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Phil Bertolini, Director, Information Technology

“Soft Launch” of the New Oakland County Web Site

by Jim Taylor, Chief, Technical Services

After considerable research, work and development, the Department of Information Technology successfully deployed the “Soft Launch” of the new Oakland County web site on October 25, 2001. The site has been designed to benefit County residents and businesses as well as be an information resource for County employees.

The “Soft Launch”, best viewed via Internet Explorer, will be available only to County employees connected to the County network.

You can visit the new site at <http://beta.oaklandmi.com>. Once there, we recommend you bookmark the address to make it easy to access in the future.

If you would like to share your comments or offer feedback, have any problems accessing the site, or see things you think might be erroneous, please email the problem or issue to softlaunch@co.oakland.mi.us. If you’re reporting a bug or problem with the new web site, please be as specific as you can be by including detail such as:

- The URL displayed in the location
- Name of the page in question
- Paragraph the text error can be found
- Links that don’t work

Inside

“Soft Launch” of the New Oakland County Web Site	1
Introducing PeopleSoft 8	2
Telephone Problem Notification	3
“N” Drive Space	3
Computer Hardware/Software Usage and License Policy	4
Meet-Me Conferencing Now Available	6
How to Neutralize Information Overload	7
Wireless Communications	7
FY2002 Salary Schedule	8
Happy 30th, Email	8
Internet Mail System Upgrade	8

Once we have verified the accuracy of the web site content and demonstrated the reliability of the new Web Development Infrastructure which supports the new web site, we will move forward with the final launch of the site to the public.

Introducing PeopleSoft 8 *by Personnel Department Staff*

In July 1998, Oakland County implemented PeopleSoft, a Human Resource information system, to manage its Human Resources, Benefits Administration and Payroll Administration. The County went through its second upgrade with the system in July 2001, migrating to version 8. The upgrade to version 8 was dramatic since this version uses a pure Internet architecture which means the software is accessed using a standard web browser. This drastically reduces client deployment and administration costs since it no longer requires additional application software on the user's PC. Version 8 takes advantage of the capability of the web, such as hyperlinks. It also uses simple navigation techniques modeled after popular web sites.

The PeopleSoft Human Resource application utilizes relational database technology which stores information in tables. PeopleSoft then uses these tables to enable efficient storage and retrieval of data. The result is a flexible, user-friendly environment.

The PeopleSoft applications currently utilized by the County include Administer Workforce, Training Administration, Manage Positions, Benefits Administration and Payroll Administration modules. This gives the County the capability to store, maintain and administer all human resource information in a centralized location enabling the County to manage its workforce, manage positions, plan salaries, administer and report on training conducted, meet regulatory reporting requirements, maintain employee benefits and process payroll.

The Administer Workforce application is the foundation of the PeopleSoft system. It is within this component that employees are hired and a detailed and ongoing history of personal, employment and benefit-related data is tracked. Training Administration enables Personnel Training to enroll students, process and track training data, and maintain and report student training history for all employees within the County. The Manage Positions module enables the County to track specific information for a position, use data specific to each position for organizational planning, recruitment, career planning and budgeting. The Benefits Administration application draws information from other components of the PeopleSoft system such as personal data, family status changes, multiple job details, and the most recent benefit deduction information and enables Employee Benefits staff to manage health, life, disability and COBRA benefits for the County. Due to the required sophisticated processing by the County, the Benefits Administration module also includes automated eligibility checking, enrollment management, event maintenance and flexible credits. The Payroll Administration application also draws information from other components of PeopleSoft. It retrieves personnel and compensation data, benefit-related deductions, as well as employee hours worked from an external Time and Labor system which is used to generate employee and retiree paychecks.

Possible future applications include employee recruitment, career and succession planning, health and safety, tracking employee absences and managing employee competencies.

To date, more than 120 department representatives have been trained to utilize the PeopleSoft system to review employee, job, position, tax and benefit data as requested by management.

Cont'd on page 3

The upgrade to PeopleSoft 8 has laid the foundation for the implementation of new modules along with enhancements to the existing system. The planned enhancements will enable us to roll out self-service to County employees which would give employees the ability to view and update their personal information, access their payroll and benefit data online, register for training online, as well as begin electronic workflow to management.

