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STAT

Strategic deployment: Macs put to work at SAC headquarters

BY GARDNER TERRELL



OMAHA, Neb. — The U.S. Air Force Strategic Air Command likes what it sees so far of the Mac network it recently installed to deal with the

functions handled by SAC headquarters.

The system is comprised of 53 SEs and seven Mac IIs, three of which are being used as file servers. Each Mac has 2.5 Mbytes of internal memory, and each is linked to the others over ordinary telephone lines through a networking system from Farallon Computing of Berkeley, Calif.

Installation of the extensive network went fairly smoothly, according to Col. Joe LaBenne, SAC's deputy director of advanced systems. "Everything worked as soon as they put it in. We are moving gradually to implement the components one at a time," he said.

SAC compared several systems before selecting the Mac. Government regulations require that the Air Force buy the least expensive product that is of acceptable quality. The IBM-compatible Zenith 248 had previously been approved as the Air Force's computer of choice. But SAC envisioned a system that could handle graphics as easily as data, and that could be satisfied only by the Mac. These special graphics requirements meant SAC had to obtain a standard waiver from Gen. Robert H. Ludwig, head of the SAC Communications Command. "To get the Macintosh, we had to resort to brand-name justification," LaBenne said.

"We didn't buy from Apple corporate," he said. "We preferred dealing with local small businesses. We announced the names of the hardware and software that we wanted, so a lot of small vendors could bid. If they could deliver in 15 days, they got a piece of the action."

SAC headquarters is phasing in each element of the system. When complete, it will include capabilities for graphics, word processing, slide presentations, project management, spreadsheets, desktop publishing, CAD/CAM and interoffice mail, all linked through an interface board that allows access to both MS-DOS and Mac files.

"Our structure goes beyond what you would expect in the usual office," said LaBenne. "We have representatives from many different func-

tions working in divisions that have nothing to do with their function. They provide the liaison between different parts of the organization. For example, we have pilots working here in headquarters alongside people from logistics and planning, so everybody will be using many different types of software."

SAC has experimented with ACIUS' 4th Dimension as a way to monitor which programs are being used by which employees. For it to work, 4D runs in the background as it keeps track of each user's global password. This has proven cumbersome, however, and SAC now requires individual passwords for each application. As an extra security measure, SAC also uses NightWatch software from Houston-based Kent Marsh Ltd. to prevent unauthorized computer access. This system requires both a password and a key disk and will not function if either is missing.

Training time on the new system and software was a major purchasing consideration. "We had budget constraints, and outside trainers would have been expensive. So ease of learning became an important factor," LaBenne said.

NightWatch keeps SAC's Macs secure

OMAHA, Neb. — The Strategic Air Command based in Omaha, Neb., is the part of the U.S. Air Force that remains constantly vigilant against the threat of nuclear attack. Not surprisingly, security has always been a major concern.

That concern became even greater when the microcomputer — with its easily carried floppy disk — entered SAC headquarters. The possible scenarios are a security officer's nightmare. Disks containing sensitive information could be easily removed; important data or programs could be altered, then replaced in the computer.

To deal with the problem, SAC turned to the Secure Disk System from Media Security, a 2-year-old company in Colorado Springs, Colo.

The Secure Disk System has two components: a card that Media Security installs in the floppy disk drive of each computer and a passive radio frequency tag implanted in the sleeve of every disk. Doug Schomerus, sales support manager of Media Security, described the system as "user-transparent."

Operation is fairly straightforward. Essentially, the modified drive senses the presence of the modified disk. Anything written to that disk — and only modified disks can be written on — becomes scrambled. Most ordinary systems will not be able to unscramble the information.

"We are trying to be really aggressive about security," said Col. Joe LaBenne. "There is always a potential risk with floppy disks, inadvertent or any other way, because they are small items. This is just another level of security, and there can never be too many."

SAC uses only modified disks from Media Security. As a further security technique, SAC has specified that disks must be bright yellow.

At the moment, SAC is rigorously testing the Secure Disk System. "We are trying everything in the book to defeat the security system," LaBenne said. The test will end soon, unless the system can be defeated. — *By Gardner Terrell*

LaBenne said training issues were particularly important because few people at SAC had ever worked with a microcomputer. "Only three people had used a Mac before and not many more had ever done anything more [advanced] than word processing on an IBM PC," he said.

For SAC headquarters, this lack of computer expertise magnified the inconvenience that goes with the early stages of any new computer installation. "But," said LaBenne, "we knew that this sort of thing takes time and expected a substantial learning curve."

Despite that expectation, SAC has kept for-

mal training to a minimum. According to LaBenne, classes consist of a 10-minute orientation, followed by a half-hour session to demonstrate user-interface consistency across applications. "We are learning from experience how we can use the Mac best. To get started with a particular program, like Excel, for example, two employees just read the documentation and started using it. Other people then came to learn from them. When we begin using complicated programs for functions like CAD, a training course may be required," LaBenne said.

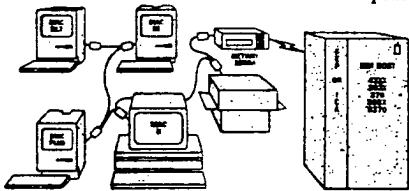
Even without extensive training, personnel networked on the system are busily working. The network includes AST boards to provide a smooth transition between the Mac and the MS-DOS operating system that was already in use. The boards are receiving little use, however, since employees prefer the Mac.

"So far, we are extremely happy with the new system. It is already starting to affect the way we function," said LaBenne. "Even so, we think it will be six months before we find out how much increased productivity it is going to provide for us." ■

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