Central States Health & Life Co. of Omaha (CSO)

Key highlights

Industry/Market:

Insurance

Products/Services

- Sun Mainframe Transaction Processing (MTP) software
- Sun Mainframe Batch Manager (MBM) software
- Sun Fire ™ V880 server
- Sun Services Mainframe Application Rehost Technology and Knowledge Transfer service

Key Business Results

- Sun Mainframe Transaction Processing (MTP) software and Sun Mainframe Batch Manager (MBM) software allowed CSO to transition to the open UNIX ® environment with minimal rewriting or reengineering of mainframe applications – and with the potential for significant costs savings
- Since applications run exactly as they did on the mainframe, the transition required no training of users, thus saving CSO money
- Sun Services staff gave customized three-week training courses on the Sun MTP/MBM products, thereby quickly and thoroughly bringing CSO 's staff up-to-speed
- Fast, reliable, highly available, and scalable IT solutions provided for future growth plans

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Sun Helps Insurance Company Migrate Smoothly, Quickly, and Seamlessly to UNIX® Environment

Insurance companies have long used traditional data centers quite reliably and consistently to provide mission-critical data batch servicing and time-sharing. However, due to the Internet, rapid change in technology, and competition, IT organizations now face the ongoing challenges of providing highly available and flexible systems while providing more cost-effective IT infrastructures and reducing operational costs. This is particularly challenging for data centers that depend on mainframes.

Founded in 1932, Central States Health & Life Co. of Omaha (CSO) is organized into two marketing divisions: Agency and Credit. The Agency Division's products include nursing facility care, Medicare supplement, cancer and specified disease, critical illness, life and other products. The Credit Division is focused on Credit life and disability products. Traditionally both Agency and Credit shared the expense of maintaining a mainframe-based infrastructure. When the Agency Division, which supported the majority of the mainframe cost, decided to move off the mainframe, the Credit Division was left wondering what options it had.

CSO's Credit Division considered options such as a smaller mainframe, application outsourcing, or moving away from mainframes. After careful analysis, CSO's Credit Division decided to test and evaluate the potential success of migrating the applications to a UNIX environment.

Reusing Mainframe Programs Saves Time in Transition

With the arrival of open systems that offer better performance and a lower cost of operation, CSO's Credit Division knew it was important to integrate new applications with its existing mainframe applications, while leveraging its original investment in applications that had been developed on the mainframe over many years. So it began the process of migrating the applications from the mainframe with VSAM, and CICS/Cobol to the Sun Fire™ V880 server. CSO used the Sun MainFrame Transaction Processing (MTP) software and Sun Mainframe Batch Manager (MBM) software to migrate 220 online programs and 350 batch programs.

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The migration project also involved 90 VSAM files, 150 screens, 45 batch jobs, and 220 transactions to support the 50-60 users. "The transition went very well," says Eric Kennedy, CIO at Central States of Omaha. "This was especially true for our users as they did not need new training. The transition was seamless to them."

A key element in this accomplishment was the fact that Sun Mainframe Transaction Processing (MTP) software has been used to successfully migrate mission-critical applications from mainframe systems to open, affordable UNIX systems at more than 600 customer sites worldwide. The crucial highlights of this software are that it provides a CICS compatible environment on UNIX environments, and it runs existing CICS applications largely unchanged. In addition, Sun MTP software provides mainframe-equivalent (or better) performance and reliability. Thus, this software helps companies keep the value of proven CICS based applications, while dramatically reducing the costs associated with mainframes.

Another critical advantage includes the fact that this software migrates the applications without rewriting or reengineering them. Thus, the business's reuse of its mainframe applications makes the migration quick, inexpensive, and seamless to users. "We were able to migrate our existing applications relatively quickly and painlessly since we didn't need to rewrite them," adds Kennedy. "Performance is better, and we have the ability to more completely separate our two divisions, which wasn't possible on the mainframe."

Sun Provides Faster Performance, Potential Cost Savings and More

There are several key benefits that CSO expects to reap in this transition to the UNIX environment. "The Sun environment is very much like the mainframe environment – that is multi processing and multi-user oriented," says Paul McGrath, System Analyst at CSO.

In addition, CSO users have experienced faster batch-processing times, and quicker on-line response. During its testing period, CSO users were pleasantly surprised at how quickly the Sun responded. "The users were extremely pleased with the speed of the Sun Fire V880 server and said the faster performance was clearly noticeable," adds McGrath. "Being a mainframe developer myself, I was skeptical from the beginning, but once I saw our system running as fast and seamless as it was on the UNIX environment, I became a believer."

Another expected benefit includes cost savings. As Kennedy explains, "We believe we're saving approximately 25 percent when compared to the Credit Division's charge for our shared mainframe. Additionally, we've projected that our costs are between 20 and 35 percent of the expense the Credit Division would incur if running their own mainframe."

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Sun's Support Staff Gets High Marks

"The Sun Support staff in Phoenix were very supportive," says McGrath. "We were running a parallel dry run conversion over the holidays, and they were there late at night, helping me out by the speaker phone." Kennedy agrees that excellent support was a key factor in making the transition to the open UNIX environment very smooth.

Another important factor was the three-week custom training/consulting session, hosted by Sun Services, that McGrath attended. This training focused on applying the methodology/tools to representative key CSO application components.

Prior to the beginning of their training, CSO sent its server to the training site. "Working on our own server was so beneficial because we could actually build the test environment for our own product during the training class," notes McGrath. "Therefore, it was real time training, and the staff helped us build our customized environment." This real time training included compiling CSO's own programs, and assembling its own maps. "It was great because we were using the system and our own data that we were very familiar with," observes McGrath.

The first week covered how to install and administer the MTP and MBM software. During the second week of training CSO learned how to convert its on-line programs to the MTP environment. During this week CSO began the process of converting its on-line programs. The final week of training covered Sun's MBM system, which was also customized to CSO's specific requirements. "We converted our own JCLs into their macros, and converted our files into their file formats. We actually ran the jobs and looked at reports that we were familiar with," continues McGrath. "As we had certain expectations about the results, we could look at the results and determine whether the tests were done right. This was much better than looking at a test script."

Sun Helps Set Up Company for Now and the Future

Sun Mainframe Transaction Processing software and Sun Mainframe Batch Manager software are the cornerstone for enterprise value, providing middleware solutions supporting business-critical applications. Now businesses have a cost-effective solution that reuses existing investments and provides mainframe-equivalent (or better) performance and reliability, while significantly reducing their annual IT costs for hardware, software, and support.

Cost-effectively working with mainframe applications while providing lower operational costs, increased flexibility, and faster performance are golden words to anyone in IT organizations.

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