

With The FeedRoom handling a lot of the details and continually finding ways to reduce the steps needed to get video online, our people are more productive. They have more time to develop the creative, in-depth programming we need to keep a strong presence on the web and secure better coverage in other media outlets.

– Brian Natwick, General Manager, The Pentagon Channel



THE NEED FOR AN ONLINE VIDEO SOLUTION TO DELIVER INSTANT, UNFILTERED NEWS

Keeping the 2.6 million members of the United States’ Armed Forces informed is no small feat. Under the leadership of Allison Barber, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, however, the U.S. military’s strategy for communicating with its far-flung forces leapt forward in 2004 with the launch of the Pentagon Channel, a 24x7 video news program.

Available via satellite at military bases and via the internet through a solution provided by The FeedRoom, the Pentagon Channel reaches a broad spectrum of the military community with up-to-the-minute news, from reports on military actions and policies to live broadcasts of press conferences, Capitol Hill testimony and military ceremonies.

Using emerging technologies to deliver news within the military is certainly not new. Generally, though, each arm of the military pursues its own communications strategy, and until the attacks on September 11, 2001, there was no single news source for all military personnel, contractors and their families. Almost overnight, however, the hunger for news of what was happening within the military—especially among the reservists, National Guard and civilian contractors providing critical support—skyrocketed. At the same time, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld sought a flexible, effective means to communicate with all the armed forces, both active and reserve.

For some time, the Pentagon had produced news clips not only for distribution via satellite to military bases, but also for use by U.S. cable networks—the latter so that the news might reach reservists and other key domestic constituencies not located at bases. Unfortunately, the cable networks often truncated the programming or simply ran a trailer at the bottom of the screen. As a result, Barber’s team began considering the options for establishing an online news outlet, recognizing it would give it more control over what content was aired.

“Both the Army and the Navy had implemented video on their websites,” says Brian Natwick, General Manager, The Pentagon Channel, “and we could see how something like this could help us get our message out beyond the military bases even as we continued to work with third-party media outlets.”

CHALLENGE

The U.S. military wanted to deliver its video news programming online. Critical factors included: (a) controlling how the content was aired, and (b) ensuring easy accessibility for a variety of military constituents.

SOLUTION

The Pentagon selected The FeedRoom to develop, launch and manage its online video application – providing troops, reservists, contractors and their families instant access to in-depth news reports and coverage of live events.

RESULTS

The enterprise online video solution provided by the FeedRoom, delivered in 4 weeks, has yielded results for the Pentagon in a number of key areas:

Easy Access - Online visitors are spending up to 20 minutes per visit

Increased Productivity - Staff members are now able to spend more time on creative programming, which leads to better content and a better online experience for visitors

Broader Distribution - The content is now achieving more air time with third party media outlets

FOUR WEEKS TO AN ONLINE VIDEO PRESENCE

On learning of the Pentagon's latest thinking, systems integrator Omnitec Solutions Inc. included The FeedRoom in its proposals for what quickly became known as the Pentagon Channel—a video-rich news program aimed at the entire U.S. military community and offered through multiple channels, including the internet.

Says Natwick, "We knew we needed a company that could provide a complement of video and video-on-demand clips, without requiring a lot of work hours from us. When we saw what The FeedRoom offered, we were really impressed with the functionality we could get, while keeping our site simple. We also liked the simplicity of The FeedRoom's user interface."

Once it was determined that the Pentagon Channel should include an online news outlet, Brian's team had just four weeks to make it happen. "The FeedRoom's people fit right in with the team mentality here," says Natwick. "They took our graphics package, made the website part of the Pentagon Channel and did it quickly without any second guessing."

Launched from Andrews Air Force Base on May 17, 2004, Armed Forces Appreciation Day, the new Pentagon Channel has a live feed 24x7. Launch day events were broadcast live, so viewers could see what was happening almost instantaneously. "It was a fantastic day and a fantastic launch," says Natwick, who sees spikes in online viewership whenever the channel broadcasts live events.

A ROBUST SOLUTION THAT FOCUSES EFFORTS ON PROGRAMMING

The ability to measure viewership is one of the many aspects of The FeedRoom's solution that has made it indispensable to the Pentagon Channel's broadband video strategy. "It's not like we can get Nielsen ratings," says Natwick, who points out that by law, government programming is barred from commercial ratings. But the information that his team gets weekly from The FeedRoom helps it gauge the online channel's effectiveness.

"We had people essentially 'parking' on the site when it first launched, as if they were watching a television news show," says Natwick. "Even now we sometimes have viewing times of up to 20 minutes, because it appears people are watching at least one or two full newscasts when they go online. Having that kind of data has really been great for us."

"The FeedRoom's people fit right in with the team mentality here. They took our graphics package, made the website part of the Pentagon Channel and did it quickly without any second guessing."
- Brian Natwick, General Manager,
The Pentagon Channel

The FeedRoom solution not only makes it easy to track usage, but it also scales easily. When major news events occur, for example, such as President Ronald Reagan's funeral or announcements of base closings, The FeedRoom's live feed enables viewers to see the news virtually as it is being made. "With live events,

traffic to the site sometimes spikes to three times the usual viewership," says Natwick, "and even so, The FeedRoom consistently handles the volume."

Other elements of The FeedRoom's enterprise video solution—including a digital asset management system, XML parsing and a highly engaging interface—free Natwick and his colleagues from the minutiae involved in such things as automatically updating the links from other military sites to the Pentagon Channel.

"With The FeedRoom handling a lot of the details and continually finding ways to reduce the steps needed to get our video online," says Natwick, "our people are more productive. They have more time to develop the creative, in-depth programming we need to keep a strong presence on the web and secure better coverage in other media outlets."