
Creating the International Training Management Web Site: A Corporate University Portal That Shares Best Practices

By

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This article traces the development of the International Training Management web site as an instructional resource at the Defense Institute of Security Assistance Management (DISAM). It examines the process that took place as attempts were made to use existing automated systems to enhance the availability of instructional materials for international training management education. It also examines the contribution of the web site to the collection and documentation of international training management best practices and the role of the web site as an instrument of the DISAM corporate university.

For years, at DISAM, we have attempted to provide our overseas security assistance office (SAO) and international military student office (IMSO) course students with printed copies of current training policy messages, articles, key references, and examples of training management best practices. We wanted our international training management students to take with them essential documents and publications that deal with the actual accomplishment of their duties. This resulted in the constant hassle of having to keep on hand a sufficient quantity of printed copies of the most current training publications. Today that is no longer a problem. We now provide access to every known international training management article, message, reference, lesson, exercise, and best practice document. We do this via the internet which makes that information available not only to current and future DISAM students but to all current practitioners who have need of this information in their day to day international training jobs, anywhere in the world.

The First Use of Automation to Support Training.

We had always provided our international training manager students with copies of essential documents and publications that they could take with them. We had also provided copies of selected publications in binders for use in class. Normally the typical DISAM students would take with them a class notebook, tailored to a specific student's community need. The biggest difficulty in accomplishing this was the constant difficulty of updating the materials, printing them, and having enough on hand for student requirements. And, unless there was a special request from the field, only DISAM students received these materials. Consequently, it was quite natural to turn to automation to help with the provision of these training materials.

The first attempt at providing these materials electronically was to make all international training references, selected exercises, and some presentations available via download from the training library of the security assistance network (SAN). This effort provided the added advantage of making these materials available not only to DISAM students but to other SAN users worldwide. The most significant limitation was that only registered SAN users could have access to the materials. There are many other members of the international military training community who are not active users of the SAN. And, how about the international military community itself (both managers and students) who need information about training in the United States?

The second significant automation effort involved the use of the Defense Acquisition Deskbook system. As Deskbook became the preferred host for all security assistance publications and all international training references were hosted on Deskbook, we began to make some real progress. DISAM students could then be provided a copy of the Deskbook CD-ROM disk with all of their international training references and others needing those references could access them at the Deskbook web site. The limitation, however, was to security assistance training references. Few other published items were added to Deskbook, the process being somewhat involved, in spite of the excellent support efforts of the Deskbook program management office.

What was needed was a process where the DISAM functional expert could research, find materials, and quickly make these materials available via the internet. The solution was obvious: develop and implement an international training management web page hosted on the DISAM web server.

Almost a Web Page.

DISAM had been hosting its own web page since March 1998 and hosting the DSCA web page since November 1999. Our web master is a DISAM faculty member who came to DISAM with significant experience in developing and authoring web pages. With the advent of the DISAM and DSCA web pages, he had quickly put that experience to work and had developed two web pages that were quickly recognized as among the best in DoD. The DISAM intranet web page also quickly evolved and a second DISAM staff member in the library was sent to MS Frontpage training and was then coached by the DISAM web master to develop and maintain that web page. Consequently, the DISAM web master has become much in demand, with his priorities being established many times at DSCA.

At the same time the training faculty was attempting to add selected training management documents to the SAN. There was a certain amount of difficulty in doing this, due to the different formatting of HTML documents created in Netscape Composer versus the Foxpro web developer software. The system manager of the SAN suggested hosting and maintaining the desired documents on the existing DISAM web server and simply linking to them from the SAN. Since MS Frontpage was already being used in the development of the DISAM web page, it only made sense to use Frontpage to create the desired HTML documents.

The DISAM international training functional experts prepared the new documents to be hosted on the DISAM web server. These documents were then linked from the SAN Main Training Menu. The disadvantage was that it still took several days to get the desired document on the internet because of the overall DISAM web master's workload and priorities of the SAN system manager. Thus, only a few documents were actually made available in this manner. And, even when this was accomplished, the documents so established were still only available to registered SAN users.

A New Web Page.

Now, only one step away from creating a new web page, the DISAM training functional expert was actually preparing the HTML documents. It also became obvious that the use of Adobe Acrobat to save and format documents for the internet was a good choice. Once a series of HTML and Adobe documents had evolved, it was only natural to link them together into a true web page. Thus, the International Training Management (ITM) web page was created.

