ROSS
an NWCG-sponsored project

# ROSS Newsletter

NEW WEBSITE!

We're on the web at
http://ross.nwcg.gov/

VOLUME 10 January/February, 2002

## 2002 Calendar

### January

- ROSS Core Team Meeting: 1/29-30 Denver

### February

- Phase 2 ROSS Dispatch Beta testing begins at NICC: 2/4
- Phase 3 ROSS Dispatch Beta testing begins in Rocky Mountain Area: 2/6

### March

- ROSS Core Team Meeting: 3/12-14 Las Vegas
- Phase 3 ROSS Dispatch Beta testing continues through March 15

**ROSS Beta Testing Schedule is posted on page 3**

## The National Coordinators See and Test Drive "ROSS Dispatch" in Charleston

Using three different laptop computers, projectors and projection screens, the ROSS Team used the ROSS Dispatch application to create, forward and fill resource orders between several simulated offices at the annual National Coordinators' Meeting in December. At two after-hours sessions, the Coordinators had the opportunity to run the application themselves and move resource orders around the room to various simulated dispatch centers.

Coordinators create and process resource orders using ROSS Dispatch

## Hardware and Network Considerations for Dispatchers and Managers

Walt Embree, a ROSS Partner who works for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection at the Northern California Coordination Center, recently shared some insight into how dispatchers and managers might want to prepare for implementing the dispatch portion of ROSS:

Some of these points below might be obvious to you and your IRM (Information Resource Management) staff, but I'll just brainstorm a bit to try and cover as many bases as I can.

Automation of a previously manual system can bring many changes to the business process in any dispatch office. Although use of the program itself may bring business practice changes that are fairly obvious, some of the less obvious issues focus on the machines and infrastructure itself. For example, consider your fault-tolerance (business continuation/disaster recovery) plans and how your office printers

need to be set up. If you have a history of Local-Area-Network (LAN) failures, a LAN-based printer may not serve you very well if you need to print some orders during a connectivity loss. Maybe at least one printer should be connected directly to a PC or laptop that has dial-in capability to ROSS.

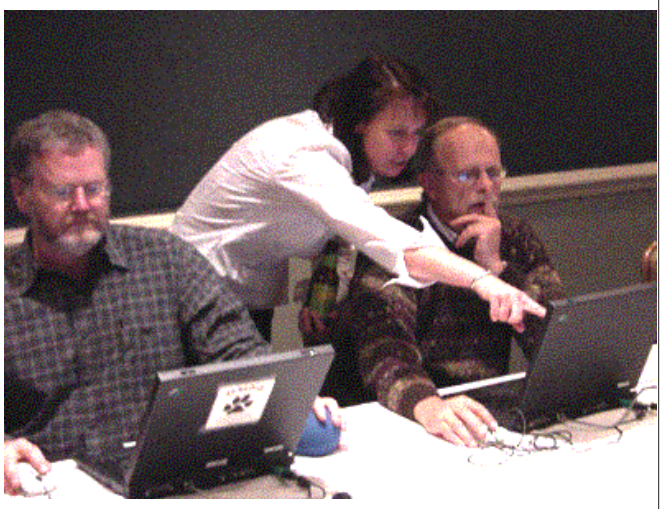
Adequate bandwidth is, of course, a must. The trick is to define what is adequate. I can use MIRPS from home while dialed in at 24K, and, although a bit sluggish, seems to work OK. As a general rule, a T-1 line (or at least 128K fractional) would ensure smooth operation for a few computers. Wider bandwidth would be needed as the volume of business and users increase in your office. ROSS has published a general hardware specification guide, which will be of value here. Please see "Hardware" white paper on the ROSS website: http://ross.nwcg.gov/documents_library/white_papers/ROSS_Hardware-Software_Information_Paper.PDF

The computers themselves need to be fairly speedy, not just for ROSS, but to handle the browser and other applications that invariably will be running on dispatchers' desks. I would certainly look at Pentium II, 450 MHz (256 MB memory) as a minimum. Anything faster will just be gravy on the mashed potatoes. Keep in mind that the ROSS server and the data link drive the speed of ROSS probably more than the client (ROSS user's) computer, but again, you must think of the other multi-tasking programs that will be running at the same time. Also, we consider 17 inches to be the smallest acceptable monitor, in order to run at 1024 X 760 resolution. My 15-inch monitor at home is a real pain.

How many computers should an office have? As many as you need, of course. The challenge is to provide enough computers to meet the need when you are "ramped up." One solution is to have a pool of employee laptops (network capable) that can be requested and pressed into service on an as needed basis. We can't do that here because about twenty employees would be without laptops for months at a time. We, therefore, have quite a pool of PCs in our expanded dispatch, but we utilize them all winter for training and special projects. Renting computers as needed might work (for agencies having the authority to do so), or establishing a laptop cache that you break out only when the situation warrants, are two other alternatives.

