

Teamwork Solves NMCI Problem

By Bob Bloudek

When the Navy Marine Corps Intranet first started being discussed, folks in the Naval Air Systems Command Weapons Division Technical Library at China Lake knew they were going to have a problem. The library subscribes to hundreds of electronic resources that are accessible to China Lake and Point Mugu personnel from their workstations via Internet Protocol (IP). Technical Library Director, Sandy Bradley explains, "With the legacy network, we had a firewall at each site we serve, one at China Lake and another at Point Mugu. Our vendors could verify a computer was physically at one of those two sites by checking the IP of the firewall. With the NMCI, we have a number of firewalls and switch points so there isn't any way to predict or specify which firewall our users will be routed through. Asking the vendors to allow NMCI IP recognition wasn't acceptable because it would open access to everyone on the NMCI network — which will eventually include the entire Navy. As NMCI workstations replaced legacy computers, library customers found they could not access all of the electronic resources they had come to rely on. We started hearing from them — and their complaints were legitimate."

A small team consisting of Bob Bloudek from the Technical Library, James Furnish from the NMCI Information Strike Force, and Larry Jenkins and Jeff Thatcher from the Information Technology/Information Management Department, set off seeking solutions. Since NAVAIR was one of the first Navy organizations to implement NMCI, we didn't have anyone else we could ask about how they solved this type of problem. We were able to get a lot of help from the Naval Post Graduate School Library, especially from Lillian Gassie who is the information systems manager. Students at NPS are able to connect to the library's Web sites from home though a proxy server. With that in mind, the team began exploring the possibility of using similar technology to solve the China Lake and Point Mugu access problems. The team was great to work with, Larry and Jeff know computer technology, James is an expert with the NMCI network, and Lillian is willing to share her experiences in setting up a proxy server. Everything just seemed to fall into place.

The team was able to secure storage space on a NAVAIR computer located outside the legacy and NMCI firewalls. A copy of EZ-Proxy, a software program written especially for libraries was evaluated. After a "little blood, sweat and tears" the software was installed and configured specifically to work with NMCI's security requirements. "The first attempts at testing weren't successful — neither were the second, third nor fourth attempts. We just kept working away," said Jenkins. "We would reconfigure the software and then we would test again — finally we were successful!"



Above left to right: Jeff Thatcher, Bob Bloudek and James Furnish check access to the NAVAIR Weapons Division Technical Library resources via an NMCI workstation in the library.

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The proxy server and software now enable NMCI users at China Lake and Point Mugu to access the valuable electronic periodicals and databases available via the library Web site located at <http://www.nawcwpns.navy.mil/~tlibrary/>.

The technology is pretty simple, when an NMCI user clicks on a link; data goes from his workstation to an NMCI switch point (in San Diego, Hawaii or Norfolk) back to the proxy server at China Lake and prompts him for a username and password. When the data are entered, the proxy server directs the user to the proper Web site. Authorization is based on both the IP of the proxy server and the username/password. A legacy user can click on the same link; the proxy server has been programmed to recognize the user is from NAVAIR WD and simply passes him through to the vendor's Web site. Now that we can access these sites from our NMCI workstations, we won't have to maintain as many legacy computers. Many offices kept their legacy computers when NMCI rolled out because they needed access to the library resources. They didn't have that access with NMCI until our proxy server was implemented, but now they do.

This is a temporary fix for what was a serious problem for us. We will continue working related issues as they come up. Meanwhile, we are happy to answer questions and share our lessons learned.

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