

An Evaluation of milSuite for A9 and the AFMC Analysis Community

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The Studies and Analyses Division conducts and sponsors studies and research of significant materiel issues. Our goal is to provide analytic solutions for improved business practices. One way we accomplish this is to quantify the relationships between alternative resources and resultant support so that the Air Force Materiel Command can prioritize and justify its investment in various resources.

This report represents the views of the Studies and Analyses Division of the Directorate of Strategic Plans, Programs, and Analyses, but not necessarily those of Air Force Materiel Command.

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Table of Contents

1. Background.....	4
1.1. milBook.....	4
1.2. milWiki.....	4
1.3. milWire.....	4
1.4. milTube.....	5
2. Evaluation.....	5
2.1. Performing Work.....	5
2.1.1. Communication.....	5
2.1.2. Collaboration.....	6
2.1.3. Research.....	6
2.2. Sharing Work.....	6
2.2.1. AFMC Analysis Community.....	6
2.2.2. milWiki.....	7
3. Recommendation.....	7

1. Background

[milSuite](#) is a collection of online social business applications developed for the DoD by [MilTech Solutions](#), a Forward Operating Agency of the Army's Program Executive Office for Command, Control and Communications-Tactical (PEO C3T). It is comprised of four active sites: [milBook](#), [milWiki](#), [milWire](#), and [milTube](#). All four operate under secure CAC authentication and thus can facilitate up to UNCLASSIFIED//FOUO content.

1.1. milBook

milBook is a professional networking and collaboration tool modeled after popular sites [LinkedIn](#) and [Facebook](#) and built upon the [Jive SBS](#) platform. Users have profiles, the details of which are automatically populated from DEERS upon signing up with a CAC, and can 'follow' other users to keep track of their activities on the site. They can create and join groups organized around units, projects, events, topics of interest, communities, etc., which can range in privacy from Open, in which any user can join and non-members can view content and participate, to Unlisted, in which membership is by invitation only and the group is not discoverable by non-members.

Users can post many different kinds of content both in specific groups and in milBook Home (a common area accessible to all):

- Status updates
- Discussions
- Private messages
- Uploaded files
- Documents – HTML documents that allow for collaborative editing and version control
- Blog posts
- Polls
- Ideas – which can be voted up or down by other users
- Events
- Bookmarks

Regardless of content type, all posts include a comment section and buttons for other users to 'like' the content or share it to other locations.

1.2. milWiki

milWiki is a DoD-exclusive knowledge management tool modeled after [Wikipedia](#). It is actually developed on [MediaWiki](#), the same open source software powering Wikipedia, so it is essentially identical to Wikipedia in both form and function.

1.3. milWire

milWire is a microblogging platform built on open source [WordPress](#). While long-form personal blogging is a possibility on the site, milWire's focus is on short text updates sharing

existing content, especially news, including links to content elsewhere on milSuite or across the web. Users must organize each of their posts into one of the 15 standard milSuite categories (called “Topics” on milWire):

- Acquisition
- Arts & Music
- Business & Legal
- Civil Services
- Combat
- Communications
- Education & Training
- Engineering
- Intelligence
- Logistics
- Medical & Dental
- Operations
- Religion & Culture
- Science & Technology
- Security

Users can ‘plug into’ Topics or individual authors to see their posts in their homepage feed.

1.4. milTube

milTube is a video sharing platform modeled after [YouTube](#). It is primarily focused on training, news and event updates, senior leader messages, and information-based material from across the DoD. Users can comment on videos, download them, and embed them on other sites.

2. Evaluation

2.1. Performing Work

There are many ways that A9 *could* integrate milSuite into our regular workflow, but none that would particularly enhance it.

2.1.1. Communication

Posting in milBook could conceivably replace all internal email traffic. A9 could create a group for the whole division and one for each branch/team, and messages meant for those audiences could be posted in their respective groups. Project spaces could be created for each active project and could house discussion relevant to each. Status updates posted to these projects could also (more visibly) replace the A9 Journal. milBook can facilitate both personal and shared calendars. The Internet forum / message board-style discussions could be an asynchronous (and perhaps more time-efficient) alternative to meetings.

While the topical flow of this format of posting and commenting and discussion threads may be in many cases clearer to interpret than email threads (especially branching ones), switching methods may involve some degree of paradigm shift, from organizing communication around people to organizing it around contexts, and those individuals less versed in social media conventions may experience greater difficulty in adapting. Additionally, unless the rest of the Air Force adapts to this strategy as well, we would still need to use email and related systems a

fair amount, decreasing the benefit of leaving it for the purposes of internal communication. Overall, such a shift would likely not be worth the effort.

2.1.2. Collaboration

While milBook's HTML documents boast impressive editing, collaboration, and versioning features, they cannot be exported in any manner except as a poorly formatted PDF and so are effectively only useful remaining on the site. Administrative documentation would be fine, and perhaps more useful, in HTML form, but analysts work and create products in many other file formats. While other files can be uploaded and attached to a milBook post, they unfortunately cannot be edited or versioned there, and viewing capabilities are fairly limited. Thus SharePoint is a far superior collaboration tool. The milSuite team is working on a plugin to better integrate SharePoint with the platform, but until that happens, milBook is not a useful location to house work in progress.

2.1.3. Research

A9 members would, however, do well to integrate milSuite into their research process, utilizing the integrated milSearch function to search for relevant user-created content across all four milSuite sites to see if anyone else in the DoD is working on anything similar. This concept will be explored more fully in the following section.

2.2. Sharing Work

2.2.1. AFMC Analysis Community

The function of milSuite that is most worth A9 pursuing is sharing work. Due to our unique responsibility of organizing the AFMC Analysis Community, A9 would do well to create a special milBook group solely to be a repository for any work products that AFMC analysts would like to share with each other. To set an initial example, any time a member of A9 writes a report, gives a presentation, or otherwise creates analytical content up to an FOUO level that is appropriate for release to the DoD community, it could be uploaded to the group. This would give analysts across the command the chance to connect and see each other's work more frequently than the occasional forum or newsletter. It would also give readers/viewers an immediate means of contacting authors/presenters for further questions and place this discussion in a centralized location so everyone can benefit from the resulting conversation.

Additionally, as an alternative to simply uploading PowerPoint slides, analysts could record audio of presentations (such as those given in A9 staff meetings) and create videos pairing the audio with timed slides. This would be a trivial operation in any basic video editing program and thus would not drastically increase workload. These videos could then be uploaded to milTube and subsequently shared from there to the milBook group.

2.2.2. milWiki

While it may be beneficial to the DoD to some degree if A9 were to update milWiki articles as we learn things, it would likely not be helpful enough to justify our taking time to do so, as it would essentially consist of the administrative work of adapting our knowledge into milWiki's established encyclopedic format.

3. Recommendation

AFMC/A9 should create an AFMC Analysis Community milBook group, begin using it to share our office's work, and mention it in the next AFMC Analysis Community newsletter. A9 members should also consider integrating milSearch into their research process. Any other larger milSuite endeavors at this point are probably not worth the required effort.