

Human Factors

"It feels safe just knowing that I can be reached and that I can reach others. I can be there when I am needed even if I am onboard."



Social IT onboard

Social IT onboard

Social IT as a concept contains all the information technology that can be used to enhance the social wellbeing onboard. It can be news and entertainment, radio, telephony, SMS and internet.

Included in internet is e-mail, surfing and the possibility to download talking books and movies. While these possibilities to communicate are taken for granted ashore, the accessibility onboard has traditionally been very limited.

Humans have an inherent need to communicate in order to maintain a social network. The emotional disadvantages for the crew deriving from long periods of separation from family and friends are mitigated by the access to good communication.

Previous studies have shown that

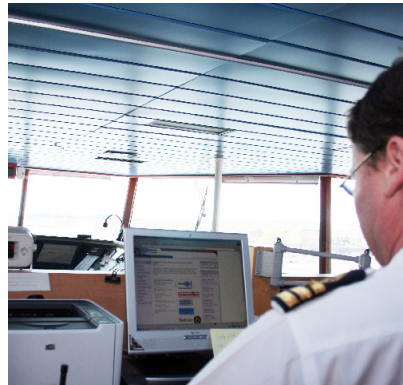
both job performance and efficiency are increased by the employers understanding of the importance of communication and the possibility to keep in touch with the ones at home. This can also lead to a reduced risk of accidents.

Satellite communication with permanent connection is a prerequisite for Social IT and today there are technical solutions that facilitates the co-existence of commercial use and the traffic originating from the Social IT. The traffic can be prioritised and bandwidth can be divided between commercial and private traffic. It is also possible to allocate the traffic over the twenty-four hours to prevent the Social IT to interfere with the commercial communication between the ship and the company.

"The social relations changed when everybody got TV in the cabin. Now, we meet in ships office or in the mess room to surf the internet and because of the slow connection everybody has time to talk to each other.."

Conclusions from the study

- The greatest need is for telephone and e-mail.
- Second, is the availability of local and international news.
- 90 per cent are positive towards Social IT in the age group up to 40 years
- Crew with a tour of duty of four weeks or longer are more positive towards Social IT than crew with shorter tours.
- Questions regarding the availability of telephone, e-mail and internet are common during job interviews.



Things to consider

- Consider which functions to offer the employees. Check with the company's IT department that the functions are doable in your environment.
- Arrange the computers to provide easy access but still with some privacy.
- Public computers without login is the easiest. It is a good idea to have the company's intranet as start page. The employees can use their private e-mail accounts (e.g. Hotmail or Yahoo).
- There should be a filter against unsuitable sites on internet that corresponds with the company's IT-policy.
- A safe and separate wireless network enables the use of private laptops, but it should be separated from the company's internal network.



"The possibility to read a local newspaper and fresh news makes my home country come a lot closer. I do not feel quite as far from home."



Technical aspects and the future

The technology enabling Social IT is readily available today but it is rather expensive. The difference is small irrespectively of whether the ship is trafficking Europe or world wide.

Due to competitive reasons the costs are expected to decrease but a permanent communication by VSAT will still be expensive. A better cost estimate is obtained when the crews wish and need for Social IT is combined with the commercial use for the operation of the vessel. There is a great potential for savings when it comes to the handling of documents and spares, safety and administration of personnel.

A telephone survey regarding Social IT onboard with 17 Swedish shipping companies in April, 2007 gave the following result:

Swedish shipowners on Social IT	Agree to 100 %	Agree to some extent	No opinion	Do not agree	Absolutely disagree
Social IT increases the crews comfort	93%	7%	0%	0%	0%
Social IT affects the safety onboard in a negative way	0%	36%	21%	14%	29%
Social IT affects the morale in a positive manner, especially on longer routes	57%	36%	7%	0%	0%
Social IT disturbs assignments onboard	0%	29%	29%	21%	21%
Seafarers should have the same access to social IT as everyone else	57%	29%	14%	0%	0%
Social IT increases the information overload of the crew	8%	50%	21%	21%	0%
Social IT is important when recruiting	71%	29%	0%	0%	0%

Generally speaking the shipping companies have a positive approach towards Social IT and see benefits for both company and crew.

This leaflet is based mainly on material from a bachelor's thesis written in 2006 at the Department of Shipping and Marine Technology at Chalmers University of Technology. Authors are the students Linda Johansson and Dick Östelius at the Degree course in Nautical Science. Margareta Lützhöft, PhD, supervised.

The study was realised on behalf of the Swedish Shipowners' Association with the aim of examining the usefulness and the need for Social IT on Swedish merchant vessels. The results include the thesis, the telephone survey, this leaflet and a movie. If you are interested in learning more, please visit <http://www.chalmers.se/smt> and go to the division of Ship Work Environment and Safety, Human Factors research group.

CHALMERS

DEPARTMENT OF SHIPPING AND MARINE TECHNOLOGY

Human Factors

Chalmers University of Technology

www.chalmers.se/smt

Human Factors/Lighthouse Rapportserie ISSN 1654-1821