



Highlights of GIST22

Introduction

The past two years have brought a decade's worth of change to federal technology, from rapidly pivoting to and sustaining a remote, virtual-enabled workforce, to revitalizing customer experience at the heart of government's biggest missions – all while defending against increasingly sophisticated attacks and making big bets on next generation technologies like cloud, AI and automation. And these transformations are only going to continue for years to come.

On May 19, 2022 top decision-makers from the federal technology community gathered at the International Spy Museum in Washington DC to discuss the ongoing digital transformation across government, agencies' adoption of zero-trust security principles in line with the president's cyber executive order, how performance engineering leads to better customer service outcomes, and much more.

Hosted by Swish and FedScoop, the event attracted 246 attendees with over 70 government agencies represented. Here are some of the highlights.

Bob Costello, CIO of CISA, a Department of Homeland Security agency, launched GIST22 with a keynote address focused on 'Shaping the Next Generation.'

Costello: "Federal service executives are building the next generation and have to make sure that the people who come behind us have the resources they need, to be successful. We're seeing a need to be a lot more flexible and open to remote work. We also need to leverage emerging technologies and change how we engage with industry and improve collaboration by working together to achieve the same goal. We want to ensure we have the best cyber posture possible. To that end, I'm looking at ways to modernize and speed up the ATO process."

"Delivering Cybersecurity in a Perimeter-less World"

Billy Mitchell, VP of Content & Community, Scoop News Group and Editor in Chief, FedScoop: "There's a lot of guidance on Zero Trust over the last year or two. Different ways of thinking about cybersecurity. How do you separate the signal from the noise?"

436 Total Registrations

246 Attendees

70+ Agencies



Robert Wood, CISO, CMS: “There’s a framework that private industry developed called the Cyber Defense Matrix. Mapping to where solutions, technologies and vendors fit into your program and where you have existing capabilities. It helps you sort out who you need to engage with, where you have gaps, and where you don’t. We ask all technology partners to self-identify where they fall on this matrix and then we engage with them to determine if what they’re proposing fills a gap we have. That has really helped us get more systematic and intentional in our engagement.”

Jason Martin, Director of the Digital Capabilities and Security Center, DISA: “About two years ago, we were asked by the DoD CIO to create a reference architecture for zero trust. Working across the department, industry, and the federal government we nailed down what we thought a zero trust, reference architecture would look like. Working with our CTO and others, we identified what changes were needed to protect the Defense Information Systems and interoperate with our partners. Now, we’re building a pilot for things like SD-WAN, containerized computing, computing at the edge and SaaS solutions. Pulling together the people helped us build the strategy that we’re executing today.”

Mitchell: “The big theme we’re hearing at this conference is that you can’t do this alone. It requires industry partnership.”

Jason Prost, Head of Growth Technologies at Check Point: “As an industry partner to government what we’re trying to do at Checkpoint is change the way we talk to the market and the agencies. Suppliers like to talk about product but a zero trust architecture is a journey. A set of initiatives we coordinate with, align to and partner with government on. It’s about how we work together to make sure agencies are making the right decisions in the interest of our country, their mission, and their employees. We can’t just come to the table with architecture. That creates more noise.”

Mitchell: “I’m curious about the cultural resistance you face in adopting or implementing zero trust. I imagine there’s a bit of pushback because of the productivity the workforce wants to maintain. Zero trust might change that.”

Wood: “I think it’s a fallacy to say that this journey of zero trust is going to somehow impede productivity. Increased security improves user experience. And I think it is imperative that security teams in the federal government treat user experience as a first-class citizen and make the secure thing the easy thing.”

“Optimizing IT Operations, Productivity, and Decisions”

Sean Applegate, CTO, Swish: “As IT leaders, we want to deliver high quality services and enable faster decisions. How did your agency start their AIOps journey and what are some of the benefits you’ve realized?”



Paul Brubaker, Sr. Advisor for Strategic Initiatives, Department of Veterans Affairs: “People talk about artificial intelligence, but what they’re really talking about is how we process and derive value from data. AI requires a solid, high quality, high reliability, data environment. We’re focused on ensuring high quality data, but how do we process that data? How do we apply it to inform decision making and make employees’ lives easier? How do we take humans out of some of the decision-making and speed up the decision-making process?”

