

# Space Operations Network (SONET)

By Lt. Col. Brad Baehr

## Common questions of the Space Operations Officer

How do I conduct collaborative planning or coordination in real-time or near real-time with geographically disparate organizations?

Where can I find the latest information on Space-based systems or capabilities?

Who are the subject matter experts (SMEs) that can provide advice to me on this challenge or task?

How can I improve my visibility and criticality to the planning staff or command group?

Where can I find an example of a paper, briefing, Officer Professional Development/Non-Commissioned Officer Professional Development (OPD/NCOPD) lesson, or annex on which to base a product I'm creating?

If you have ever asked any of the above questions, the Space and Missile Defense Battle Lab (SMDBL) may have the answer for you. The SMDBL, in collaboration with the Center for Army Lessons Learned, designed a prototype web-based knowledge management system known as the Space Operations Network (SONET). SONET provides the Space Operations Officer with a knowledge management system focused on Space support to the Army. The purpose of this article is to acquaint you with the SONET, to explain how knowledge management systems work, and to solicit your participation as an active member of the SONET.

## What is Knowledge Management (KM)?

Knowledge Management systems came into vogue in the early 1990's as businesses sought to gain the ever elusive advantage over competitors. Corporate America discovered that ingenious concepts and practices developed in one part of the corporation were not being shared in an effective or timely manner with other elements. In fact, the average time for a "best practice" to percolate through a corporation was 27 months!<sup>1</sup>

Knowledge Management systems address the dilemma of having a vast treasure trove of knowledge held within the minds of the community without a way to access or share

this knowledge.<sup>2</sup> Knowledge Management is a systematic approach to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, ideas, and best practices within an organization, what we refer to as tactics, techniques and procedures. For the purposes of this approach, knowledge is defined as processed information or information that has had some thought or analysis applied to it. It is important to note that Knowledge Management systems cannot work without the active participation of its members who are the source of the knowledge being managed.

## How Does the SONET Knowledge Management System Work?

The SONET currently resides in the Lotus QuickPlace program, a commercial off-the-shelf Knowledge Management software program used by industry. You access the SONET through your web browser. All you need is a user identification and a password to access the full capabilities of the SONET. The SONET is organized into five major areas:

- The collaboration area supports real-time (synchronous) and near-real-time threaded (asynchronous) coordination and planning. Review of documents off-line or of products on-line can be conducted. Content and access to the collaboration area are controlled.
- The content center contains the Space reference library, briefing room, and classroom. This is where the latest information on Space is found. Briefings, lesson materials, lessons learned, student papers, and back copies of the Command and General Staff College Space newsletter are all here. The potential for pre-Space Operations Officers qualification course training and recurring training exists in this area.
- The knowledge base contains condensed elements of Space knowledge that are kernels of processed information which will become the heart of this system. Examples of these Space Operation Officer developed kernels are insights on Space play during division or corps warfighter exercises, perceptions from the field on the impact of new systems or capabilities, or other nuggets of processed information of interest to the Space community.
- The mentoring area provides access to Space and

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All Army Space Operations Officers interested in exploring the advantages of this Space Knowledge Management system are invited to contact Lt. Col. Brad Baehr (brad.baehr@arspace.army.mil) for user ID and password to access the SONET. Please send any SONET questions or comments to the SONET site manager, Mike Doyle at mdoyle@arinc.com.

career subject matter experts. You can find advice on challenges and taskings, methods of improving your criticality to the planning staff or command group, and guidance on how to find “X” or accomplish “Y” in this area.

- The upload area is where members of the Space community submit their products for formatting and placement into the appropriate area of the SONET.

As discussed earlier, Knowledge Management systems such as the SONET require active participation of the Space community. It is the community that provides the knowledge, example products, as well as collaborative and subject matter experts support to other members of the Space community. While you are sure that the knowledge you need is out there somewhere, the trick is to find it quickly and efficiently. In a nutshell, the SONET Knowledge Management system is a single focal point for sharing Space information knowledge and conducting collaborative planning, coordination and support.

### **How Do I Reap the Benefits of the SONET Knowledge Management System?**

This is the easy part. Just as you activate your email at the beginning of each business day, you could set the SONET as your Internet browser homepage and login each morning. With its embedded email and chat features, the SONET ensures that you are never far from true Space subject matter experts or from having your own expertise and experience tapped by other members of the Space community. You can download a condensed user’s guide from the SONET homepage to learn the basic functions of the SONET.

As more members participate, the SONET will gain a life of its own with corresponding growth in value and utility. It is your tool, and will only work if you, as members of the Space community, make it work.

### **What Will I Find in the SONET Today?**

SMDBL is conducting SONET beta testing by using a relatively small target audience with ongoing improvements to be based on this early testing. It is the SONET membership, however, that makes a Knowledge Management system work, provides most of the products, and all of the

knowledge. The small test audience could not populate or use the SONET enough to assess its operational utility as a Space Knowledge Management system. Of the five major parts of the SONET discussed earlier, the library portion of the content center is the only area that has been filled to any significant degree. The classroom contains the unclassified Command and General Staff College Space lesson materials but does not yet contain the Funtional Area 40 qualification course material.

### **What Does the Future Hold for the SONET?**

SMDBL is expanding the SONET into the operational Space community to evaluate its viability as a Space Knowledge Management system. A major part of this challenge includes making members of the Space community aware of the SONET and to solicit their active participation in sharing Space knowledge, products, tactics, techniques and procedures.

Transferring or mirroring the SONET from the Internet is the Secret Internet Protocol Network (SIPRNET) which is under consideration to improve the operational utility of the SONET. The SIPRNET offers many advantages as a host for the SONET.

The SONET has the potential to support the operational warfighter by providing a collaborative planning and coordination environment, access to subject matter experts, and an extensive collection of Space-related training and reference materials. SMDBL solicits your comments and suggestions on SONET structure and functionality, as well as your product input.

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