

The Coast Guard's Logistics Geospatial Integration Center Increases Efficiencies and Overall Communication with iLinc Web Conferencing Software



Tasked with providing Information Technology to support Coast Guard engineering business practices, the Logistics Geospatial Integration Center (LoGIC) faces complex assignments that can impact the effectiveness of the United States Coast Guard. Assigned as the Coast Guard center for geospatial data solutions, LoGIC not only determines what technology solutions civil, naval, and aeronautical engineers should use in day-to-day program activities, they also support and train users on those technologies.

Challenge:

Find a highly secure Web conferencing solution to reduce travel time and costs, enable distance learning, and improve overall communications. Also, the solution must operate in locked down environments and be installable on-premise.

Solution:

Install the entire iLinc software suite — MeetingLinc, ConferenceLinc, LearnLinc, and SupportLinc – to host meetings with remote staff, deliver online personnel training, and record video sessions for selfpaced instruction.

Additionally, LoGIC needs to act in accordance with the Coast Guard's strategic goals, which specify that all IT systems, including data and databases, be designed and evolved to support full interoperability of data, information, and knowledge both internal and external to the various engineering programs.

When the organization's officers began to suggest implementing a Web conferencing solution to reduce travel time and costs, enable distance learning, and improve overall communications, LoGIC undertook an evaluation of the Web conferencing space and its leading vendors. After agreeing that Web conferencing would be financially and operationally beneficial, they began to look for a solution that would promote collaboration through Web meetings and conferences, facilitate remote technical support, and provide cost-effective online training — all while being approachable enough for end users to easily adopt.

Among their technical requirements, LoGIC determined that the Web conferencing solution would need to provide high voice and video quality, enable easy access for both scheduled and on-the-fly training sessions, and allow for on-demand editing and archiving of sessions. They also required the solution to enable both participant and presenter control of sessions, text chat, online testing, application sharing, breakout sessions, and Outlook integration.

As a government organization, LoGIC of course demanded the highest levels of security for Web conferencing. The product needed to operate in locked down environments, be installed as an on-premise solution within their network, and function without altering users' root directories.

“The choice wasn't difficult. iLinc software met all of our requirements and none of the others could. As an added benefit, the pricing model made it more affordable than other products on the market.”

Gary Green, Configuration Manager, LoGIC

Because of these challenges and the frustrations with technical limitations, many of the QWBS staff resisted Web conferencing at first. As more powerful equipment was dispersed and the learning curve was climbed, QWBS' LearnLinc users began to embrace online training. Adoption grew again when QWBS offered its first recorded sessions. Users who had juggled schedules to attend live, online classes learned that iLinc made it possible to meet training requirements on their own time.

Choosing the Ideal Web Conferencing Suite

After examining offerings from the leading vendors, LoGIC learned that only iLinc's Web conferencing software and audio conferencing solutions met all of their usability, technical, and security needs.

“We’d like to see other government agencies adopt the iLinc technology, in order to experience some of the benefits that we’re seeing. We’re that happy with the product.”

Gary Green, Configuration Manager, LoGIC

LoGIC immediately made iLinc licenses available to engineers and other officers throughout the organization. Now, with access to the entire iLinc software suite - MeetingLinc, ConferenceLinc, LearnLinc, and SupportLinc - LoGIC can offer comprehensive collaboration capabilities to staff members across varied job functions.

Utilizing LearnLinc for Internal Employee Training

Now, using LearnLinc, LoGIC delivers mandatory iLinc training for all new LoGIC personnel, especially Regional Information Asset Coordinators (RIACs). In turn, RIAC trainers take frequent advantage of SupportLinc to provide one-on-one support with customers as well as to collaborate with each other (as a geographically diverse team). RIACs based on the East Coast were able to provide full training sessions to participants on the West Coast, taking advantage of application-specific experts who were not in close geographical proximity.

“The ability to quickly share either user’s desktop in-session, along with an uncluttered interface has been ideal for our collaborative sessions,” said Regional Information Asset Coordinator, Kristine Thayer.

Reducing travel and other expenses, LoGIC delivers highly effective staff training on the organization’s document management system, scanning procedures, and other applications as necessary in both one-on-one and group settings. In addition to providing live training, LoGIC uses iLinc’s recording capabilities to create video sessions for self-paced instruction. At no additional cost or effort, they garner ongoing returns by making archived training courses available.

“We’ve developed our own training material to introduce users to the iLinc software and quickly get them proficient,” said William Baker, a senior network engineer for Perot Systems Government Services, a full-time contractor for the Coast Guard. “We particularly like being able to record sessions and provide anytime, anywhere access to that material. It’s more convenient for us and for trainees.”

Learn More:
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Using MeetingLinc to Create a More Connected Staff

LoGIC takes primary advantage of MeetingLinc, using it to host weekly meetings that allow headquartered staff in Washington DC to actively participate without traveling and with much greater interactivity than a conference call.

“The synchronized Web browser is particularly useful in meetings with headquarters,” commented Green. “We can walk through websites as a group. And, when they want to show us a webpage, we simply give them control of the session.”

MeetingLinc is also being used to host corporate communications, informal meetings, and by RIAC’s, who have followed LoGIC’s lead and adopted the system for their weekly meetings.

“We appreciate being able to use the iLinc software, whether in an instant or planned capacity,” said Baker. “The instant meeting capability works very well for informal meetings. In about ten seconds, we’re up and running, and any participant can take control of the meeting, as needed.”

During intense periods, such as the extended hurricane season of 2005, iLinc software became an essential tool, enabling remote users to exchange critical information with LoGIC. Teams can take advantage of desktop sharing to quickly and easily collaborate on documents. According to Green, “iLinc’s desktop sharing functionality allows the person with the idea to input that idea directly, which certainly saves time, as does being able to transfer documents to all participants, rather than send an email later.”

With iLinc, LoGIC succeeded in meeting their goals for Web conferencing, while staying within the Coast Guard’s regulations for IT solutions and security. The organization has increased communication and efficiency, and generated ongoing time and money savings. The benefits manifest not just in more collaborative business meetings, but also in more effective application training and technical support.

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