

AFFINA

The Customer Relationship Company



Key highlights

Industry/Market:

Customer Relationship Management

Applications/Solutions

- Reduce IT costs while maintaining enterprise applications
- Gain control over previously outsourced IT environment

Products/Services

- Sun Fire™ 280R Server
- Solaris™ Operating System
- Sun™ Mainframe Transaction Processing (Sun MTP) software
- Sun™ Mainframe Batch Manager (Sun MBM) software
- Sun Services Mainframe Application Rehosting Project Service

Key Business Challenges

- Reduce cost of IT programs by eliminating costly mainframe
- Improve communications among disparate IT applications on various platforms
- Improve reliability by operating IT system in-house

Key Business Results

- Reduced annual IT expenditures by \$100,000 per month
- In-house IT system lets AFFINA quickly respond to changing customer needs
- Improved information resource integration across platforms
- Batch processing time reduced by 30 percent
- Staffing needs reduced by 75 percent

“By using Sun to move our applications from the mainframe environment, we significantly reduced costs and gained control over the reliability of our IT environment.” – Ron Nelson, Technical Manager, Information Technologies, AFFINA

AFFINA manages almost 25 million inquiries from consumers each year, handling inbound phone, Internet and white mail inquiries on behalf of about 100 of the worlds most highly-recognized companies and brands plus federal government agencies. Through seven contact centers across North America, AFFINA delivers enhanced sales, maximized ROI and increased customer loyalty and retention through carefully managed customer interactions.

Naturally, to successfully handle thousands of transactions each day, AFFINA cannot afford to have a computer system go down unexpectedly. So AFFINA must have a reliable IT system to handle and route call traffic and other data sources without fail. After 25 years of relying on a mainframe-based system, AFFINA has moved into its next generation of service to customers on open systems, and selected a Sun Fire™ 280R server as the foundation for its important inbound customer relationship management application. The company migrated its trusted and essential applications easily and efficiently from the CICS mainframe platform to open systems using Sun™ Mainframe Transaction Processing (Sun MTP) software and Sun™ Batch Manager (Sun MBM) software.

By moving to an open systems platform from the mainframe environment, AFFINA is saving 25 percent in real costs. In addition, the company now has total control over its IT environment, allowing rapid changes to applications to respond to emerging business needs.

Sophisticated Marketing Services Require IT Performance and Reliability

AFFINA’s service offerings include outsourced contact center, mail and fulfillment, data analysis, and customer interaction consulting.

AFFINA has been maximizing the customer interactions of its clients for the past 30 years. Over three decades, AFFINA has been successful by evolving ahead of its clients’ needs and expectations. Clients rely on AFFINA as their strategic marketing partner to provide technical support, order taking, relay company and product information, outlet referrals, complaint and crisis/recall management, and promotional campaign support.

Mainframe Environment Becomes Too Costly, Too Complex

With the addition of new platforms and applications to the mainframe system over the years, AFFINA reasoned it would be wise to close down its internal CICS mainframe and move to an outsourced mainframe. Doing so would help AFFINA manage the complexities of mainframe communication with its other applications and lower the high cost of running its own MVS mainframe, which required nine dedicated systems programmers. Ron Nelson, technical manager, Information Technologies at AFFINA, noted that by 1998, the company was using several different applications, including IBM’s Lotus Notes, Wilke/Thorton’s CRS and Graham Technology’s GT-X, which all needed to communicate with the mainframe applications.

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However, after the move to an outsourced mainframe, AFFINA found that the same issues remained. It was still a complex matter for the mainframe to communicate with the other systems—and still way too costly. In addition, the outsourcing company wanted to take the system offline for extended periods for maintenance. Nelson explained that AFFINA's around-the-clock business could not be unsupported during those times. Because so many issues remained, AFFINA quickly decided that the outsourced mainframe was not the final answer and another solution was needed.

AFFINA's Solution: Open Systems and CICS Application Migration

The company studied several possible solutions, including another CICS mainframe and a smaller system. AFFINA even considered eliminating a mainframe altogether, but didn't see how it could abandon that platform because the company had amassed an extensive number of valuable CICS applications that needed to be preserved.

In its search for a better, less costly solution, AFFINA learned of Sun Mainframe Transaction Processing (Sun MTP) software, which has been used to successfully migrate mission-critical enterprise applications from mainframe systems to open, affordable UNIX systems at more than 600 customer sites worldwide.

AFFINA first decided to use the Sun software to develop just a backup system for AFFINA's outsourced IBM mainframe that had the MVS/ESA operating system, CICS 4.1 transaction processor, and JES2 batch environment. This backup system would be used only if the outsourced application happened to go down.

AFFINA first had to migrate the mainframe applications to the new open systems system. The contact center application is complex, with 300 online COBOL programs, 1,700 batch COBOL programs, 1,000 files, and 32,000 screens. The application performs nearly one million transactions per day. When a consumer calls a toll-free number, the company's Automatic Call Distributor sends the call directly to a customer service representative (CSR) trained on that client's customer service program.

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— Ron Nelson, Technical Manager, Information Technologies, AFFINA

Consumer inquiry calls handled by CSRs involve every question or comment imaginable, so that even with extensive training, CSRs need access to scripts to help answer the varied inquiries. Scripts are dynamic, continually changing, and extremely sophisticated. In fact, AFFINA employs four people dedicated solely to generating new scripts from client change orders. With Sun, scripts are placed in a VSAM file, which means no compiling is required. This allows AFFINA to change scripts within minutes or hours of a client change request, giving CSRs access to the most up-to-date information.

Backup Project is a Success with Sun Mainframe Rehosting Solutions

In spite of the complexity and size of the applications, Sun MTP and Sun MBM were used to migrate them to the new platform in just nine months. Because of the success with



this initial backup project, AFFINA decided to move the entire application off the outsourced mainframe and onto the UNIX® system. AFFINA and Sun Services worked together as a unified team to realize both the successful backup and the application rehost solutions.

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Nelson considers the move to open systems as the best possible solution. It provides a lower cost and more reliable IT system, and did not involve the high risk of rewriting tried and true applications. Also, it allowed AFFINA to control its IT environment, something it could not do with an outsourced system.

As a result of the migration, AFFINA has improved resource and information integration across platforms and reduced batch time processing by 30 percent.

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