

SIGNET NEWS

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Technology and Change

by Gordon Smith, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs

I welcome this opportunity to share with you some of my thoughts on technology, the changes it brings to the Department and how we can successfully integrate it into our daily work.

Technology and Opportunities

Many of you at Headquarters recently saw an exhibition of some 15 work applications currently in use in the Department. The variety and sophistication of these software tools enable us to work smarter and faster in an increasingly complex world. To me, these applications represent the opportunities that technology offers.

Technology is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Technology lets us get things done. Technology represents changes and with change there inevitably comes frustration. I experienced these frustrations with the introduction of SIGNET at BREEC. I deal with the frustrations regularly as I try to learn some new ways of using the Internet. Fortunately, the satisfaction of

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learning new applications and the advantages they give me easily outweigh the frustration involved.

The technology offers exciting possibilities which will change the way we work. At BREEC, the mission had access to some twenty on-line information services, CD-ROM databases and broadcast fax, all of which helped our work considerably. Now I can communicate with my sherpa colleagues in London or Washington via Internet e-mail. I was recently in Davos for the World Economic Forum. From my hotel room in Switzerland, I plugged my laptop into a telephone jack and continued to communicate with Ottawa, London or San Francisco. I pull up wire services on my computer to follow developments in Croatia or elsewhere. Working in a "real time" environment gives me an invaluable edge when it comes to analyzing events, and underlines the potential that SIGNET enables. Our wired world compresses time and speeds up the delivery of one of our essential products: *advice*.

Information is the very life blood of the Department. SIGNET is our window into the world of information and serves as a primary tool for the collection, creation, processing and communication of the information to do our jobs. The technology enables a Trade Commissioner, for example, to do something seemingly as simple as select information from a variety of sources relevant to a question from a business client, apply it to a client's situation and then pass this knowledge directly to the client. It also facilitates the development of recommendations to Ministers on

major political or trade issues that result from the culmination of long, multi-stage processes of reporting, analysis, review and discussion drawn on resources from Departmental as well as outside sources.

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Training and Education

Our workplace will continue to change. As a Department, we have responded well to the introduction of new technology and the changes it has brought by demonstrating our ability to adapt. To be successful in today's environment, we must be fast on our feet and able to make the right decisions quickly by using the information technology provides. This requires a general willingness to continually evaluate what we do and how we do it. This process of evaluation must be supported by training and education.

I am committed to the Department being a "Learning Organization." I believe it is

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