It took several weeks of concentrated effort to research and collect all available written materials in electronic format. Then the next step was to identify the target audiences of the web

page and tailor the presentation of the collected materials to suit those needs. We went through several complete revisions of the ITM web page before it began to settle down.

There still remained one more critical step in the complete evolvement of the ITM web page. The International Training Management web page truly existed at this point. The drawback came in how it was being maintained and updated. The DISAM training faculty was authoring the individual web pages but still having to go to the DISAM web master to have them published on the internet. And, others were setting priorities for his limited availability. The last step was about to take place establishing an independent web master for the ITM web page.

International Training Management
**A Web Site for International Military Training Managers
Involved in Security Cooperation Programs**

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Finally, Our Own Web Page!

It took a few hours of work between the DISAM LAN manager and the DISAM web master to set the required accesses so that the DISAM training functional web master could author and then publish the ITM web page on the internet. The rest is history. Today, when a new element of the ITM web page is identified, researched, and authored, the result is published on the internet in a matter of minutes. This work is accomplished entirely within the faculty group that is responsible for the conduct of international military training management education. Thus it is the training subject matter experts who are actually running the ITM web site. They, of course, are the ones who best know what is needed on the web site to enhance the educational process.

And, they are the ones who are in continuous contact with the worldwide U.S. security cooperation training community. Obviously, this has value well beyond the schoolhouse by the publishing of procedural information that is truly needed by training managers in the field. In fact, this may ultimately be the most significant value of the ITM web page, because many of these procedures have not been documented adequately or simply that good procedural instructions published conventionally have not reached managers in the field.

Identify an Informational Need and Publish It

Unfortunately there are many areas in the management and administration of the security assistance training program where adequate procedural instructions have not been prepared or have not been provided to all who need them. Now, with the existence of the ITM web page, documenting and publishing them for all via the internet makes a lot of sense. Following are a few of the latest examples of accomplishing this.

Recently a guest speaker from the Defense Institute of International Legal Studies (DIILS) was present at DISAM to give a human rights awareness presentation. After collaborating with this subject matter expert, it was decided to create a human rights web page as a part of the overall ITM web page. The first result of this collaboration was a page that provided human rights references, Power Point presentations, links to various human rights web sites, etc. This page was created within a thirty minute period, including being published on the internet. It was done entirely by the DISAM training faculty member in collaboration with the DIILS subject matter expert. The DIILS instructor was obviously surprised at the ease with which this was accomplished.

Following the December 2000 Army IMSO conference, a visit was made to the IMSO office at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC). The purpose of this visit was to explore the development of a Model IMSO Web Site. Prior to this visit, the DISAM training faculty member developed a draft model web site for IMSOs using existing HTML documents from several good examples of IMSO web pages. By simply putting these documents together under the Model IMSO Web Page and indicating in red those items that need to be entered for the particular school, a model web page was developed. An interested IMSO can simply save the HTML files concerned to his/her computer, open them in MS Word, and make any desired changes. The resulting HTML files can then be given to the school web master to be hosted on the school web server and linked through the school web page. The folks at the CGSC IMSO office have developed an incredible web page, probably one of the most advanced in use today. Following this visit, a separate Model IMSO web page will probably be developed and tailored for each military service.

In the October 2000 training policy meeting we were asked to work with DLIELC and the U.S. Army Communications Electronics Command which is responsible for the acquisition of English language laboratories. The objective was to better document the procedures for the procurement, shipment, and installation of language laboratories and the ordering and shipment of DLIELC provided materials needed for the labs. Again a web page was created within the overall ITM web page to fulfill this need. Thus, following the visit to DLIELC with the Army CECOM representative, a web page was created to provide guidance and required information for this acquisition process. The following information is now available in two web pages dedicated to the overall in-country English language training program, language laboratories, and materials for the labs. Information provided on language labs includes, point of contact information, technical information on types of labs available, how to add a language lab to a training program, a sample message to request requisitioning of the language lab, a sample message to request installation of the lab, current status of all language lab orders, current status of orders for language lab materials, and links to related web sites. This is a wealth of information that

previously was only provided to SAO training managers at the annual training program management reviews. Today, that information is available on the internet at the ITM web site.