Liz Chirico, Acquisition Innovation Lead, Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Procurement: “Our team explores ways to apply technology to improve acquisition and contracting business processes. We’re looking at robotic process automation, artificial intelligence, natural language processing, optical character recognition, and tools like that, to make the workforce’s life easier. That could be populating data in a way to help make better decisions, taking a human out of the loop because the decision doesn’t require critical thinking, or freeing people up to make those critical thinking decisions.”

Bajinder Paul, Deputy CIO for USDA: “Our business components have become believers in using data to drive operational and mission critical decisions to the external stakeholders like farmers and loan programs. As a result, we have become proliferators of robotics process automations. We’ve deployed 70 plus bots automating our budget formulation process, budget execution, food safety mission, farmers program areas, and others. Looking at the number of hours and laborers saved, the data quality, and the decreased error rate in data validation, it’s brought significant optimization.”

Applegate: “From an industry perspective, what things have you observed that allow large organizations to leverage AI technologies to gain operational benefits?”

Dave Link, Founder and CEO of ScienceLogic: “Over the last decade we’ve seen the volume and velocity of data greatly increase. You have to realize that you can’t measure, manage or operate what you can’t see. Then you have to contextualize how the things you’re looking at across the different technology stacks work together in real time. And then you have to reason over that and work on automation, which is the third leg of the stool.”

Applegate: “There are different ways to look at the value of using AI operations. I’d like to hear what best practices have come out of your journey of building bots, finding the data, and making value of it.”

Chirico: “In January of 2020, we deployed our first acquisition bot, called DoRA (Determination of Responsibility Assistant) bot. There are hundreds of thousands of acquisition contracting processes required in accordance with federal acquisition regulations. DoRA is automating just one, but it was one that took about an hour and cut it down to five minutes. We have 8,000 users of DoRA in the Army and the Navy and Air Force are using it as well.”

“DoRA decreases touch time on some low value tasks. It’s going to websites, getting information, populating it into a user-friendly report and sending it back, increasing the user’s decision space. It’s also increasing compliance with less touch time, decreasing the number of oversight hours required for our business operations teams and reducing errors. It’s saving about 13 days a year for each specialist.”

Applegate: “I’d love to hear more about how you are dealing with some of these data challenges and how you’re using or plan to use AI.”

Brubaker: “We’ve been spearheading an effort to understand exactly what our current architecture looks like from a data perspective to get positive control over our data. If we’re going to realize the promise of improving life outcomes for our nation’s veterans we have to understand their journey. Where the touchpoints and data are that need to come together at the right time and place to allow us to better deliver services that drive those life outcomes.”

Applegate: “Let’s shift the conversation to things like culture and workforce development.”

Paul: “In the last two years, we’re using more AI applications, moving toward DevSecOps and cloud computing so new skillsets are required. It’s a key priority to provide the resources and training the workforce needs to adapt to emerging technologies and the challenges the pandemic brought.”

Applegate: “Can you contextualize the value, from a business and teamwork perspective, of pulling different IT data sets together, and what you see in customers when they’re able to break down silos and work together towards a single objective?”

Link: “It’s all about how you leverage the data to make better informed decisions. Data scientists tell us that 70% of their time daily is spent cleaning up data so they can use it intelligently. From an IT perspective, it’s less about monitoring the device or asset and more about the context of how it all comes together to deliver, with other technologies, a service and an outcome. I’ve seen that as the biggest catalyst to help teams work on things that matter now versus noise that takes time away from more important things.”

Michel Galbraith Chief Digital Innovation Officer, US Navy, delivered the afternoon keynote address, “Accelerating Navy’s IT Transformation with Cloud Services.”

“Navy is future-focused on our Joint Warfighting Cloud Capability (JWCC) contract. When I joined the Navy there were a lot of cloud strategies being published like JEDI which I was a big supporter of. The intent of JEDI was the same intent that’s behind JWCC. JWCC is bringing some critical capabilities to the DoD and every warfighter. It’s going to bring enterprise cloud capability at all three security classifications; unclassified, secret and top secret, and it’s going to push cloud power to the edge, from the U.S. to OCONUS. That tactical edge, is going to be the foundation for the department’s Joint All-Domain Command and Control (JADC2) initiative. If anyone listening today that can make that a reality, I ask you to do that for our warfighters.”

