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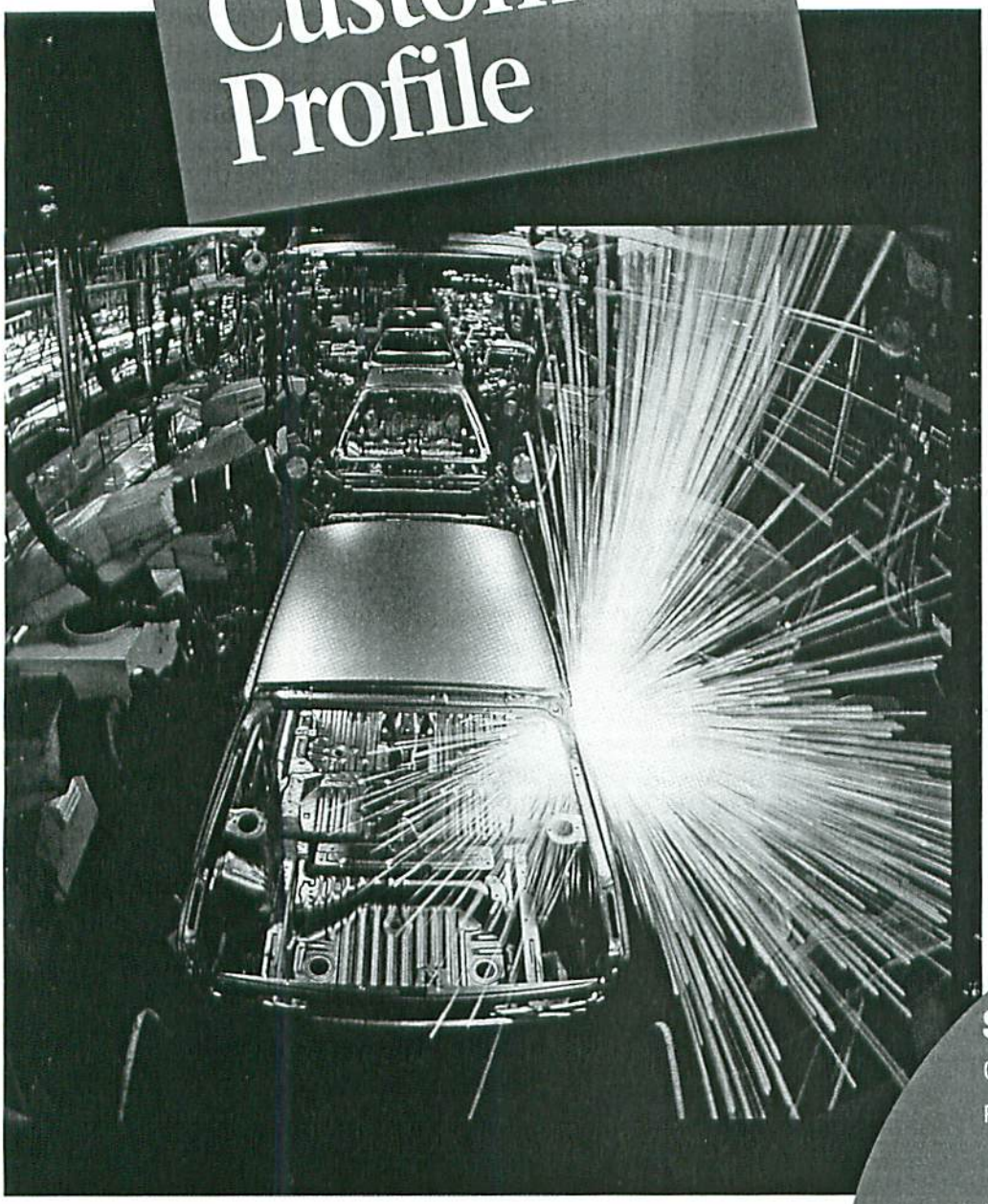

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Mazda of North America Streamlines Data Management And Reporting With FOCUS

Corporate leaders have issued a series of challenges to IS professionals: Find new ways to process information that empower employees; minimize dependency on hardware and software vendors; and, most importantly, reduce the cost of developing and maintaining systems.

These directives were paramount to software engineers at Mazda of North America's Systems Services (MSS) in Flat Rock, Michigan. They needed a better way to maintain service part information for American-made Mazda trucks and decided FOCUS met those challenges and it promised to deliver much more.

