



FEDERAL RETIREMENT THRIFT INVESTMENT BOARD
1250 H Street, NW Washington, DC 20005

May 8, 2009

MEMORANDUM FOR THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

FROM: Penny Moran, Director, Office of Participant Services
Renée Wilder, Director, Office of Research & Strategic Planning

SUBJECT: Redesign Effort for the Thrift Savings Plan Web Site

As you are aware, the Agency's staff has been working on a complete redesign of the Thrift Savings Plan Web site. This multi-year project is approaching the launch of the beta (or test) site at the end of September 2009. This memo updates you on the status of this project. At our May Board Meeting, we will also provide a brief presentation on the site.

Background:

Established in May 1997, the TSP Web site is our primary mechanism for communicating with our 4 million participants. Accessible 24 hours a day, seven days a week, the site provides participants around the world with information about the TSP in general and their accounts in particular. In addition, participants can manage their accounts – checking account balances, requesting investment changes, viewing their participant statements, and initiating loans and withdrawals – through the web site. Last year, we averaged 19 million page views per month for the entire site; 5 million views of the homepage and 4 million views of the account access page. To give you a feel for the usage, in 2008 93% of the 1.6 million interfund transfers and 94% of the 1.2 million contribution allocation requests were executed through the web site.

In 2006 and again in our 2008 Participant Surveys, the web site was cited as the main method by which participants accessed TSP account information. Further, 79% indicated satisfaction with their ability to access information about their accounts and the general plan features on the web site. Satisfaction with the site varied somewhat by retirement system with those participants covered by the Civil Service Retirement System indicating an 82% satisfaction rate; those covered by the Federal Employees Retirement System an 80% satisfaction rate; and uniformed services participants a 76% satisfaction rate. The fact that uniformed services participants tend to be younger, probably more web-savvy, and geographically dispersed was a consideration in our design model for the new site since this population has the most potential for future growth.

Although the content and functionality of the site have been expanded over the years, it has never had a major redesign. Given our dependence upon the web site, our goal is to provide best in class services to our participants. We approached the redesign effort seeking a more contemporary look and feel without sacrificing the simplicity of use which is crucial given our diverse population.

Phase I – Research and Ideas

In undertaking this endeavor, we contracted with Carney Inc. which partnered with Insight Systems Corporation to provide an initial analysis of the site and recommendations for the new design and functionality. Carney undertook an extensive review of the existing TSP web site (from both a program and systems perspective), the desires and recommendations of our client populations and best practices of other financial web sites. In addition to interviewing Agency staff, the Carney team conducted stakeholder meetings with agency and service personnel who represented not only our participant base but also the perspectives of the human resources and payroll office personnel who use the site. They also hosted an on-line survey soliciting input from our site's users and analyzed the more than 5,000 responses to questions regarding not only the look and feel of the site but also desired functionality and service improvements.

After extensive discussions and much interaction with the Agency staff to establish our priorities, the Carney Team presented a blueprint of recommendations, including an initial redesign of the site and also future enhancements which build on the new foundation. Because of the potential impact on the TSP Systems Modernization Project and the fact certain enhancements are more technologically challenging (including for example, the possibility of streaming video or podcasts, and online training for the agency and service representatives), we have deferred exploring some of these venues until after the new site is introduced and the system modernization project is completed. Based on these recommendations, we have begun the development phase of the project.

Phase II – From Ideas to Implementation

The development effort is a major undertaking by Agency and contractor staff and is the Agency's priority this year. Based on the recommendations of the Carney Team and in coordination with SERCO-NA, we have developed a plan of action that provides for a beta (or test) site followed by a launch of the entire site in January 2010. Critical to the implementation are the development of our new style guides, page designs or templates, and menu-driven navigation (the underpinnings of our new look and feel). Each page of our current web site (and

there are more than 300) is being cataloged and triaged given the new organization of the site, content is being rewritten and repositioned with the new structure, with new design elements incorporated. The navigation between the pages has been redone to be more user-friendly and where possible, we are leveraging the existing programming, particularly for participant account access functionality. However, both within the public web site and account access site, new pages providing dynamic information are being introduced, which require additional programming by the SERCO-NA team. In addition, the underlying technology and infrastructure have been evaluated and consideration given to what augmentation may be needed to support the more interactive nature of the redesign – a major challenge of our information technology staff both at the Agency and our SERCO-NA contractors.

Because of the dramatic changes to the site, the level of effort involved in redesign, and the infrastructure demands anticipated, we decided to launch a beta site before rolling out the entire web site. Comprised of selected pages and functionality from the various areas of the new web site, the beta site will give participants a chance to “test drive” the new site and provide feedback on its design and functionality. Based on their feedback, we will be able to adjust elements of the site prior to a launch – thereby increasing its acceptance by our population as a whole.

A Preview:

On May 18th, at the Board Meeting, we will present a cross section of the web site to highlight the changes that we will be making. Some of the more significant attributes of the redesign effort as demonstrated by three popular areas of the web site are discussed below:

The home page has been totally redesigned with a contemporary feel, a warm, inviting color scheme, and a navigational structure which is consistent throughout the web site. Instead of being organized along topical themes like our current site, the design includes a new login feature (which will facilitate access to personal account information); quick links to the most popular information on the site, a center page section highlighting Plan Participation (essentially our current features section), Planning and Tools (which contains our calculators and external links to retirement planning resources), Investment Funds, and Life Events.

The investment information section is undergoing a reorientation that reflects a more contemporary presentation of financial data. Currently, our fund information is presented via static fund sheets and a series of tables and graphs. In the new design, we are converting this information presented to a series of tabbed pages representing the key features of the fund, fund information, performance, and fund facts. The existing share price history and returns history tables/charts will be retained, but reformatted with a new look. The design also

allows for shared logic in the calculation of returns – an example of leveraging programming to maximize its utility. Future opportunities exist for more dynamic output, including interactive tables and chart views which can be developed in real-time. This redesign will present the data in a format that is more consistent with what participants may see in the private sector mutual fund world while retaining the flexibility to add new features.

The Account Access section is the heart of the web site for most participants. Our focus has been to expand the functionality of the site while building on familiar presentations and programming. Thus, although we have kept the functionality of the existing pages, they all have a new look. In some cases, transactions have been reconfigured to be more user friendly (as with our interfund transfers or contribution allocation requests). In other cases, we are moving to wizards – an interactive question and answer format similar to Turbo Tax – that will make requesting the transaction, e.g., a loan or withdrawal, more personal than trying to complete a form on line. From a security perspective, we are also introducing a section on “managing your profile” which combines the existing functionality for custom id, password, and access blocks with the future ability to integrate challenge questions and other security features.

SUMMARY:

Key to all of the design elements are the underlying fundamental goals of ease of use, contemporary styling, best practices, and interactivity or the engagement of the user. The new web site will be an evolving entity – future enhancements have already been identified as time, resources, and infrastructure become available. The approaches that we are embracing now will dramatically enhance our participants' web experience, attract new users and set the stage for future growth and expansion into new arenas of online communications and educational opportunities.

It's said that a picture is worth a 1,000 words. We'll illustrate that axiom at the May 18th Board meeting when we will present a few pages of our new TSP Web site to the Board of Directors.