Faculty IT *Research*
HITS HOME *& Away*

By John Gregory

A naval officer spent four months at sea and, without access to the Internet or phones on board, communicated only by snail-mail with his wife and children. Ten years later when he went to sea, he could email home almost every day. He helped his wife buy a TV by surfing the Net for retail stores near their home, 11,000 miles from the ship.

A U.S. computer company hired workers in India to perform tasks for less pay than what its American workers earned. Executives signed a labor contract after meeting with several of the Indian workers, all of them sufficiently experienced. Months into the contract, the work was lagging far behind schedule. The executives flew to the scene and found to their surprise that the work was being performed by a different group of workers who lacked experience.

A wine connoisseur in Southern California had fits finding a local wine club to join. He knew only of clubs far from home. He finally discovered one in his neighborhood by browsing the bulletin board of a unique community intranet system.

Outsourcing computer jobs, dealing with military family separations, finding a wine club on an intranet— welcome to the wide world of research conducted by UC Irvine's Center for Research on Information Technology and Organizations. CRITO brings together scholars, many of whom are GSM faculty members, to study how technology changes organizations and society.

The Navy family, the intranet and two outsourcing studies—one on jobs overseas, the other on business process management—illustrate the variety and social impact of CRITO's research, and demonstrate how GSM faculty members are leading the IT revolution.

Email Battlefield: Military Families

Many members of the armed forces face prolonged separation from their families and a high level of job stress. The spouses of U.S. Navy personnel at sea are left behind to run the household and fulfill other family duties and events, such as birthdays. Human resources officers and recruiters from the Army, Marines, Air Force and Coast Guard worry as the Navy does that overseas duty creates hardships that cause personnel to leave the service early.

Is there any way to reduce the pains of family separation?

Marketing Professor Mary Gilly and colleagues reporting for duty, Sir. If their three-year study for the Navy on newer communications technologies bears out their current hypothesis, there could be a victory at sea as well as on land for all military branches. Their project, just underway and scheduled to finish in 2005, will examine the impact of email and the Internet on household decision-making, familial relationships and employee morale. The study is expected to benefit not only all military branches but also private enterprise—consulting companies, oil rig operators and others with widely dispersed employees or units.

Mary Gilly

"We believe email and other newer technologies offer absent spouses a quick and inexpensive way to remain a part of household decisions and family events," says Gilly. She and her research partners at Temple University and Cal State Long Beach expect the study will find that emails, e-greeting cards, photos and live web cams will strengthen family bonds in the military.

Gilly's team will conduct in-depth interviews with Navy personnel in San Diego, their families and support groups regarding decision-making by the absent spouses, attitudes