MKS Toolkit Case Study

The Council of State Governments, Lexington, KY

The Council for State Governments is a non-profit organization that has served the states and territories of the United States of America for approximately 70 years. The organization is headquartered in Lexington, Kentucky; this location houses approximately 100 people. In addition to this location, the council has satellite offices in Washington DC (2), Manhattan NY, Chicago IL, Atlanta GA, and San Francisco CA.

The Council serves many roles. It provides research and information to various state governors and other elected and appointed officials; legislation preparation, polling, etc. It is also a large publishing house, producing hundreds of books and magazines (electronic and paper), providing statistics on states, historical perspectives, trends, and demographics. Also provided are on-line research databases and Internet gopher, ftp, and World Wide Web access. And finally, the Council helps to coordinate interstate, inter-government participation through meetings, seminars, and approximately two dozen organizations including NASTD (National Association of State Telecommunications Directors), NAST (State Treasurers), NASFA (State Facilities Administrators), NASPE (State Personnel Executives) and many more.

MKS Toolkit for Developers (formerly MKS Toolkit) capability "was a godsend" in helping the Council tie headquarters into satellite offices, allowing information and email movement in and out of the headquarters and to the rest of the world via the Internet.

The Council's headquarters in Kentucky is UNIX based—running three versions of UNIX; AIX on RS6000, UNIXWare on Intel, and SCO OpenDesktop on two multiprocessors, and an Intel CPU. The /Council also has a centralized DOS server. All of the satellite offices are DOS-based networks.

Approximately three years ago, the Council decided it wanted to automate all of the satellite office processes. It soon became apparent, however, that DOS batching was limited, and would not help them achieve the desired result. Because of the strong UNIX background in the Lexington office, however, they knew that UNIX's powerful scripting would help them achieve their solution. The key now was to find a technology that would work within the satellite office's DOS framework.

Phil Baughn knew about MKS Toolkit for Developers (formerly MKS Toolkit) from a former job (used to be a Toolkit reseller) and realized that it was a good tool for the job.

Using the Toolkit's KornShell scripting capabilities, the Council was able to successfully automate the regions. The use of the KornShell scripts also added an element of security to the process. Regional offices, more familiar with DOS than UNIX, are less likely to change or rework the new UNIX commands.

The Toolkit also found another key use within the Council. One of the major roles the Council serves is as an information provider/hub for the various states and the public. It has a direct presence on the Internet, with a Web server and gopher server, acting as a clearing house for all state-related information. In addition, direct contact is maintained between headquarters and each of the Council's satellite sites. One of the Washington DC offices is a direct (bridge and special circuit) connection to Lexington, and the backbone of hosts and services and the council's phone switch. All but one other regional office is in contact with Lexington via modem dial-in or Internet telnet access.

MKS Toolkit's `uucp` capability "was a godsend" in helping the Council tie headquarters into satellite offices, allowing information and email movement in and out of the headquarters and to the rest of the world via the Internet.

The Council is not a big Toolkit user—and probably owns only ten or so copies of Toolkit all told. The job it performs however, is a huge one for the council. It would be hard to find a solution in one package that could do so much, for such a small price.

Today, the Council could resort to a more sophisticated email gateway, but three years ago, there was very little technology available that could work in MKS Toolkit's place, and the technology that existed was immature and buggy.