"FOCUS offers a cohesive development environment that is easy to use," says Nikki Acosta, an analyst with Mazda Systems Services. "Furthermore, FOCUS applications are highly portable, which

Snapshot

Organization: **Mazda of North America**

Profile: **Wholesale supplier of parts for distributors throughout the United States.**

Headquarters: **Flat Rock, Michigan**

Objectives: **Provide an integrated database and reporting system that gives accurate parts information to distributors and dealers.**

Why FOCUS: **Portability, strong database and reporting tools for client/server, host based, or mixed environments.**

Results: **Distributors and dealers now receive the right parts at the right time and give customers the latest in engineering improvements.**

"FOCUS' reporting tools have dramatically and consistently helped us improve the quality of the information we give to our distributors who depend on it."

increases our flexibility when we adopt new platforms and processors in the future."

Select Mazda vehicles have been built by Ford Motor Company in the US since the early 1990s. Although the vehicles were manufactured by Ford, Mazda of Japan still maintained all the parts information. This made it difficult for workers at Mazda's Parts and Accessories Division, which serves as the wholesale supplier of parts for Mazda distributors throughout North America, to keep their part numbers and descriptions up to date.

"Whenever parts analysts needed to order extra parts, they confronted a language barrier as well as a 14-hour time difference," Acosta explains. "Getting problems resolved and questions answered was both difficult and time consuming."

When Ford agreed to take on the manufacturing of a new line of Mazda trucks early last year, management at Mazda's Japanese headquarters and the Parts and Accessories Division in Flat Rock decided it was time to set up a system that could maintain parts information locally.

In Search of a Solution

"Our job is to convert data from our parts suppliers into usable data for our distributors," says Gregg Thacker, Assistant Manager of Engineering Information and Publications, Parts and Accessories Division. "We have to take part numbers and raw materials from suppliers (primarily the Ford Motor Company) and convert them into a format that is suitable for our Mazda parts catalogues. This includes establishing part numbers and writing descriptions based on the suppliers' raw data while keeping within Mazda's standards."

"At first we hoped to find an off-the-shelf solution," he recalls, "but none of the packaged software had the flexibility we were looking for."

Before long, the writing on the wall was clear; the best course would be to build the system they required from scratch. An in-depth study of the application development market concluded FOCUS was the best product for the job.

"FOCUS appeared to have all the components we were looking for, along with a wide range of productivity tools," Acosta explains. "We had very specific needs for screen design, database management, and reporting. It made sense to have all those things in one integrated environment. We also chose FOCUS for its ability to easily transfer data and integrate with other systems, in Japan and elsewhere. Several developers in Mazda Systems Services already knew about FOCUS and recommended it for the project."

"It is easy to find people with FOCUS skills," Acosta continues, "so we knew we wouldn't be leaving behind a legacy that was difficult to maintain. As it turns out, users can perform much of the maintenance themselves, something we would never have achieved with COBOL."

Building the Service Parts Information System

Developers built the new application, dubbed the Service Parts Information System (SPIF). Unlike many of the newer 4GL tools on the market, which are designed only for graphically oriented client/server development, FOCUS can develop applications for client/server, host-based, and mixed environments.

"What I really like about FOCUS is the speed with which you can get a system up and running," Acosta says. "The entire system was built in FOCUS and uses the FOCUS

database. Once we had a prototype, we let the users try it out with a test database, then went back and added more features."

In the future, developers plan to take advantage of a new component of mainframe FOCUS, HiperFOCUS, which greatly enhances CPU performance by using external system sorts and processor storage to reduce application I/O.

"FOCUS' reporting tools have dramatically and consistently helped us improve the quality of the information we give to our distributors who depend on it," Thacker says. "If a dealer is looking for a specific part or group of parts, our users can quickly pull together a customized report and get that information to them."

How it Works

After its completion on the mainframe, SPIF was made available to the Parts and Accessories division in Flat Rock. Now, instead of querying Japan for updates to the parts database, data is fed directly from Ford in large flat files each night.

As part of the nightly run, FOCUS reports are automatically created for parts analysts to tell them which Ford part numbers they are responsible for from the previous night's download. First, a Ford database is created from the raw ASCII data. Then as Mazda part numbers and descriptions are added, data is moved into the Service Parts Information System database and simultaneously deleted from the Ford database.

