



Out like a lamb: Interpersonal MSG/MSG01 decommission goes smoothly

September 30, 1999

At 6:00 a.m., Dallas time, on September 19, 1999, Terry Thompson, a project leader for the IT Services E-mail & Notes team, installed a new version of the MSG system that disables MSG/MSG01 for interpersonal e-mail. By 8:00 a.m., Dallas time, on September 24, 1999--no one had reported any significant problem as a result.

The IT Services E-mail team, the Central Help Desk, and other support organizations were braced for a high volume of calls after the change, expecting that it might catch a number of Tlrs by surprise. Apparently, however, Tlrs around the world rose to the challenge and made the move to distributed e-mail before the decommission date. During the week following the decommission, the Central Help Desk reported very little increase in ticket volume, and the E-mail team's level 3 support group received a total of 3 tickets related to the decommission.

In a business that tends to gauge its effectiveness by a lack of feedback, this is good news. "We know we've done a good job when we don't hear from people," Thompson remarked. "That means that people are just getting on with their jobs with minimal disruptions." Over the years, the E-mail team has learned that changes to e-mail are emotional issues. Because e-mail has a long history at TI, Tlrs are quick to complain if things don't work the way they expect them to. Even small changes can generate a lot of angry response.

The key to avoiding that angry response is keeping everyone informed, and it appears to have worked in this case. The E-mail team began informing key business stakeholders about the decommission as early as January 1999. A full scale effort to move factory workers off of MSG/MSG01 for interpersonal e-mail was underway by the end of the first quarter. By mid-May, publicity began in earnest, with this special section on the E-mail & Scheduling web site and monthly articles in *Connected*, T NEWS, and *InfoLink*. Posters appeared during the summer, and the E-mail team began sending targeted messages to people who still appeared to be using MSG/MSG01.

With the help of support groups around the world, the team tried to anticipate and answer any question a customer might have in the frequently asked questions section of the web site. They also provided MSG usage statistics for regional support representatives to use in tracking their sites' progress.

Many Tlrs around the world were instrumental in making the decommission largely a non-event for the company. The E-mail team would like to extend hearty thanks to everyone who participated and to all former MSG/MSG01 users who took the time to switch to distributed e-mail.

Long history of use

The decommission ended nearly 30 years of interpersonal e-mail use on the TI proprietary MSG system.

MSG was one of the first corporate e-mail systems in the world, with roots that go back to 1969 when its first architecture was a TI front-end to TWX, Telegraph, and Telex. The later versions began using IMS as the message delivery platform. The system gained some popularity, and over the years more features were added that attracted yet more users.

Terry, who began working on the system in 1985, laughs when he recalls the stares he gets from people at e-mail conferences when they ask how long he's been involved with the now ubiquitous form of communication.

"You have to realize," he said, "that this predates all the e-mail systems we have today." Many Tlrs weren't even born when this system became operational

By the mid 1970s, MSG had spread to a few thousand users--many of them administrative assistants who had to print individual messages at one printer and then distribute them by hand to Tlrs' mail slots.

In 1985, Terry, along with Glen Hansel, both still in Information Technology and still working on e-mail, created MSG01, which greatly expanded the features of interpersonal e-mail at TI. For example, MSG01 allowed users to view messages at any terminal on which they could log onto IMS, instead of having to print out their messages at shared public printers. Use of MSG01 literally doubled overnight.

The system eventually grew to handle millions of messages a month in the late 1990s, but without open system capabilities could not meet TI's changing business needs.