Having all the computers and printers running on some type of Uninterrupted Power Supply (UPS) might be handy, but speaking strictly from a ROSS perspective, this may not be all that important. The data source is external, so that seems not to be a concern. In the event of a power failure, will your entire network system and data circuits continue to operate? If not, then having your computers on a UPS, but not able to talk to anything, would be a decision each office would have to make based on other merits. You know how much we firefighters hate to get all dressed up with no place to go!

So, in general, what we need is easy login to a reasonably fast computer, with great access to good bandwidth to Kansas City, and printers that print everything we need, when we need it, exactly how we need it, with users that come trained and ready to work!



Mary Toews helps Lindsey Lien and Mike Plattes get acquainted with ROSS Dispatch

## Notes from the ROSS Boss - Jon Skeels

With the development of the ROSS application Resource Ordering components moving along at a rapid pace, it is time to bring everyone up to speed on testing plans. It is important that everyone understand that testing must follow a very rigorous and well-documented process. The application will go through a significant amount of testing prior to release for beta (field) testing. This includes comprehensive testing of components by the developer (Lockheed-Martin) during the initial development and integration of the application.

Once completed, ROSS Project personnel will perform alpha testing. During this phase, screen level organization and operation, screen-to-screen data transfers, data transition between records, adherence to preliminary and detailed designs, and scenario-based testing will be tested. Once alpha testing is completed, corrections to documented issues are performed and the application is readied for beta testing.

The beta testing process submits the application to testing by units representing all levels of the dispatch organization. Offices involved in beta testing include: National Interagency Coordination Center (NICC), Rocky Mountain Area Coordination Center (RMACC), Fort Collins Interagency Dispatch Center (FTC), Pueblo Interagency Dispatch Center (PBC) and the ROSS Help Desk. This level of testing requires the use of pre-built dispatch scenarios with known outcomes, and the creation of mock incidents with dispatch offices submitting ad-hoc requests.

The tests are coordinated to assure that all issues are well documented. At the conclusion of the tests, priority issues will be corrected. This effort will occur in three phases. The initial phase will involve only the NICC. Each additional phase will build upon the previous one by adding more centers to the mix. Phase 2 will involve NICC and RMAC, and Phase 3 will involve NICC, RMAC and two Rocky Mountain Area field dispatch centers (Fort Collins and Pueblo). More centers may be added as testing progresses.

Involvement in the testing will require commitment from dedicated personnel during the period of February 4, 2002 through the end of March. Testing will not occur every day.

Once testing is completed, training and deployment will be scheduled. Planning for training and application deployment is currently underway. The Coordinators will become very involved in this process beginning with the National Coordinators' Meeting in December 2001.

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**The forecasted beta testing schedule is as follows:**

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| **Beta Testing Meeting & Application Review** | **January 23, 2002** | **Denver, CO** |
| **Phase 1 Testing** | **February 4, 2002** | **NICC and SME*** |
| **Phase 2 Testing** | **February 5, 2002** | **NICC, RMACC, and SME** |
| **Phase 3 Testing** | **February 6 - March 15, 2002** | **NICC, RMACC, FTC, PBC and SME** |
| **Beta Testing Review Meeting** | **Week of March 18, 2002 (1-2 days)** | **Denver, CO** |

*** ROSS Team Subject Matter Expert**

David Kee of User Technology Associates explains on-line ROSS user support to the National Coordinators

## New ROSS Website Launched

The ROSS Website was recently redesigned to make it easier for users to find desired information. Most information that was on the previous website has been updated and moved to the new site. The new website features some significant new additions. One of these is a "Contract Partners" tab, which allows one to learn more about some of the many industry partners with which the ROSS Team has established working relationships. Another new tab is called "Download Application," which can be used by authorized persons to access and install the ROSS application on their computer.

Another addition is the "User Support" tab, which is a direct link to the new ROSS Helpdesk, which is operated by User Technology Associates (UTA). The ROSS Helpdesk website features some powerful tools for the ROSS user. These include:

- **Auto Ticket** enables a ROSS user to quickly submit questions to the helpdesk.
- **Heat Self Service** lets a user log in and quickly access answers or submit a report to a helpdesk technician.
- **Knowlix** is a search engine designed specifically to search through an extensive ROSS knowledge base.

The ROSS Helpdesk website also features a ROSS Users Guide, and will eventually include web-based training, a job reference aid, on-line help, an on-line tutorial and ROSS training scenarios.

Previous copies of the ROSS Newsletter can also be retrieved from the ROSS website by opening the "Newsletter" link.

The new ROSS website also has a new address: http://ross.nwcg.gov/.

## Notes From the ROSS Boss

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Training and deployment will occur at a pace that provides for a maximum probability of success. It is expected that training and deployment will take at least a year. Once the initial application is ready for deployment, design and development of lower priority components will continue. This will require ongoing testing of new and existing components. These additional components will be released throughout the year with the ultimate goal being to have all components released by the end of the deployment period.

Southern Area ROSS Implementation Task Group develops a plan for training and phasing in ROSS Dispatch in their area