a personal storage area of 10 megabytes — roughly enough space to hold half of the information in the Encyclopedia Britannica. The system has been sized to accommodate all current operations with an additional allowance for 20 per cent growth.

Environmental sensitivity

Adjustments to compensate for local environmental factors such as humidity, altitude and temperature have been designed into COSICS facilities. The basic equipment used in the system is already operating around the world.

Printers

COSICS will have two types of printers: a letter-quality printer capable of printing 3,600 characters per minute, and a laser printer that can produce 28,800 characters per minute.

Generally speaking, one printer will be provided for each four to eight terminals. The exact number and their physical location will be determined on a location-by-location basis, in consultation with the head of mission.

Languages

COSICS will be fully bilingual. Employees will have the choice of an English or French menu system. But even if you choose an English "screen" and command system, you will be able to type copy in French and use French punctuation.