"We take all the Ford information and create Mazda part numbers, descriptions, and about twenty other required data elements in FOCUS," Thacker says. "As updates to the data are sent from Ford, a compare function verifies it for accuracy against existing Mazda parts data before updating the Mazda records."

Analysts make sure that the part numbers from Ford match the actual part numbers on the vehicles, confirm where each part is used on the vehicle, and verify that the part is the most current one.

"It is all well controlled and negotiated," he adds. "We edit it, check for errors, and send any erroneous information back for confirmation before adding it to the Mazda parts database."

Now, because parts information is continually updated, distributors and dealers throughout North America are assured of receiving the right parts at the right time, and that those parts reflect the latest engineering improvements. If discrepancies arise, they can be quickly resolved with the new system.

"We have achieved our goals of flexibility and efficiency," Acosta concludes. "Since its inception as a tracking system for one vehicle, we have added another vehicle and are on the verge of adding a third. The database has doubled in size, yet the performance is still excellent."

Looking Ahead

Eventually, the Service Parts Information System may be ported to a LAN where FOCUS for Windows will be used to take better advantage of an MS Windows environment.

"It looks promising that we will be able to downsize the application virtually intact," Acosta says. "We've found that FOCUS applications can be ported from one platform to another with little or no modification. This will enable us to offload mainframe data and give remote users better response time and more local control."

Other developers at Mazda say FOCUS is one of the most flexible 4GLs on the market, and they look forward to applying its robust capabilities to new Windows applications that may eventually be used on departmental LANs. But for now, Mazda management and program developers are happy with the results they have achieved using mainframe FOCUS. "We had less than a year to create the system," Acosta says, reflecting on the recent flurry of activity. "If we had used any other language, I know it would have taken us a lot longer than planned." ❖

"We've found that FOCUS applications can be ported from one platform to another with little or no modification. This will enable us to offload mainframe data and give remote users better response time and more local control."

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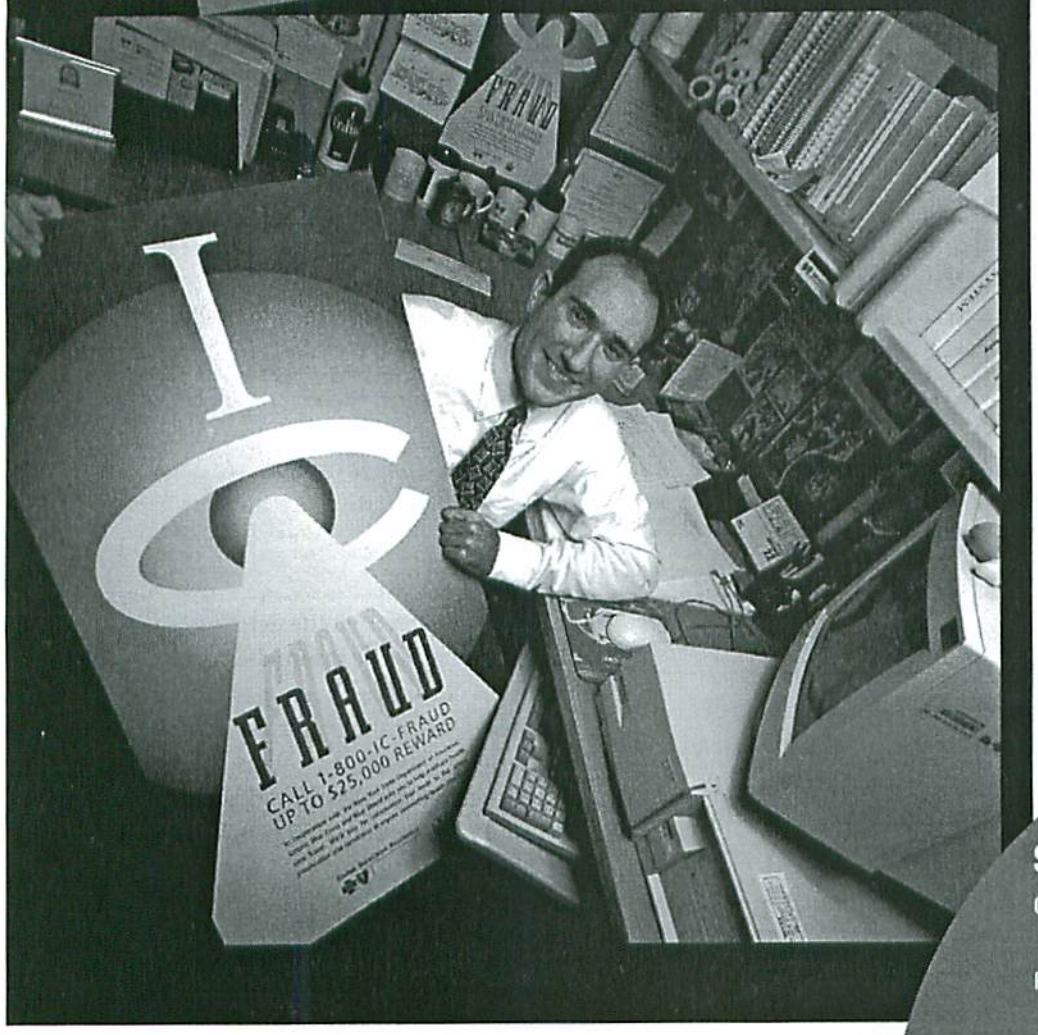

