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APPLICATION STUDY

A Healthy Workflow at BCBS Florida - RSA Streamlines Printing and Fulfillment

Investment protection and improved efficiency are critical but often contradictory, and even elusive goals in any data-intensive organization. Not so at Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Florida.

The Jacksonville-based health care insurer provides access to affordable health care to more than four million Floridians. BCBS Florida is committed to improving efficiencies so it can bolster services while reducing costs. One example of the firm's efforts to streamline its internal operations centers on its print/mail finishing function. The unit has achieved an enviable level of success in automating a manual work process, bolstering its print capabilities, and streamlining the way it handles data streams and the production of customer messages.

A Complete Solution

The challenge BCBS Florida faced was not uncommon in the health care insurance industry. The firm wanted to automate a manual fulfillment task that had become tedious, time-consuming, costly and error-prone. But it also wanted a comprehensive solution, one that was capable of aiding the processing of their other mailing applications, and one that bolstered the utilization and reliability of their substantial investment in laser printing resources.

"On the surface our need was quite simple," says John Cary, an IT technical architect with the firm who directed the improvement effort. "Our internal clients wanted to abandon the manual assembly of individual health care insurance contracts." Like all health care insurers, BCBS Florida is required to send detailed and personalized information to group members who can select customized coverage plans during the annual open enrollment period.

"Previously, we received a collection of pre-printed materials. We utilized as many as 50 workers to assemble customized packages by hand." Workers used a 'pick' list as a guide as they selected the documents and booklets by hand, placed the collection in a large envelope, and affixed a mailing label.

In-line Printing

"Our goal was to automate the process and print all of the information in-line," continues Cary, a 45-year IT veteran. "Before, we printed only a couple of pages for each mail piece and merged those by hand with the pre-printed booklets and other materials." But the individually-printed enrollment packages would now consist of 80 to 100 pages printed in-line, so the unit's print requirements would soon increase dramatically.

And BCBS Florida's existing print requirements are already substantial. The insurer typically processes about 8.3 million mail pieces per month, which involves printing 15 million feet of paper in 2-up fashion (or 30 million pages) on continuous feed equipment, and another six million images per month on cut sheet equipment. It is a rigorous production operation. The print/mail finishing center occupies about 76,000 sq. ft., runs 24 hours a day, five days a week, and employs 80 people who process about 180 different applications each month.

There is a wide variety in the size of mail pieces. The unit handles claims processing for members, doctors, hospitals and clinics. And it processes Medicare claims under contract with the Federal government for senior citizens in Florida and Connecticut, handling pieces that range from one page to packages for providers that contain several hundred pages.

"We needed to bolster our print capabilities," notes Cary, "and we didn't want just a new laser printer, or even several additional laser printers. We wanted a printing system that was flexible and would enable us to handle virtually any printing need we might encounter."

"QDirect was an excellent fit for us because it enables us to segment a single large, file into several, smaller and more easily-managed files, which we can then direct to whatever printers may be available."

John Cary
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*RSA was the right prescription
for a BCBS Florida!*

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BCBS Florida Equipment Operator Larry Pack and IT Architect John Cary

Greater Flexibility

There were four components to the desired level of flexibility: load balancing, automated reprinting, improved application testing, and assured quality. First, the solution had to enable load balancing to facilitate better productivity. "We didn't want to put all of our eggs into one basket and just buy another big printer," continues Cary. "We opted for three medium speed printers and wanted to disperse the work across all three. If one machine was down for service, we wanted to be able to shift any and all work to the other two." Cary also needed a fool-proof automated reprint capability. "If documents were damaged during the inserting process, we wanted to be able to initiate and complete the reprint in real-time and without any user involvement." Lastly, Cary wanted the solution to facilitate the prototyping of new mailing applications to further enhance productivity, and he wanted it to accommodate a 2-D barcode, to assure page-level integrity within each mail piece.

The solution came in the form of a coordinated suite of three software products – M.I.S. Print, IPDSPrint, and QDirect – from Rochester Software Associates, Inc. The RSA products transform legacy LCDS and IPDS data streams to industry standard PostScript allowing data center jobs to print on modern production printers. QDirect is a graphical (Java-based) tool to automate, manage, and redirect print jobs. QDirect allows for complete accounting of all jobs routed through it. These products combine to give BCBS Florida immense flexibility over the data streams and the ability to fully utilize all of its resources.

Efficient Segmenting

"In many instances we have very large files coming from the mainframe," explains Cary. "These files can have embedded resources, or resources loaded in the front of the file, which can make it difficult to segment the file for optimum productivity." The result? The single, large file is directed to a single printer, which works full tilt while other printers that may be available are sitting idle. "QDirect was an excellent fit for us because it enables us to segment a single large file into several, smaller, easily-managed files, which we can direct to any available printer. If a printer is down for maintenance, we can easily redirect the file to another printer and not lose any productivity. So much happens on a daily basis in a high-volume shop like ours that it is just essential to have an automated reprint capability," Cary continues. "If you have to wait and go back and reprint various pages after the fact, you encounter a substantial loss of productivity and introduce an unnecessary risk of error and misassembled mail pieces. Quality is always a concern in any manual operation. Our solution utilizes a 2-D barcode to assure page-level integrity throughout even the largest mail pieces."

Faster Prototyping

Application proto-typing and development is vastly improved as well. "When dealing with data streams that are vendor-specific, such as Xerox Metacode, the testing of new application can be difficult," he continues. "That's because users typically don't have access to our high-volume printers because they are being used to produce our daily work load. QDirect lets us define remote printers off our network, format the data into a PostScript file, and send it to a LAN printer that provides excellent print fidelity." So new customer-messaging applications can be refined and tested quickly and without interrupting production schedules or waiting for available print resources.

Of course, all of these productivity and quality benefits are substantial and worthwhile. But there's a remarkable cost savings as well. Cary estimates the cost to print and assemble the open enrollment packages using the manual process was \$6.00 per mailpiece including postage. The new software solution from RSA has helped lower that cost to \$4.00 a piece. In fact, Cary estimates the pay back from the investment – due to lower labor costs, increased productivity and better quality – was achieved in about six months. That's a prescription for a healthy workflow.