Publishing Best Practices

The training management faculty has for many years attempted to collect best practice documents from our international training managers. These were provided in hard copy and later as digital files on computer floppy disks to students attending international training courses. As CD-Rom read/write equipment became available, materials were made available via this medium. We had also begun putting some of the more significant documents on the Defense Acquisition Deskbook (DAD) system. While Deskbook is an excellent system and the folks that host our materials are excellent, the process still takes time. And, we are simply one of many clients who want to get their materials on Deskbook. Thus, it wasn't until our International Training Management web site became available that we really began to collect in earnest materials from the field that represented some of the best practices and examples of how to do it. We went to the entire international training community, to training managers both overseas and in the U.S., and solicited input of their examples of best practices. This was done multiple times by e-mail and input was requested in electronic format as an e-mail attachment. The response was overwhelming, with very excellent materials being provided. Checklists, briefings, and guides for international students poured in. Solutions to problems encountered were quickly offered. It was quite obvious that the folks who were contributing these materials felt as though they were making a real and lasting contribution to the establishment of a body of material that would truly be available to their associates worldwide. And this continues today, now that there is an International Training Management web page that encourages the sharing of these best practices.

Is the ITM Web Page Worth the Time and Effort Involved in Maintaining and Running It?

The preceding clearly shows the value of documenting a new procedural area and adding it to the ITM web page. Again, there are many areas presently in the administration and management of the security assistance training program where procedures need to be documented and published via the internet for all international training managers to see. And, due to the constant changes that occur in the training program, new procedures will continuously have to be documented and published.

The ITM web page does require continuous update and maintenance. All web pages do, if they are to remain viable and worthwhile. Perhaps this is the optimistic way of looking at this issue, but isn't it easier to update something one place only, and then be done with it? Once the change has been made and published, that information is immediately available to all. There is no requirement to republish hard copy and go through the agony and imperfection of manual distribution. The actual work involved in making a change, for example adding a link to a new reference or adding a new document to the web page, is a matter of a few minutes of work. Collectively, a lot of time is involved in updating and making changes. But, this is not a valid criticism, because the value of the entire web page increases as all of these collective changes are made.

Doesn't a web master get tired of making changes that users are constantly recommending? Not really, if he wants the web page to truly be a valuable management tool that all training managers will find useful. Perhaps we need to identify who the web master actually is. The web master of the ITM web site is a security assistance training functional expert who teaches others how to manage our international training program. That functional training expert is also responsible for providing a significant amount of customer support to our international training management community. To put it frankly, the ITM web page actually saves time and effort in providing that customer assistance. Instead of writing out answers to numerous E-mail questions

and inquiries, references are simply made to the ITM web site and answers provided with a web site address.

The added advantage of many training managers looking at what is published in the ITM web site and bringing required changes to the attention of the ITM web master is a decided advantage. Again, as these additions and changes are made, web site becomes even more valuable. The web site actually becomes a vehicle for effecting change. In an effort to actually solicit the input of material from the field, we queried all SAO, IMSO, military department, and other training managers for examples of electronic documents that they are using to manage their portion of the training program. We have been adding these continuously to the ITM web site.

A Comment on the Style and Format of the ITM Web Page

The format and style of the International Training Management web page was purposely kept simple, without the use of extensive web page graphics. We decided to do this so that the impact of accessing the ITM web page files could be kept as small as possible, particularly for our overseas users. Opening most of the military school house web pages using a typical slower telephone modem connection is less than satisfactory. ITM pages open much faster because they are basically a textual HTML document. The only exception to this is that Power Point presentations have been provided. Even these are now provided as an Adobe Acrobat file as are many of the larger textual documents.

The use of Adobe formatting provides much smaller files that open much easier. Of course, this requires the use of Adobe Acrobat Reader, but all U.S. government users surely should have this now on their computer. Adobe Acrobat Reader is free. We provide it via the DISAM distributed Security Assistance Software CD-Rom disk and, from the ITM home page, we point to the Adobe web site where you can download Adobe Reader at no cost.

The Access Issue

There certainly is a significant issue involving access. Many of our overseas SAO offices that have a local internet provider and thus come in with a foreign URL address, cannot successfully access .MIL addresses. We have provided a partial solution for them that involves logging on the Security Assistance Network (SAN) and using the SAN proxy server. Some users who are having trouble with .MIL access have not yet registered to use the SAN proxy server.

