

ATC uses iOra

iOra Mobile Intranet is an application that enables seafarers to access Intranet content from any Windows laptop computer. Included in the application is iOra's patented Epsilon technology, which compresses data by up to 99 per cent of its original size. This means that updates can be sent to and from vessels more quickly. Epsilon identifies and transfers only the changes made to a document, vastly reducing the amount of data downloaded. Once published, the newly amended file is placed on a standard web server to await download by the vessel. Anytime a crew member makes an internet connection, iOra's software automatically downloads the new amendment and removes out-dated information. The entire set of information can be used offline, available anytime a crew member needs it.

iOra claims that implementation of this software has resulted in savings of up to 94 per cent on satellite data transfer costs for their clients including Alaska Tanker Company (ATC), which carries BP Amoco oil from Alaska to the US West Coast and mainland. In addition, ATC estimates that it will save 66 per cent in printing and production costs and 20 per cent in administration costs. "We used to update the QSMS [Quality Safety Management Systems] annually," says Rick Powell, IT site manager for ATC, "but with iOra, we can update quarterly and even more often if there is an urgent safety order."

Ensuring that updated safety procedures were always to hand was a motivating factor in Shell's decision to implement the technology in 2000. Shell's designated person ashore, Jim Cripps, commented at the time, "The health and safety information in our CD-ROM based Safety Management System is critical for our tankers, but providing timely updates to tankers around the world's oceans has presented logistical problems. iOra's solution is designed to allow us to deliver updated information quickly and efficiently. This is to ensure that the most up-to-date details are always available to the tanker captain and crew, and to simplify the way in which they use the health and safety information."

According to iOra's Geoff Wells, iOra Mobile Intranet provides ship operators with two key advantages, the first being cost saving and the second new opportunities. "The big constraint to owners has been bandwidth, but now they can think about providing intranet on a vessel," he comments. "We have provided them with options that were previously not even considered because they were too expensive."

Thus far, tanker operators have identified the update of safety information as a key use for the iOra application; however, new uses are being identified. ATC's Rick Powell suggests future uses include keeping tanker crews up to date on "policies, announcements and company information including HR forms, virus updates, software updates and other IT functions". In addition, he comments that the application could also be used to improve crew morale by providing them with access to selected websites offline, e.g. favourite websites or news.

More recently, the US Navy has implemented iOra to ensure its safety information is kept up to date. The Navy chose to make all relevant information available in a "Distance Support" portal. iOra Mobile Intranet supports intranet content hosted on any intranet server technology, including Microsoft and Lotus Domino servers. The portal will act as a single point of call for crew members seeking information. "We have thousands of personnel at sea at any given time involved in strategic operations who are responsible for sophisticated equipment, and we have large volumes of information that needs to be provided to maintain operational excellence and safety of personnel," says Craig Brandenburg, US Navy. "iOra's ability to deliver our 'Distance Support' portal offline helps ensure every ship has the same up-to-date standard operational procedures, maintenance, and safety information."