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Firm aids Pentagon with info battles

Building central database for military

By PAUL MERRION

WASHINGTON—A small data-management consulting firm in Hinsdale is helping the Pentagon do a better job of keeping U.S. armed forces supplied during peacetime and war.

In last year's fast-paced attack on Iraq, the front lines ran low on basics like ammunition, food and water, but not because supplies weren't available in the region. Problems with ordering and delivering goods to fast-moving soldiers created the snafu.

The Defense Logistics Agency, a central support agency for all branches of the military, has to contend with more than 3,000 separate computer systems throughout the Defense Department. Until recently, the computers lacked the common data formats needed to pull information together in one central location. For instance, different branches of the military have their own ways of track-

TAMING THE DEFENSE DATA JUNGLE

EWSolutions' president says the Pentagon's data-sharing woes are much like those faced by Fortune 500 companies, just on a larger scale. A look at the magnitude of the military's system:

$80 billion supply chain

8 million parts

3 million people

3,000 separate computer systems

ing equipment deemed combat-ready or in need of repair.

Enterprise Warehousing Solutions Inc., also known as EWSolutions, has subcontracted with Science Applications International Corp. (SAIC), a major defense contractor based in San Diego, to create a new central database at the Department of Defense. EWSolutions specializes in "metadata" consulting, which

amounts to helping corporations and government agencies make sense of voluminous amounts of information.

In essence, metadata is data about data—the context that makes data meaningful, says David Marco, president and founder of EWSolutions. "If you don't have metadata, you don't have data that's usable."

While metadata is a fairly new, fast-growing area for computer consultants, Mr. Marco stands out because "nobody lives it 24/7 like David does," says Jean Schauer, editor in chief of *DM Review,* a Wisconsin-based journal for database managers, for which Mr. Marco writes a regular column.

In July 2001, long before the Iraq war, the Defense Department began working to fix the disparate computer systems as part of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's broader plan to apply modern business practices to the Pentagon. But more work needs to be done.

The Pentagon job is similar to what EWSolutions does for clients including California-based Hewlett-Packard Co. and New York-based American Express Co., albeit on a much larger scale.

"Because of the orders of magnitude, it's groundbreaking," says Mr. Marco, 36. "But these are exactly the kinds of problems faced by the Fortune 500."

The 8-year-old firm's share of SAIC's Pentagon contract has totaled about $2.5 million since 2002, when the project began. It's a substantial chunk of EWSolutions' revenues, which Mr. Marco says are expected to reach nearly $8 million this year, up from less than $2 million in 2002.

EWSolutions also is working with the FBI to create data warehouses for counterterrorism efforts and criminal investigations.

To contact *EWSolutions* please email us at Info@EWSolutions.com or call 866.EWS.1100