Application Story
NOAA Safety & Compliance Office

NOAA Connects Offices Around the World and Speeds GIS Development Project With e/pop Web & Video Conferencing

Weather-related disasters have always made headline news, but weather and climate has become even more critical now that we have access to data that confirms, and in some cases, even predicts the effects of global warming and other man-made damage to the earth's ecosystem. New technology has helped meteorologists and other experts more accurately predict when certain weather-related emergencies, such as hurricanes and tornadoes, will occur. In the U.S., we depend on one federal agency more than any other to supply this data. The National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), under the umbrella of the Department of Commerce, is responsible for "taking the pulse of the planet." NOAA provides information that pertains to the state of the oceans and the atmosphere. This is generally done with the production of weather warnings and forecasts through the National Weather Service, but NOAA's information services extend to climate, ecosystems and commerce as well. NOAA provides accurate and objective scientific information about the ecosystems, including coastal and marine ecosystems, climate and weather/water, providing data and forecasts for weather and water cycle events, including storms, droughts and floods.

NOAA employs approximately 13,000 people, many located in exotic and remote parts of the world, including America Samoa, Alaska, the South Pole and Mauna Loa, Hawaii, to name a few. NOAA's Safety & Environmental Compliance Office (SECO), headquartered in Silver Spring, Maryland, is responsible for the NOAA-wide guidelines and procedures to implement federal, state, and local statutes and regulations. It also develops policies and working procedures for promoting safety and environmental compliance, and develops program goals and objectives in order to help satisfy these procedures. This office within NOAA sought an easy way to communicate via online meetings in real-time with coworkers in other NOAA offices quickly and reliably.

Problem:
- SECO required an immediate solution for meeting, training and collaborating in real-time with globally dispersed personnel

Solution:
- e/pop Web & Video Conferencing, a full-featured, affordable, multiparty web and video conferencing software and/or hosted service

Business & IT Benefits:
- e/pop allows NOAA/SECO employees to connect with anyone at anytime regardless of location
- Desktop, document and application sharing enables conference attendees to easily share highly complex applications such as CAD or GIS mapping and analysis applications without requiring application installation

Will Freeman, a program manager in the SECO, found e/pop the old-fashioned way, through word of mouth from Tom Simon, a coworker at SECO. After a short trial, Freeman and Simon discovered that e/pop Web and Video Conferencing had all the features they sought, including application, document and desktop sharing. Multiparty video is an added bonus that allows all conference attendees to 'meet and greet' colleagues. To start reaping the benefits of web and video conferencing right away, it was easier for NOAA and SECO to utilize e/pop as a hosted service from WiredRed Software. SECO was able to use e/pop immediately without standing up a conferencing server.

Freeman and Simon, along with the rest of the SECO employees, are able to connect easily with anyone throughout NOAA, regardless of their location or time zone. Most NOAA offices utilize a high speed Internet connection that makes the web conferencing experience more fluid.

"The flexibility and affordability of e/pop made it that much more of an easy sell," said Freeman. "If we want to have a meeting or training session, we simply send a link to all attendees and they click on that link at the designated time. We've found that it's so much simpler to show someone than just tell them on the phone – and it saves a lot of time."

While e/pop comes in handy for internal meetings and training the field personnel on energy tracking software applications, one of the main objectives for e/pop was to assist with an ongoing Geographic Information System (GIS) application development project that is being managed by Freeman, who is located in Silver Spring, MD and Simon who is located in Seattle, WA.

The goal of the SECO GIS project is to implement a standardized, spatially referenced asset information management and distribution system that will manage NOAA assets.

"One huge project bottleneck was the ability to share the very large GIS project files," explained Freeman. "It was impossible to zip and email them, and .ftp didn't work well either. This was a big problem that was really slowing down the progress of this project. e/pop is used as an effective communication tool between users and developers to share ideas and troubleshoot problems."

e/pop's document, application and desktop sharing feature allows multiple conference attendees to share not only documents, but even highly complex, industry-specific applications, such as Computer-Aided Design (CAD) drawings or GIS mapping and analysis applications without having to install the application on each individual PC.

While ease-of-use is always important, NOAA has no lack of technical expertise. The bureau employs thousands of meteorologists, oceanographers, and other scientists who research, track and interpret the data that NOAA disperses to its customers, through its Line Offices, such as the NOAA National Weather Service.

"For us, how easy it is to use is less important than how reliable it is," said Freeman. "e/pop works well, every time, and it certainly comes in handy when we need to meet with coworkers from our remote locations around the globe."

"It's kind of like having a mobile phone these days. Once we started using e/pop we really can't do without it," he added.

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