

SIGNET NEWS

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Small Mission SIGNET - the Munich Experience

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Munich was the pilot installation for Small Mission SIGNET (SMS), the version of SIGNET for missions that are not large enough to warrant having their own server or System Administrator (SA). Our server is in the embassy in Bonn. The SAs there maintain it and provide us with assistance over the MITNET telephone link. SMS was designed to resemble regular SIGNET as closely as possible. The main difference is a plus - because SMS uses Windows for Workgroups to link the Munich workstations and printers, we enjoy niceties such as being able to send faxes anywhere in the world directly from our workstations. Now that SMS is running smoothly, there are no significant disadvantages. That's not to say everything went perfectly. For a while after the installation team departed it looked like SMS was not going to work at

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all. We spent a lot of time re-booting, cursing and wondering why we volunteered to be the pilot. I am happy to report those few weeks are well and truly behind us.

SMS works extremely well. Now that it does, we can get on with allowing it to change the way we work.

It may be difficult for those of you who have had SIGNET for some time to remember what life was like without it, although you do get an unpleasant reminder whenever, for some reason, SIGNET is down. As new subscribers, we in Munich are still very much in transition. The full impact of SIGNET has not yet sunk in, but life here will never be the same.

The main benefits of "SIGNETization" are familiar to anyone who has experienced it. Instant communications take almost no time to accept as normal. But there are side effects which may not be apparent at first. Among these are: the loss of managerial control over communications, decentralization of record keeping, outmoding of cherished office procedures, a blurring of "support" and "officer" staff functions, an informalization of communications, and pressure on staff to enter a continuous learning mode. This last item is particularly difficult for small missions that do not have a resident SA. Any or all of these effects can be upsetting to managers and staff alike,

SIGNET workshop schedule

Please note that no SIGNET workshops will be held at Headquarters during the month of March.

depending on how well they accept change and on the level of support available to them.

Munich is a typical small mission. Trade/Investment promotion dominates: the consular program provides a small but steady workload (heavier during Oktoberfest when, for some reason, itinerant Canadians are more prone to losing their wallets and passports). Most of the procedures attending these programs have been in place for years. Before SIGNET, everyone knew what was to be done, who was to do what and how it would get done. The officers used foolscap or dictaphones, the secretaries transcribed, filed, maintained address lists, worked the phones and registered and moved the mail. The eternal harmony of this arrangement was not much disturbed by the introduction of PCs to the workplace - the division of labour was maintained; secretarial desktop real estate became more crowded as PCs joined the IBM Selectrics already there.

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