REVIEW OF HTTP://ADMINS.TAMU.EDU

Background

In order to determine the effectiveness of http://admins.tamu.edu, IT staff from the office of the Vice President for Research and the Bush School of Government and Public Service were assigned to review the website and report our findings. The members of our group approached the task from several diverse perspectives based on current responsibilities, current site-specific setups, various experiences as IT professionals within the university itself, and general work backgrounds. To carry out our task, each individual member made their own survey of the site before meeting with his colleagues. After a general report was created, each member met together as one group to discuss and compare our findings. Not surprisingly, as the conversation moved to a more granular level of discussing content-specific information, it was apparent that there were various unique individual needs discovered; however, at a high-level there was significant overlap within the group of our individual conclusions.

Website Scope

We determined that for the website to be effective in assisting IT professionals within the Texas A&M community, it would need to provide both basic and detailed information for many various types of individuals, whose job functions include information technology tasks, including:

- New admins with no prior affiliation to TAMU and the TAMU network environment
- Current/existing admins with prior working knowledge of TAMU network environment
- “One-person” shops with no means for division of labor
- “Multi-person” shops with divided areas of speciality

General Conclusion

In general we found that the website was not effective in providing the information needed by the intended audience. No compelling reason such as ease of access to desired information, or quality of information was found to encourage use of the site. We believe that without such a reason, admins will continue to seek their information through other resources such as the pre-existing listservs, already established campus website, or a search engine like Google (i.e. using keywords “TAMU NIM,” “TAMU WPA Vista,” etc.).
Basic Corrective Recommendations

- Website information should be re-compiled from scratch rather than collected from old aggregate link sources to ensure the latest information is available.
- Wiki component should be included to allow IT professionals to build-out information ranging from resource allocation to hot-fixes for timely IT problems.

Operations & Design Recommendations

Admins.tamu.edu should be designed to funnel people to the information they are looking for instead of using a “shotgun” approach as exemplified by the current “how do I ____?” tab.

We recommend that:

- Information should be arranged by category for ease of access
  - Recommended categories:
    - Audience - This would be IT position (i.e. Server Administrators, Computer Managers, Webmasters, IT directors, etc). Any questions pertaining directly to more than one area should be listed in both areas.
    - Issue - This would be by question area (i.e. Net ID, Network Security, Server Management, etc). Any questions pertaining directly to more than one area should be listed in both areas.
- A search feature should be included in the design, perhaps using the university’s Google appliance
- If linking to someone else’s site (i.e. CIS), include first paragraph or description of linked data for a better idea of information available

Content Recommendations

During the course of our review, we found many issues with the information that was currently linked on the site, and that many times the information we were seeking appeared unavailable. Some of the content we would recommend adding or improving are:

- Glossary of acronyms (i.e. NIM, CIS, FAMIS, ITF, SSO, etc.)
- Admin Responsibility Clarification – as an admin (new/old), what is expected of me to be a good net citizen within the TAMU framework
  - This should include a page that covers the basics in narrative format
- We would like to see basic interpretations of the appropriate SAPs in language easily understood
- There is currently no mention of http://gateway.tamu.edu
- Howdy portal information. What is it? Who should use it?
- WebCT/eLearning information
- Account Services – What services do they provide?
- Would like to see information on how to have ports opened to multiple MACs
- NIM information
  - How to obtain access.
- Campus software licensing information
  - Software for university business (SELL)
  - Software for personal use (software.tamu.edu)
- There is currently no reference to EIS/SIMS/PeopleSoft
- Information on surplusing computer equipment with specific rules for different parts of campus (i.e. TAMU/TAES/TEES/TAEX)
- Easily accessible information on topology interruptions. (i.e. adding small hubs and unmanaged switches)
- Information on password strength with a possible app for testing strength
- More detailed information on why ISAAC is important and why it must be done
- Detailed information on campus back-up/data storage policies
- Physical and logical network maps
- Policies regarding DHCP
- Opening ports in the University’s firewall
  - How do I...? currently links to http://net.tamu.edu/network/port80.html instead of http://net.tamu.edu/network/firewall.html as it should
- Port scanning information
  - Tools Provided by CIS
  - Policies regarding port scanning
- VPN information
  - Who has access?
  - How to connect?
  - Where does it place users within the TAMU network?
- Information regarding switch configurations
  - MAC restrictions
  - VLANs
  - Other security settings
- Information regarding virtual machines
  - Requesting changes to MAC restrictions on switches
  - Does CIS want to be informed on whether a system is physical or virtual? (Should this information be entered in NIM?)
  - Are there any policies that define different rules for physical, virtual, or host systems?
- Vendor purchasing agreements and sales rep contact information (Dell A&M portal, A&M Apple Store, etc.)
- Policies regarding departmental ownership of network hardware (switches, wireless APs, routers, firewalls, etc.)
- Information regarding the university’s e-mail system
  - Mail-flow diagrams
  - Policies regarding departmental e-mail servers
  - Using smtp-relay.tamu.edu as a smart host
Inbound spam and virus scanning
Inbound and outbound rules regarding files size and type of attachments

Questions / Possible Issues

Some areas that we found to be of concern, but which did not necessarily fall within the scope of our review were:

- What individual(s)/department(s) is/are responsible for the content maintenance of the website?
- How are IT professionals within the university to be informed about the website and encouraged in its long-term use as an effective resource for discharging the duties effectively?
- Content Updates: We recommend at a minimum the site be updated quarterly to ensure the best available and timely information.