Telephone Problem Notification



Since the porting of our telephone service to McLeod, Information Technology has received a few complaints from County customers and clients that calls are not being completed when they are dialing certain County telephone numbers. The caller would hear an intercept recording: "the number is being checked for trouble." Locally, these numbers often connect properly. However, translation problems with other telephone carriers are not readily apparent.

To resolve these problems, I.T. is asking for the following information to be recorded when your department receives a complaint regarding a call not completing when dialing a County number:

- The number being called
- The number being called from
- The intercept message received

Please forward this information to the Hardware Help Desk at 858-5265. Information Technology is sorry for any inconvenience this may have caused. With your assistance, we will resolve this issue.

"N" Drive Space

Due to the large number of files on the "N" drive, please review all documents you have stored on this drive for possible deletion or relocation. The purpose of the "N" drive is to store shared files. Files that are not frequently used should be moved to a local drive (d:\\$data) or a diskette. Any unused files should be removed. You can review the last time a file was modified by using Windows Explorer, which provides a list of file names and the last date of modification. This should help with the decision to delete files that have not been used recently. Files stored on the "N" drive should be related to County business.

There are 100 gigabytes of disk space on the "N" drive. A backup of the "N" drive is performed daily. With the increasing amount of data files stored there, the backup requires more and more time to execute. The last restore of the backup tape ran 20 hours.

Examples that decrease the disk space available on the "N" drive:

- Saving a file and forgetting it is stored on the "N" drive
- Creating a duplicate Access database or Word document and forgetting to delete the old one from the "N" drive
- Performing a backup of data stored on the "D" drive to the "N" drive
- Saving graphic files such as bitmap or JPEG files, which are generally large files, on the "N" drive instead of the "D" drive under "\$data"

It is advisable to always keep a backup of your files. However, I.T. recommends that users backup the data on their "D" drive to a diskette. If you have questions regarding the "N" drive and its use, please contact the Software Help Desk at 858-8812.

Computer Hardware/Software Usage and License Policy

By Matt Pawlowski, Software Help Desk

The purpose of the Oakland County Computer Hardware/Software Usage and License Policy is:

... to ensure that software used by County employees is properly acquired and licensed and to ensure that the County of Oakland's network and associated hardware is not exposed to interference, corruption or damage through the use of non-approved software/hardware or improper relocation.

The full text of the policy is available at o:\infotech\standard\software.doc. This article will attempt to explain the meaning of the statement above, why a policy is necessary, how it helps you, and the consequences of disregarding the policy.

Most Oakland County PCs are 'cloned' from one of several standard installation 'images'. An image is a large file that contains a copy of the complete contents of a hard disk drive. When new PCs are built, instead of installing, configuring and testing software on each machine, the image of a pre-tested installation is copied onto the new hard disk drive. This procedure is often referred to as 'cloning' or 'ghosting'. Using the same image on multiple PCs ensures that the PCs are configured the same and are using the same software versions. This makes it easier for technicians to diagnose problems that may occur. When any additional software is requested, it is important that I.T. be involved in the installation. **Any new hardware or software installations require a work order.** This is necessary to ensure the application is compatible with your current configuration, properly licensed, and correctly installed. Please contact your department I.T. liaison or project manager to submit a work order.

Licensing

When you purchase software, it is important that you read and understand the *End User License Agreement* (EULA). For the majority of retail purchased applications, the license allows you to install the software on one PC only. This means that you can't bring an application you have installed at home and install it on your PC at work. You also can't purchase one copy of an application and install it on several PCs. Many applications that can be downloaded online use a shareware licensing agreement. Shareware applications allow you to freely use the applications for a trial period of time, but when that trial period expires, you must either register (purchase) the software or uninstall it. Another licensing model known as freeware may not require registration or payment but may have restrictions in which you need to be aware. Some applications may be distributed as freeware, but there is a hidden cost, which will be discussed later in this article. Oakland County is subject to audits by software companies and the Software & Information Industry Association for compliance. Therefore, I.T. has installed census software to audit Oakland County PCs. Licensing issues can be addressed by involving I.T. in the installation of any new software.