The Army CGSC does have concerns about all of their materials being available on the open internet and is considering putting their course materials on an intranet that would only be available via limited .MIL access. CGSC is considering using Army Knowledge Online as the system to provide access from outside the CGSC installation. DLIELC has placed its web site on a commercial server and thus their web page carries an .ORG address, insuring easy access by all. DISAM has placed their web pages, including the ITM web page, on a .MIL server that is not behind a firewall. This is a correct statement, in that such an arrangement has been set up at Wright-Patterson AFB. Obviously there are significant access issues to be dealt with.

Is Internet Web Page Use Applicable to Other DISAM Instructional Areas and to Other Schools?

Once the ITM web page was actually ready for use, the value of the page both for in-house educational use and for use by managers in the field quickly became evident. Naturally, the idea of using a similar web page approach in providing information for other DISAM instructional areas became apparent. To that extent, the DISAM training faculty briefed other functional managers at DISAM on the establishment and use of a web site to host training materials for other

security assistance functional areas such as international logistics, FMS case management, FMS financial management, etc. While the value of providing instruction and reference information via the internet was quickly recognized, the biggest drawback was the thought that these other functional experts would also have to learn to use MS Frontpage and actually run a web page. This appeared to be a daunting task and review of it is still underway as this article is being published. Actually, within the DISAM Overseas course, the regional seminar directors had already been providing their instructional materials via CD-Rom disk. Providing these materials via the internet is simply a natural extension of this.

During the previously mentioned visit to Ft Leavenworth Kansas it was found that the Army Command and General Staff College has now adopted use of the internet as the total repository of all instructional materials. This is done for all students, U.S. and international alike. Inquiries at other military schools have revealed similar interest in providing instructional materials via the internet. The Air Force Institute of Technology is perhaps typical, covering the entire range from providing only conventional hard copy, to providing electronic format on disk, to complete use of electronic format via the internet. When one considers the rapidly expanding use of the internet in so many distance learning applications in our civilian education community, there is little doubt that it is only a matter of time until use of an internet web site for educational information sharing purposes becomes the norm.

Is the ITM Web Page an Instrument of the DISAM Corporate University?

For those not familiar with the concept of the Corporate University, a quick search of the internet reveals a wealth of information on the subject. Obviously, this concept of what modern, successfully competitive industry training and education should be is very profound. It should be fairly safe to establish that DISAM must become the corporate university for the Security Cooperation community. It is also obvious from the literature that internet based education is an absolutely essential element of a successful corporate university. If DISAM is to keep pace and successfully evolve as that corporate university, computer based training and online education and training must proliferate.

The newly developed ITM web page is simply one step in that direction. It is the first attempt to pull together the entire body of international training management resources and make that readily available to all international training practitioners. Obviously more sophisticated educational instruments will have to be developed and made available via the ITM and DISAM web sites. The lessons and exercises provided in the ITM web site are essentially those developed and used in resident international training courses at DISAM. Also of interest is the newly developed DISAM Virtual Classroom.

For those who have not seen or used our currently established distance learning online facility, you may wish to read Dr. Larry Mortsof's "Distance Learning Concept Paper" on the DISAM web site at http://disam.osd.mil/distance_learning/home.htm. The DISAM Virtual Classroom can be found at http://disam.osd.mil/distance_learning/VirtClass/default.htm. It must be emphasized that this is only a prototype of the future DISAM electronic center for distance learning. The Virtual Classroom is at the forefront of DISAM's distance education program. The Security Assistance Management CONUS Orientation (SAM-CO) course presented in the DISAM Virtual Classroom is the first in a series of distance learning educational modules from DISAM. Future offerings will include computer-based training available on CD-ROM, as well as internet-based courses offered from the above web site. All educational materials and content that will be included in the final release are offered in the prototype. DISAM is still in the process of developing interactive testing, however, so this course is presently offered in a non-credit mode only. The newly hired DISAM distance learning specialist has just reported for duty and the development of E-training initiatives at DISAM have only just begun.

About the Author

Charlie Collins is a retired Army foreign area officer and has taught at DISAM since 1980. He is an associate professor at DISAM and is the functional manager for international training management. He has been intimately involved in the development, fielding, and use of all of the current security assistance training automated systems: TMS, the SAN, Deskbook, and the ITM web site. He can be contacted at (937) 255-8094, DSN 785-8094, or e-mail: charles.collins@disam.dsca.osd.mil. Remember, your contributions to the ITM web site are very important.