

Micro Missions: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

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With the birth of SIGNET, it was decided that there would be two basic communication designs. The small mission platform would be used for missions with 10 to 25 users, while the classic mission platform was meant for more than 25 users. It was also decided that missions with fewer than 10 users would continue to use traditional methods of communication.

In 1997, the spread of technology, the pervasive nature of e-mail and the Department's increasing reliance on information technology was already apparent. Consequently, it was decided that micro missions should be provided with a basic minimum of access to the departmental e-mail system.

The design of such a communications package faced numerous challenges including the security requirement that all data transmission outside Canada be encrypted. This requirement was satisfied for standard MITNET-connected missions by the encryption provided by MITNET. However, most micro missions had no MITNET, which meant encryption had to be provided in the design. Without MITNET, a common carrier had to be identified to reduce costs and provide a firm connection, or secure tunnel, through the Internet. Airline Telecommunication and Information Services was identified as the carrier to

serve all micro mission areas, and a contract was signed.

Since the rollout of Micro Mission 97 (MM97), technology has progressed and other requirements have been identified including the need for increased flexibility in the MM97 design to allow for additional upgrades and for other programs such as the CIDA suite and many Citizenship and Immigration Canada and other government department applications. In addition, local communication problems in the countries in which we are located around the globe were placing long communication delays on many micro missions.

This year, the Information Management and Technology Bureau (SXD) redesigned the MM97 platform. It was upgraded to emulate the SIGNET2000+ platform that other missions and headquarters staff enjoy, and given the flexibility needed to handle other packages and to use alternate means of communication where possible.

While the redesign should ease the burden on micro mission staff and improve their work environment, it does not approach the larger question of whether micro missions should have more or less access to information technology resources. This question is the subject of an upcoming submission to Department management.

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