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Automation in the Civilian Agencies
Q&A with Mike Garris

Featuring:

Mike Garris,
Solutions Architect,
Red Hat

"Leadership throughout multiple agencies I have spoken with believe automation is an essential requirement for the way their agencies move forward in their digital transformation journey."

–Mike Garris, Solutions Architect, Red Hat

Contact:

For more information about Red Hat Products and Services, please contact:

Red Hat Solutions for Government
Toll-Free: (877) RHAT-GOV
877-742-8468
Main: (703) 871-8570
Fax: (703) 871-8585
Email: *redhat@carahsoft.com*

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What are two or three essential messages about automation that you would like to convey in this post?

IT automation is here to stay because of all the efficiencies and quality it provides. Many federal agencies have noticed this and are eager to reap the benefits automation has to offer."

Anyone can learn automation! You will be amazed by the capabilities and you might even have some fun while learning it!

How do civilian agency leaders feel about automation? What questions and/or concerns do they have?

Civilian agency leaders want to hear use cases and customer success stories which are extremely easy to produce because of the rapid pace people are adopting automation. It is allowing engineers and administrators to learn a new skill, which is highly coveted, and I believe most of us got into this field because of the constant need to expand our skillset and learn new technologies!

How does Ansible help with hybrid cloud management?

The ability to deploy, manage, and maintain infrastructure as code is paramount. Cloud providers know this and participate within the community to provide functionality and enhancements which are integrated into Ansible. The ability to ensure security compliance and updates are implemented before the provisioning process increases the speed of deployments and the reliability that everything is built the same way every time.

How does using Ansible enable the transformation to DevSecOps?

Ansible is most commonly thought of as an automation tool first. More than that though, it is a collaboration tool that can be used by multiple teams within every organization. It is helping break down the barriers, or silos as they are often called, by allowing everyone to write code in the same language and work together to solve problems across multiple platforms, environments, and application lifecycles.

Do you have a common use case that shows the value and ROI of Ansible?

Before coming to Red Hat, I was an Automation Team Lead for a government agency where I deployed the first Red Hat Ansible Tower for testing. We were so impressed with the capability, we expanded and moved to production automation. After almost 2 years of Ansible Tower running in production, we were averaging 5,000 automation jobs a month. Those jobs included provisioning, application deployments, configuration management, patching, security scanning and more! This wasn't limited to Linux either. We had a mix of Red Hat Enterprise Linux as well as Microsoft Windows and Ansible was able to seamlessly work between the different operating systems. The Automation Team that I led even included 2 Windows Engineers that were able to learn Ansible quickly and almost immediately start writing playbooks.

Where do you see the future of Ansible and automation?

More and more vendors are providing modules to integrate their products with Ansible. Coupled with the continual growth and backing from the open source community and the short learning curve for people looking to learn how to leverage Ansible, I don't see it slowing down in the least bit. I can only imagine future integrations, future enhancements, and more agencies deciding to use Ansible. I was also excited about the announcement made last year at Ansiblefest regarding Red Hat's move to the Ansible Automation Platform. An all-in-one solution providing all the great features you have come to expect from using Ansible while adding Automation Analytics and Automation Hub. Great additions for analyzing the work Ansible is performing in your environment and providing customers a way to consume content supported by Red Hat or certified partners.

What else should the civilian community know?

Start with small wins first. Identify a manual process that is constantly performed and find out if it can be automated. Leverage the open source community and the Red Hat Ansible Automation Hub because if there is a task/application within your environment that needs to be automated, chances are that the same task/application resides somewhere else and already has a playbook written for it.