

# Repeatable collaboration solutions

## help keep America safe.

Government agencies must work together as never before to protect citizens from terrorist threats. Public health and safety organizations need to collaborate across jurisdictions to deter attacks, and they must plan jointly to respond to attacks that do occur.

State and local agencies throughout the nation rely on Microsoft and its industry partners for interoperable solutions to strengthen homeland security.

In Missouri, for example, public safety agencies collaborate through a Web portal created by Convergence Communications, based on Microsoft SharePoint technology. In Alabama, the Law Enforcement Tactical System uses Microsoft BizTalk Server to give police access to data maintained by other law enforcement agencies statewide.

The Michigan Health Alert Network — supported by SharePoint Portal Server and Microsoft Active Directory, and based on software from Microsoft industry partner Virtual Alert — links 180 hospitals, allowing any participant who detects signs of a possible bioweapon attack to broadcast an alert to all the others. And public safety officials from 39 jurisdictions in King County, Wash., use a system built on Microsoft SharePoint Portal Server and Microsoft Live Meeting Server to hold online planning sessions, complete with slides, documents, videos and other tools.

Many DHS funding programs promote development of innovative technology solutions such as these, and they encourage agencies from different jurisdictions to work together. States and communities may tap additional DHS sources, such as the Urban Area Security Initiative Grants program, to fund technology implementations for planning and preparedness.

Keeping Americans safe means building an intelligent, robust and highly integrated homeland security infrastructure. Microsoft and its industry partners are delivering repeatable solutions that enable governments to make the right connections.

### Case Study:

## POWERFUL PORTAL

Web-based alerting and collaboration tool proves effective in presidential debate.

When President George W. Bush and Sen. John Kerry traveled to St. Louis to square off in the Oct. 8 presidential debate, scores of law enforcement organizations had to be coordinated behind the scenes.

These occasions traditionally spawn organized chaos as multiple agencies react to rapidly changing conditions using telephones and paper task orders. But this time, a collaboration portal deployed by the Missouri Office of Homeland Security strengthened and streamlined management of security for the high-profile event.

The Web-based collaboration tool, built with Microsoft SharePoint technology, coordinated activities of 25 state, local and federal agencies, including the U.S. Secret Service and the FBI. Commanders tracked the progress of events and the deployment of resources through the portal. XML forms were used to automate the paper-based process for assigning duties to 450 police officers deployed at the debate.

The event posed the first real-world test for the portal, which is designed to promote cooperation among the diverse agencies that form Missouri's homeland security community.

The portal's initial performance earned sparkling reviews, said Tim Daniel, Missouri's homeland security director. "It was received extremely positively by the people in St. Louis," he said.

### Solving Challenges

Building collaboration is a key challenge for Daniel, who became the country's first state-level homeland security director in 2001. His office coordinates activities of

thousands of potential stakeholders to deter terrorism and respond to disasters.

Daniel needs to stitch together a remarkably diverse group of agencies and individuals — police, firefighters, doctors, emergency medical personnel and others. These stakeholders are scattered across the state, and they often have little in common, both culturally and technologically.

The portal responds to these requirements. Working with Convergence Communications, a Microsoft partner based in St. Louis, the Missouri Office of Homeland Security deployed advanced Web-based alerting and collaboration tools to flexibly meet the needs of this extensive audience.

“The central idea behind the portal is to attract people who have an interest in homeland security and enable them to act on that interest,” said Daniel, a retired U.S. Army colonel. “I was looking for a vehicle that would let us communicate top-down and bottom-up at the same time.”

### **Laying the Groundwork**

Convergence Communications used Microsoft technology to create a portal capable of alerting as many as 10,000 participants within one hour through voice calling, text messaging, e-mail and paging. The portal also delivers collaboration functions such as e-mail, forums, calendars, shared documents, task lists and messaging that allow homeland security stakeholders to work together efficiently and effectively.

“When you look at all the people who could be involved in homeland security efforts, it’s a huge audience. Getting all of them on the same page is a huge challenge,” said Robert Wolf, president of Convergence. “The portal is the glue that will hold them together. It’s the one system they all can have.”

That was the case for the collection of state, local and federal agencies that provided security for the St. Louis presidential debate.

“All of the collaboration — as they worked with maps, documents, plans and even the discussions — took place in the portal,” said Wolf. “Commanders could see what tasks are coming due, what had been accomplished and what was past due. This increased the situation awareness of the commanders and leaders.”

Technology requirements are extremely minimal; users need only a browser and an Internet connection

to access the portal. That’s important because IT capabilities vary widely among stakeholder groups. An online registration process authenticates users and allows the portal to tailor information for users based on their roles and responsibilities.

The portal provides Web sites for individual agencies across Missouri’s nine homeland security regions to promote internal collaboration. These agency-level sites are linked together to promote regional and inter-agency collaboration.

### **Demonstrating Effectiveness**

The portal’s success in the Oct. 8 debate sparked interest among other Missouri agencies, Daniel said. For instance, he expects the portal to support collaboration among 43 St. Louis-area hospitals that have partnered under a joint medical command.

“That group represents real progress,” he said. “I’m looking forward to them using this tool to become even better in their communication and collaboration.”

With basic communication and collaboration capabilities now deployed, Daniel expects users to mold the portal to fit their needs.

Fortunately the portal’s SharePoint technology offers ample flexibility to meet evolving requirements. New applications can be built quickly, and deploying them is a drag-and-drop operation, according to Wolf. Furthermore, specialized Web sites can be created on the fly to manage events or support additional communities of interest.

Ultimately the portal’s usefulness to homeland security stakeholders will determine its success.

“I can’t just deem it to be successful. We’re going to build it, and hope that users come,” Daniel said. “Early indications are that portal use will grow rapidly. I’m seeking a network of networks, and I’m very hopeful this will find a life of its own.”

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