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Empire Blue Cross and Blue Shield Puts the FOCUS on Fraud

"The old tracking system couldn't keep pace with our growing caseload," says Pat Fitzsimons of the Fraud Investigation and Detection Unit at Empire Blue Cross and Blue Shield. "We needed a more effective way to manage the process of recovering the millions of dollars lost to fraud each year."

To operate efficiently, Empire must be able to detect, pursue, and prevent fraud aggressively. "So we created the Fraud Detection Case Tracking System," says Joe Angarola, Chief Applications Systems Specialist for Empire Blue Cross and Blue Shield. "It's a customized system that is used to manage the investigation of suspect providers, groups, and subscribers for possible fraudulent activities, and it's based on FOCUS from Information Builders."

Snapshot

Organization: **Empire Blue Cross and Blue Shield.**

Profile: **Provides health insurance coverage to 4.4 million subscribers.**

Headquarters: **New York, New York.**

The Challenge: **Effectively track incidents of health care fraud.**

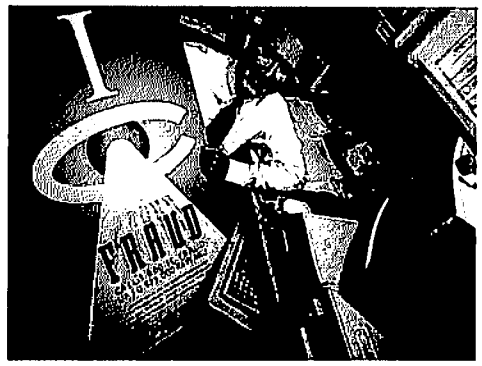
Results: **Through development and use of Fraud Detection Case Tracking System, $36 million was saved.**

Information Builders Tools: **FOCUS.**

"The Fraud Detection Case Tracking System is unique. We developed it because there wasn't anything available on the market that could do the job."

Committed to providing affordable, quality health care and excellent customer service, Empire Blue Cross and Blue Shield is the largest health insurer in New York State. With a staff of 6,000 employees in eight sites throughout the state, Empire has served its local market for over 60 years and is considered a health insurance leader.

Tracking Down Lost Dollars



In recent years, fraud has become a major concern for the health insurance industry. In fact, the U.S. General Accounting Office estimates that insurance fraud costs American consumers more than $100 billion annually. With a yearly caseload that has jumped from close to 2,000 in 1994 to over 12,000 in 1996, Empire's Fraud Investigation and Detection Unit has had their work cut out for them.

"We have to record every single fraud case that's opened – around 900 to 1,000 per month," says Fitzsimons. These cases come from all over the corporation, from Empire's 1-800-IC-FRAUD hotline, and also from law enforcement agencies. The unit then tracks and pursues each fraud allegation, recovering funds if fraud or abuse has actually occurred. But with an increasingly complex and growing caseload, the tracking system the unit was using just wasn't up to the job.

"The fraud unit had a proprietary, PC-based system that was really designed for lawyers. They couldn't get customized reports from this system, and since it wasn't LAN-compatible, there would be data-entry lag time because only one person could enter the information," says Angarola.

