

# GOVERNMENT COMPUTER NEWS

THE NATIONAL NEWSPAPER OF GOVERNMENT COMPUTING ■ A CAHNERS PUBLICATION ■ VOLUME 15, NUMBER 11 ■ MAY 27, 1996

## Search, store, access for SSA

*With Envision 3.5 repository giant documents are cut down to size*

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At Social Security Administration headquarters in Baltimore, picking a chart out of a 20,000-page eligibility requirements document was like finding a needle in a haystack. With documents piling up, storage space was also becoming a problem.

Using Envision 3.5 client-server software from Future Tech Systems Inc. of Auburn, Wash., Social Security's Automated Requirements Branch created a more manageable system that enables end users to search through hundreds of pages in seconds and transfer information easily, between documents.

"We used to develop all our requirements documents in WordPerfect, but when you've got such large documents, it just becomes impossible to deal with," said Christopher Miccio, the branch team leader. "We decided to put the documents in a database so they would be more accessible."

### A third less work

Miccio used Envision to create a system in which Microsoft Windows clients could search and extract specific information from the Envision database.

"We've reduced the amount of work done by at least a third by allowing users to go into and out of different tools to look at things," he said. "We don't have to produce 20,000-page paper documents now—we can produce and view them electronically."

Before, Miccio said dozens of copies of documents thousands of pages long had to be sent to different offices within SSA for review and approval. Now users can call up specific sections and make changes electronically.

"People can quickly get to the area they're



GCN photo by James B. Gardner

SSA's Christopher Miccio made benefits document searching easier with an Envision 3.5 repository and shell where users can build their own search tools.

concerned about and mad all they want on the screen" he said. "The elimination of paper is one of the big things we were looking at."

Envision 3.5 maintains a central repository on the headquarters' Novell NetWare LAN. About 200 Social Security employees use

Envision, with 10 to 20 concurrent users. SSA is considering an upgrade to Envision 5.0, probably by September.

### No going back

"It's a good tool; Miccio said. "We just have to be careful, because you can't backtrack if [the upgrade] doesn't work out. We are carefully considering what to do, and I think we'll probably make the upgrade."

Envision 3.5's NetBIOS protocol takes up a lot of memory on the desktop clients and clogs the network with excess packets. The updated Envision transfers data much smoother with the Novell IPX/SPX protocol and makes differently formatted documents readable with Adobe Systems' Acrobat viewer.

Although Envision 3.5 works well for the agency, Miccio said it is a little labor-intensive and requires a strong support staff.

"Because it's more of a shell that you use to build your own tools and forms, you need people around who understand what you've done and how to fix any problems; he said. "It's good because you're not locked into anything, you can make it fit your needs."

It also takes user training. Most Social Security users took 28 hours of training.

"We figured we'd rather cover all the bases—and make sure they knew how to use the program," Miccio said. "We gave them basic training on Microsoft Windows, then went into Envision and how it works."