

Thoughts on Business Opportunity and Network Consolidation in the Department of Defense

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In an effort to deliver services across the enterprise, the consolidation/convergence of information technology networks is in full swing across the federal government. Some agencies are further along in this endeavor, while others are just getting underway. Nowhere is this chaos of consolidation more evident than across the Department of Defense, which possesses as many as 15,000 networks. The efforts required to converge these networks are herculean, but absolutely necessary if the DoD is to achieve the cherished goal of creating a truly "joint" information environment where networks and data are secure and interoperable. Knowing where the DoD wants to go, it is worth contemplating which parts of the department are in the best shape when it comes to network consolidation and where it might be best to seek new business opportunities.

Arguably the Navy is the furthest along in moving toward a consolidated network environment. The Navy-Marine Corps Intranet (NMCI) project may have been a boondoggle the DoD would rather forget, but it did have the benefit of moving the Navy and Marines toward a unified environment earlier than the other Military Departments. To be sure, a vast amount of work still needs to be done to achieve the level of interoperability that the Navy and DoD desire, but it is nothing compared to the amount of effort required for the Army and Air Force to approach the level of consolidation achieved by the Navy so far.

In the Army's case, network convergence has focused on three areas: Defense Enterprise Email, Multi-Protocol Label Switching router implementation, and standing up Joint Regional Security Stacks. The migration to DEE is largely complete and generally has been considered a success by the Army and DoD. MPLS deployment is currently underway, with Army officials saying that they anticipate its completion by the end of calendar year 2015. Although MPLS is a decade-old technology it will vastly increase the amount of bandwidth flowing into and out of Army posts, camps, and stations. The JRSS effort is also underway in concert with DISA and goals for its completion are similar to those for MPLS deployment – to have the CONUS implementation completed by the end of 2015.

As these network constructs are completed, the Army will take a hard look at selecting applications which can be moved to commercial clouds. Activity in this area should pick up in fiscal 2016, and especially in 2017.

In contrast, the Air Force continues to struggle ahead. Air Force officials have expressed full support for moving the Service into the JIE construct. This means they will take advantage of the MPLS and JRSS efforts currently underway. The Air Force has also migrated to Defense Enterprise Email. This said, the Air Force is also in the early stages of planning what it calls a "Common Computing Environment." Similar to the Army's plan for a Common Operating Environment, the AF CCE will deliver enterprise services across the Air Force. Dissimilar to the Army's COE, the AF CCE is far from the level of execution that the Army has already achieved with its COE. Currently, the Air Force is developing metrics to understand how much implementing a CCE will cost.

The implications of this brief comparative view are that the most extensive IT business opportunities are likely to be found in the Air Force, Army, and Navy, in that order. Navy's big efforts – the Next Generation Enterprise Network (NGEN) and Consolidated Afloat Networks and Enterprise Services (CANES) – are locked up in large, long-term contracted efforts. The Army's approach is fragmented and heavily reliant on the Defense Information Systems Agency, but the Army also has publicly expressed the greatest interest in moving applications to commercial clouds. The Air Force will need help with the CCE and **has even considered** if it should award a contract for the effort. Should the Service move forward with the CCE concept, it could easily prove to be a lucrative near-term opportunity in the years to come.