Success Story

ZEH's PLOT EXPRESS Software Complements ArcGIS 8 Roll-out at the United Kingdom's Ministry of Defence, Defence Estates

ArcGIS Users Print Large Images Quickly and Easily

Defence Estates, the agency managing the estates of the United Kingdom's Ministry of Defence (MOD), utilizes ESRI's ArcView, ArcInfo, and ArcGIS to analyze and share geographical data. Defence Estates decided to improve efficiencies and better utilize internal IT resources by moving from standalone UNIX GIS servers to a corporate-wide, GIS network. Moving to a centrally managed ArcGIS 8 and Windows-based system reduced costs by facilitating data sharing throughout the agency. However, Defence Estates had customized their GIS printing environment over the years to match their business needs. They soon learned that upgrading to Windows and ArcGIS 8 meant some critical printing customizations were no longer available to users.

Moving away from the customized printing infrastructure resulted in frustration for many GI professionals within Defence Estates. The GI Office Managers struggled to get large raster files with vector overlays and topographical maps printed. The file sizes combined with limited printer memory often resulted in truncated prints or prints that took 30 or more minutes to process with poor quality results. This prompted Martin Meggs, Information Business Service GI Programme Manager to find a way to address the new printing challenges.

At an ESRI UK Goverment Seminar, Martin Meggs was approached by ZEH Software Business Development Manager, Stephen Field. Meggs subsequently scheduled a PLOT EXPRESS proof of concept in the Rosyth, Scotland office. After a successful trial Defence Estates standardized on ZEH software as a part of the ArcGIS 8.3 upgrade program.

"Whilst the benefits of moving to the ArcGIS 8 architecture were significant, the move presented us with some new challenges to resolve" comments Martin Meggs. "Producing high quality maps quickly on demand is critical to our business. Our GI Officers need the confidence of knowing that they have full control over the output process and ZEH Software's PLOT EXPRESS solution provides us with exactly that assurance".

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ZEH Software Implementation

With ZEH Software, the Defence Estate was able to print images they were not able to print successfully before. For one project, they were able to combine two 1:50,000 scale Ordnance Survey maps and print the resulting image at a much smaller scale on a single A0 sheet. With PLOT EXPRESS, they were able to overcome printer limitations and extend the life of the existing printers while making them more accessible to all users.

The biggest benefits for Defence Estates were the improved print control and reduced processing time. Before PLOT EXPRESS it was very difficult to control the queues and manage priorities during the printing process. The print processing that used to tie up workstations for 30 minutes or more was now offloaded to a print server and processed in about 10 minutes.

With PLOT EXPRESS in place, the GI Office Managers could quickly and reliably print up-to-date maps to support the selling and acquiring of land. They could prepare maps for training activities showing approved areas for training as well as conservation areas where training was not allowed. Also, contractors hired to work on the estates could be provided up-to-the-minute prints of grounds or facilities.

The implementation at Defence Estates includes nine PLOT EXPRESS systems installed on Windows 2000 servers. The PLOT EXPRESS servers are connected to over 20 print devices including A3 colour and HP 750 printers. PLOT EXPRESS allows 40-50 users to more easily print within their local offices as well as to other remote offices. Users submit single prints or multiple copies easily to PLOT EXPRESS through a convenient ArcGIS plug-in.

Longer term, Defence Estates plans to use ZEH software to provide other users, outside the GI teams access to wide-format devices. Historically this was problematic because there was no control of the print queues. With queue management provided by PLOT EXPRESS, other users can be provided access to additional devices in a controlled manner.

MOD Background

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) is responsible for defending the United Kindom and promoting international peace and security. Defence Estates is an agency of MOD that manages and maintains the MOD's estates in the UK and abroad. MOD is one of the largest landowners in the United Kingdom occupying about 1% of the UK landmass. Defence Estates manages over 4,000 sites and rural areas. More than 45,000 buildings are managed including barracks, naval bases, depots, aircraft hangars, and armed forces training facilities. Defence Estates enables the MOD to work towards having an estate of an optimum size and structure from which to deliver the UK's defense capability.