PPP Healthcare,
Tunbridge Wells, England

European Excellence Award: Workflow, Silver

Executive Summary

To unravel the mystery of business process automation, take 101 different document types, distribute around three LANs, one WAN and 640 desks. Tthrow in a jumble of hardware and software, superfast state-of-the-art scanners, juke boxes and the latest in workflow technology, whiz together with a legacy mainframe system and it is possible to begin.

It is true that not every business process automation program will take this mix of new and used IT as its infrastructure. However, these are the raw ingredients exploited to great effect by England's PPP healthcare. PPP healthcare has implemented a workflow strategy, which is already delivering dividends by cutting out 'red tape' and increasing staff productivity. PPP healthcare's mission is to supply its 2.3 million customers with the ultimate in service. In fact, so successful has its implementation been, that it now claims to have an infrastructure that is increasing customer loyalty with visible improvements in service.

Customer Satisfaction is Key

PPP healthcare's brand awareness is very important to the Company and its future growth. It has steadfastly developed and activated high-profile marketing programs to promote its caring and personal approach, which it claims to provide every step of the way. To this end PPP healthcare has introduced a range of products and services to satisfy a myriad of healthcare needs, but products alone do not build a consistent market image.

Mike Tinsley, business project manager, planning and development division at PPP healthcare explained "We can all design and sell new products-but the reality is that people buy, and buy again, based on service, quality and satisfaction. It is the service in our business that will make or break customer loyalty."

This in some way explains why PPP healthcare has invested heavily in an IT infrastructure, which it expects to deliver on its brand promises.

"The technology we have in place today enables us to provide the best customer service in the business, in that we can respond to a customer inquiry instantly," he continued.

To reach the point whereby PPP healthcare can guarantee the best available service, it looked very closely at its customer support and

response processes. At this time it recognized that workflow technology was key to overall improvements. PPP healthcare's process involves a large variety of inbound and outbound documents from various sources, such as general correspondence, claims, hospital and consultant/specialist provider accounts being merged into a single case file. Previously, this resulted in a lot of paper work, handling and filing. Following information collation and gathering, the file was passed to the responsible personal adviser for action. Once a file was closed, and a customer claim dealt with, it was archived on microfiche. The whole process was paper, people and time-intensive, with many opportunities for human error. Moreover, it required a large number of staff for the microfiche handling alone.

An Integrated Process

Having examined the process, PPP healthcare established that the new system needed to remove all opportunity for error and allow for future developments and growth. Consequently, the decision was taken to totally integrate the process from start to finish. The new system scans, indexes, merges legacy and current data on the fly, and delivers information automatically to the desktop of the designated personal adviser.

It goes a stage further than this; all staff has instant access to all information and any member of the team can provide a customer with exact, up-to-the-minute details on the status of his or her claim.

"This really is the beauty of the system, all documents are electronically available, managed, merged and produced out of the Mosaix workflow system which has been our route to integration on the desktop," Tinsley added.

Technology Requirements

PPP healthcare selected Mosaix as its workflow/business process environment, in late 1993 based on its open architecture, recognizing that total system integration on the desktop was imperative to the level of customer care and service PPP healthcare was determined to achieve. The whole system is designed to serve the needs of PPP Healthcare's three main offices in and around Tunbridge Wells, Kent and Eastbourne, Sussex. It comprises two Novell Local Area Networks connecting 16 NT Compaq servers and AST, WindowsTM clients.

There are two Kodak scanners on the third LAN taking care of incoming post and two Hewlett-Packard jukeboxes for optical disk storage and archiving. A Wide Area Network connects the LANs and users to the mainframe, which holds valuable customer legacy data. Currently scanning takes care of 10,000 documents per day, although when the system is

running to full capacity, Tinsley expects to consume fully 30,000 documents into the workflow system daily.

"There are literally too many document types to mention, they could be anything from a birth certificate through to handwritten bills sent in by specialist providers-but whatever the content or type of document they will need to be assigned and managed," added Tinsley.

The Mosaix system integrates all components onto the desktop, merging, tracking and delivering information no matter its origin, for example, scanned documents or those generated internally by accounting or word processing applications. The workflow system also interacts with the mainframe, retrieving legacy data that resides on the Amdahl/MVS and here, Mosaix integrates with the terminal emulation software, Attachmate.

"The system represents the first true client server environment the Company has ever had; it required many changes in the IT department. We needed new skills for support and discovered that managing a client server environment is much more complex than managing a mainframe," said Tinsley.

Implementation

In the early stages of its implementation and in addition to the network issues, PPP healthcare encountered many unforeseen difficulties. For example, every time there was a technical problem, it had to be isolated so that the right supplier could be contacted for support. In addition to orchestrating the installation and system integration, PPP healthcare found that it had to overcome a massive learning curve.

"We became very frustrated, because the technology is much younger than, say the mainframe.. While PPP healthcare developed new personnel skills and recruited new staff, we quickly identified that the tools for managing the client server system and network lacked maturity in areas such as system performance monitoring and diagnostics," said Tinsley.

Having surmounted the technical problems and reconciled its IT skill base, PPP healthcare had yet another hurdle to jump.

"The biggest challenge came from a completely unexpected quarter. You see, we had previously taken telephone inquiries from customers and responded by calling them back. From our point of view, it is much more productive and service oriented to instantly access information while the caller is on the line. But we did not consider the 30 seconds the caller may have to wait while we retrieve the customer file. Thirty seconds is obviously a great improvement over, perhaps, half a day but when you are waiting on the end of a phone it can seem a long time," said Tinsley.

It is hard to imagine the frustration of PPP healthcare when it discovered that it had successfully set up and invested in a system that the customer perceived to be slow-even though it was actually delivering a much improved service. PPP healthcare understood that it had a weak link in its system. And the culprit was the highly visible personal computer. PPP healthcare's staff was equipped with 486-based PCs.

"By switching the 486s to Pentium-based technology we immediately improved the retrieval times—the result is the customer perceives instant response times," Tinsley explained.

Indeed, PPP healthcare's personal advisers wait no more than nine seconds to retrieve every relevant item of information. Besides upgrading its PCs, PPP Healthcare found that it could improve system performance by migrating its database to NT SQL Server.

The System's Impact

Today, Mosaix's workflow system is available to 300 PPP healthcare staff, with plans to further expand the system, making it the working environment for all of PPP healthcare's 640 staff who deal with customers by the middle of 1996. However, the Company is already benefiting from 10 percent gains in total productivity and is using the system as a marketing tool.

"We know that our recent promotional campaigns and revamped branding is educating the market and generating more business. However, the workflow system is proving an excellent selling point for corporate private healthcare buyers," said Tinsley.

Potential corporate customers are invariably shown a demonstration of the Mosaix business process automation system, thus proving PPP healthcare's commitment to service and clearly illustrating its ability to deliver against its brand promise.

By using Mosaix's open architecture to integrate the desktop across a sophisticated network environment, PPP healthcare can manage its cocktail of complex and varied documents within a single workflow solution. In doing so, PPP healthcare has unraveled the mystery of business process automation to benefit its customers, its staff and ultimately contribute to its future growth.