“Innovating Digital Services in the Cloud”

Wyatt Kash, SVP of Content Strategy, Scoop News Group: “Let’s talk about how and where the cloud has led to new and innovative digital outcomes within your organizations.”

Rob Brown, CTO, USCIS, DHS: “We’ve been in the cloud for close to a decade and 96% of our workload is not in a federal cloud, but a public cloud which is great because we can take advantage of all the latest services. One of the advantages we’ve seen is the ability to drive our own destiny in the realm of data. We’ve made a big leap forward in federating a lot of our data, and leveraging some embedded technologies to do more modern ETL type activities.”

Kash: “What are you seeing in ways the cloud is improving innovation or better outcomes?”

Danielle Metz, Chief IT Strategist, Office of the Secretary of Defense: “The cloud is revolutionizing how a workforce behaves and executes their mission, and how DoD delivers technology that is useful and at the speed of relevance for the warfighter who’s not in the U.S., but at the tactical edge where they need to have ubiquitous access to the power of compute.”



Kash: “Sanjay, talk to us about what’s you’re doing at the Department of Labor.”

Sanjay Koyani, CTO, Department of Labor: “We’re using the cloud to spin up technologies that enable us to use AI and other cognitive services to deliver greater value as part of our shared services. An example is form recognition with regards to investigative services that DoL does around labor violations. These come in as paper forms and take a lot of human hours to go through and assess.

We leveraged AI and automation in the cloud as a way to significantly decrease the time it takes to structure the forms and deliver greater value with faster processing and less errors.”

Kash: “What’s impressed you in the way that agencies have advanced digital services because of the cloud.”

McFate: “What happens with an on-prem, legacy application? Is it a good candidate for lift and shift to the cloud? If I can model that and figure out, that it is not a good candidate, why and what do I have to refactor? What issues are there with this legacy application? These answers mean I can have a much more successful move to the cloud. What I think customers are learning is that they have data to make predictive analysis. Also, how do I quantify end user experience and make sure that I continue to have that experience after I move this to the cloud?”

Kash: “How are you facilitating change in mindsets and the processes to promote innovation around digital services, especially when agencies are traditionally risk averse?”

Metz: “If you’re able to get technology and perfect your processes but don’t have a plan to enable your workforce, you’ve still failed. My favorite word, that some of the panelists have mentioned, is ‘democratize’ excellence. Democratize the ability for everyone in the department to have access and know how to use the technology that we are providing. “

Kash: “Rob, what else would you add about being a catalyst for changing mindsets and processes to make cloud work faster?”

Brown: “We’re putting technology into the hands of the people that know what they want to build as opposed to the old, methodology of ‘give me your requirements.’ Within two months, we opened the aperture in one area and have over 1,600 applications that have been developed to satisfy the needs of the organization. Some could be minute, like doing OCR on a PDF to derive sub content, another could be a large reservation system.”

Kash: “Sanjay, can you talk about what’s on your 18-month horizon in terms of cloud investment strategies and priorities.”



Koyani: “As we've started to move forward with emerging technology services and data services, we're finding a lot of people-process engagements having to take place. And that's much harder than the technology itself.”

Kash: “Where do you see the greatest investments being made?”

McFate: “I feel that the most investment is going to be on the adoption and culture side of things.”

Kash: “How about you, Danielle?”

Metz: “I think a lot of it's going to be focused on the digital workforce. At the DoD we have an aging workforce and a younger one coming in. How are you going to balance those gaps in terms of use of technology to further or execute the mission? There's going to be a lot of investment in this area.”

Brown: “I'll reemphasize getting the technology to the people that need it and can drive the mission faster. We're looking at making investments in low/no code platforms. And again, back to democratizing data, providing a safety net, and delivering ease of use.”

About Swish

Swish is a provider of technology solutions and engineering services to the U.S. Federal Government with a focus on high-quality outcomes for customers. Experienced and certified engineers research and evaluate the most innovative technologies on the market and then develop full life cycle solution offerings to ensure that customers realize maximum operational value. Since 2006, Swish has delivered high-performance solutions and services to the Federal Government market ensuring that customers' digital service capabilities, performance and security exceed expectations and requirements. Swish is a Service-Disabled, Veteran-Owned and HUBZone certified Small Business.

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