Cont'd on page 5

Compatibility

When new software is installed, it can cause unexpected behavior in other applications. For example, some applications share components. Sometimes a new application installation will replace a shared component with a different version of that component. This can effect the behavior of the applications previously using the shared component. There may be no problems at all, or perhaps an application may start to exhibit strange quirks, or the application may stop working completely. When I.T. is involved in the installation of all new software, these issues will be quickly identified and resolved.

Performance

All applications use system resources. In addition to hard drive space, when an application is running, it will use memory and processor power. Many applications will install components that run at all times in the background. Some of these components may be identified by an icon in the system tray (the area on the task bar where the time appears) while others are not so obvious. Some applications will load themselves into memory automatically when you log in. This can increase the time it takes your system to start up. Even the wallpaper you choose may be a potential slowdown. The larger the file, the longer it will take to load and the more memory it will use. You may notice that applications take longer to start as they load into memory and slow system performance overall. System resources are limited, so they are important to consider when installing new software.

Spyware/Adware



Spyware and adware deserve a special mention and were one of the motivations for this article. Instead of charging for use, adware applications embed advertising to generate revenue. The application author is paid based on how many advertisements are displayed or how many of those advertisements are clicked on. This is fair use of advertising but spyware takes this business model into controversial territory. Spyware is a general term given to programs that do things like track your activities on the Internet and, in other ways, collect your personal information. This information is analyzed and is said to be used to target advertising and marketing to you. In addition, spyware components often interfere with your machine by launching advertising pop-ups, changing your homepage and altering web pages. Applications with spyware embedded may not even inform you that these components are being installed. The spyware component runs whether you are running the application it was 'piggybacked' onto or not, and may remain on your machine even after you have uninstalled that application. Spyware requires special procedures to remove it from your PC and, as such, it is very undesirable for you to use software that includes it. Some applications known to carry spyware are Bonzi Buddy, Comet Cursor, GoHip, Go!Zilla, KaZaa, Webshots, and many more.

Please take a look at the software policy at `o:\infotech\standard\software.doc` and contact the Software Help Desk at 858-8812 if you have any further questions.

Meet-Me Conferencing Now Available



Meet-Me Conferencing is now available through the Communications Unit at Information Technology. This feature allows the linking of as many as twelve callers together on a single incoming telephone number. There are no special codes or buttons to press and no need to wait at a particular phone location to be linked by the conference leader. If need be, participants may leave the conference and return later independently. Both County and non-County participants will appreciate the convenience of dialing the same telephone number at the scheduled time from wherever they happen to be and being linked immediately into the conference. Callers outside of the County's telephone system pay for the cost of their own call into the conference number.

To schedule a Meet-Me Conference, please use the following instructions:

1. At least one business day prior, call 858-1000 (I.T.'s main switchboard operators) or email your request to "TeleAdmin" at teleadmin@co.oakland.mi.us. Mention that you want to arrange a Meet-Me Conference and provide the following information:
 - Conference leader's name
 - Telephone number where you can be reached
 - The date and time of the conference
 - The maximum number of parties expected to call into the conference
 - An estimated length of the conference call
2. A conference telephone number will be assigned by a switchboard operator (if calling in) or by return email.
3. The conference leader must then notify all conference participants of the Meet-Me telephone number to call on the scheduled time/day of the conference. They will need to dial the full 10 digit telephone number (area code + seven-digit telephone number).
4. The first party entering the conference call will hear an indefinite ringing until the second party calls into the conference. Therefore, it is recommended that the conference leader dial in slightly earlier than everyone else. Each party will hear short rings as other parties enter the conference.
5. After all callers have entered the conference, the "lock out" feature can be activated to prevent uninvited callers from entering the conference.
6. As parties disconnect from the conference call, a short burst of dial tone will be heard. The conference call will end when the last party hangs up.
7. At the termination of the conference, the conference leader must call 858-1000 and advise a switchboard operator that the conference has ended.

For additional information, you may refer to the "O" drive, specifically o:/infotech/telephon/meetme.doc. If you have questions regarding Meet-Me Conferencing, please contact Graceanne Hill at 858-0867.

How to Neutralize Information Overload

There's just too much information out there. In fact, information processing accounts for half the gross national product—and most of it ends up on paper that someone has to read. But you don't have to fall prey to information overload. You just have to be more strategic about the information you choose to take in. Here are five steps to becoming a picky information consumer:

- Step 1: Don't read everything that comes to you. You simply can't absorb everything you think you need to know. Once you admit that, you'll be better able to prioritize, delegate or ignore the information that comes your way.
- Step 2: Assess your information sources. Take a couple of hours deciding which sources of information are essential to your job. Weed out any publication, Web site, report or professional association information that isn't of the highest quality.
- Step 3: Scan for information. When you open a publication, look through the table of contents first. Scan for topics and article summaries. Choose only articles or reports that you need to read. Don't waste your time on information just because it's mildly interesting to you. Stick to what's important.
- Step 4: Use your highlighter. Once you commit to reading an article, underline any information you want to refer to later. Throw out any article or report that doesn't have any highlighted passages.
- Step 5: Be an example. If you don't want to get bogged down by long emails or voice messages, keep your own short. Let others know that they should keep their information as concise as possible—and chastise them when they don't.

—adapted from *The Power of Simplicity*, by Jack Trout and Steve Rivkin (McGraw-Hill)

Wireless Communications



On October 1, 2001, the responsibility for cellular telephone service and pagers was transferred from Radio Communications to the Communications Unit at Information Technology. Transition of service and support for 334 cellular phones, 240 cellular/group-paging phones and over 700 individual pagers was completed. The I.T. Communications Unit would like to thank Radio Communications and Patty Kudla for providing the necessary training and assistance during this smooth transition.

Cathy Teague, Information Technology, will now be the contact for cellular and pager communications requests and issues. Cathy may be reached at 858-0056. Requests must be received from each department's designated communications contact. Departments that have not designated a primary and secondary communications contact, should call Judy Foglio, Information Technology, at 858-5273.

The list of departmental Communications Contacts may be found on the "O" drive under `o:/infotech/telephone/dept.telephonecontact.xls`.

FY2002 Salary Schedule

The Personnel Department has replaced the FY2001 Salary Schedule with a new and improved FY2002 Salary Schedule which is currently available on the "O" drive under "o:\persnnel\scheduls\salary\FY2002 salary schedule cover.pdf". The document is in Adobe Acrobat Reader format so it should be launched directly from the Windows NT Explorer.

The electronic version of the FY2002 Salary Schedule has a similar look and feel to the printed version. The Salary Schedule cover allows the user to link directly to the Table of Contents. Once on the table of contents page, you can link directly to any portion of the salary schedule (i.e., FY2002 Holiday Schedule, FY2002 Salary Grade Ranges, etc.).

The user can move back and forth between the different sections of the document by clicking on the "Go to Previous View" button. If necessary, it can also be printed on any available printer. The document is updated periodically as a result of approved Board of Commissioners resolutions. The online version will always contain the "Last Revised" date on the cover so the user will be sure that the Salary Schedule they are using is the latest version.

If you have questions about the Salary Schedule or experience trouble using it, please contact the Employee Records and Salary Unit of the Personnel Department.

Happy 30th, Email

We have Ray Tomlinson to thank for developing the prototype for email. In late 1971, Tomlinson was working at a tech firm when he started tooling around with a program that allowed users to send messages to other people working on the same computer. He created a way to send files between machines and then improved it to send messages. Tomlinson has since forgotten the content of the first email. It was the 70s, after all.

—adapted from *Fortune*

Internet Mail System Upgrade

In August 2001, Information Technology performed an upgrade to the Webmail Internet mail system. As part of this upgrade, procedures for the following were updated:

- **Internet Email Password Change...For Non-Outlook Users**
- **Changing Your Internet Email Password...For Outlook Users**
- **Setting up an Automatic Reply (Similar to a GroupWise Rule)**
- **Setting up Automatic Forwarding**

Please refer to the Information Technology Training Center web site, **Documentation** section (<http://www.co.oakland.mi.us/start/ocittc/docum.html>) for the most current versions of all software instructions. If you have any questions, contact the Software Help Desk at 858-8812.

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This newsletter is designed to share useful technology news and information with Oakland County Employees!

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