"The existing PC-based system was becoming increasingly problematic," agrees Fitzsimons. With pressure to stay on top of the escalating caseload, Angarola and his teammate, programmer Carmen Lopez of the Information Center at Empire Blue Cross and Blue Shield, came to the rescue by developing a new FOCUS-based system that solved all these problems and more – and won both of them the company's Leadership Award.

Eliminating Backlog With a Customized System

Working with the programming team, Fitzsimons began by fleshing out approximately 35 different data elements and ways that the data should be captured. "Everything that we wanted was easy to accomplish with FOCUS," says Fitzsimons. "Multiple user access, ad hoc reporting, flexible, expandable data capture...the FOCUS database was a terrific idea."

The project, called the Fraud Detection Case Tracking System, went live in July of 1996. "The system is unique. We developed it because there wasn't anything available on the market that could do the job," Angarola says.

The system records all the details of each case, then tracks the information and generates customized reports whenever required. One of the major goals for the new system was multiple access, and today the entire Fraud Investigation and Detection Unit – about 50 people – is able to use the system. And with several investigators entering information at once, data-entry lag times have been eliminated.

But the need for multiple access brought security concerns. "We needed to be able to secure certain parts of the system for data integrity purposes," Fitzsimons relates. "The security infrastructure means that users have different levels of access, some read-only. Angarola and Lopez created a security feature using a security table that allows specific access options for each user.

Another requirement was the ability to identify repeat allegations. "We needed to be able to look back at previous cases," Fitzsimons explains. "If an investigator gets another complaint on the same suspect, they can go in and research that without the time and trouble of pulling hard-copy files, which are archived after a certain period of time.

"We also have to track what types of cases are being investigated for fraud," Fitzsimons continues, "so we collect a lot of demographic data. For any period of time, we can go into the system and find out how many cases involved an ambulance company or a medical equipment provider, for example. This allows us to identify trends and focus on areas where fraud is more prevalent."

The fraud unit also uses the system as a data collection tool for cases that have been referred to law enforcement agencies and are in various stages of prosecution. And, for all these areas, the customized ad hoc reporting capability of the new system is invaluable. "We incorporated the FOCUS TableTalk feature for ad hoc reporting," says Angarola.

All in all, the new Fraud Detection Case Tracking System has been warmly welcomed by the fraud unit. "It even tracks the money recovered, which we often receive in installment payments," says Fitzsimons. "We used to have to do that on a different system, so FOCUS eliminated the need for two systems."

FOCUS: The Tool of Choice

"We've used FOCUS since the late eighties throughout the company, so it was a natural for this project," relates Angarola, who finds FOCUS very easy to roll out to a large number of users. "FOCUS is the heart of the new system. It basically does everything: it's the online database, it's used for data collection, searching and sorting...we're not just using it for back-end reporting."

The development process for the case tracking system was smooth and speedy. "FOCUS is an easy-to-use application development tool, and we were able to develop the system quickly," says Angarola. Fitzsimons agrees. "Basically, we told Joe and Carmen what we needed, then they came back and showed us when it was done. It was that simple."

Speeding Up Workflow... Gaining Control

Has the system been a success? "Absolutely," says Fitzsimons. "It's given us control over the process of tracking cases and tracking the dollars."

Perhaps the biggest benefit of all is the system's flexibility. "It's easy to enhance," says Fitzsimons. "As our needs change, the system can evolve with us. We've already had to add some more detail, and Joe and Carmen just tweaked the system a bit and we were in business. It's not a problem to add detail as we go."

Call Tracking Around the Corner

Looking to the future, Angarola and Lopez will continue to work to make the Fraud Division's efforts more effective. "We're going to be using FOCUS to create another new system for the fraud area," Angarola says.

Callers report cases of suspected fraud using Empire's 1-800-IC-FRAUD hotline, which receives between 2,000 and 2,500 calls per month. Currently, information on every call is manually recorded on a contact sheet. "They've asked us to create an online reporting system for the hotline that will automate and track information about the fraud allegation, the caller, and more," says Angarola.

Thanks to the Fraud Detection Case Tracking System, Empire is able to research and manage anti-fraud activities much more effectively. Through initiatives like this, Empire Blue Cross and Blue Shield has recently emerged as an industry leader in detecting and investigating health care fraud. The company was able to realize over $36 million in fraud and abuse savings and referred more than 3,100 cases for criminal prosecution in 1996. ❖

"FOCUS is an easy-to-use application development tool, and we were able to develop the system quickly."

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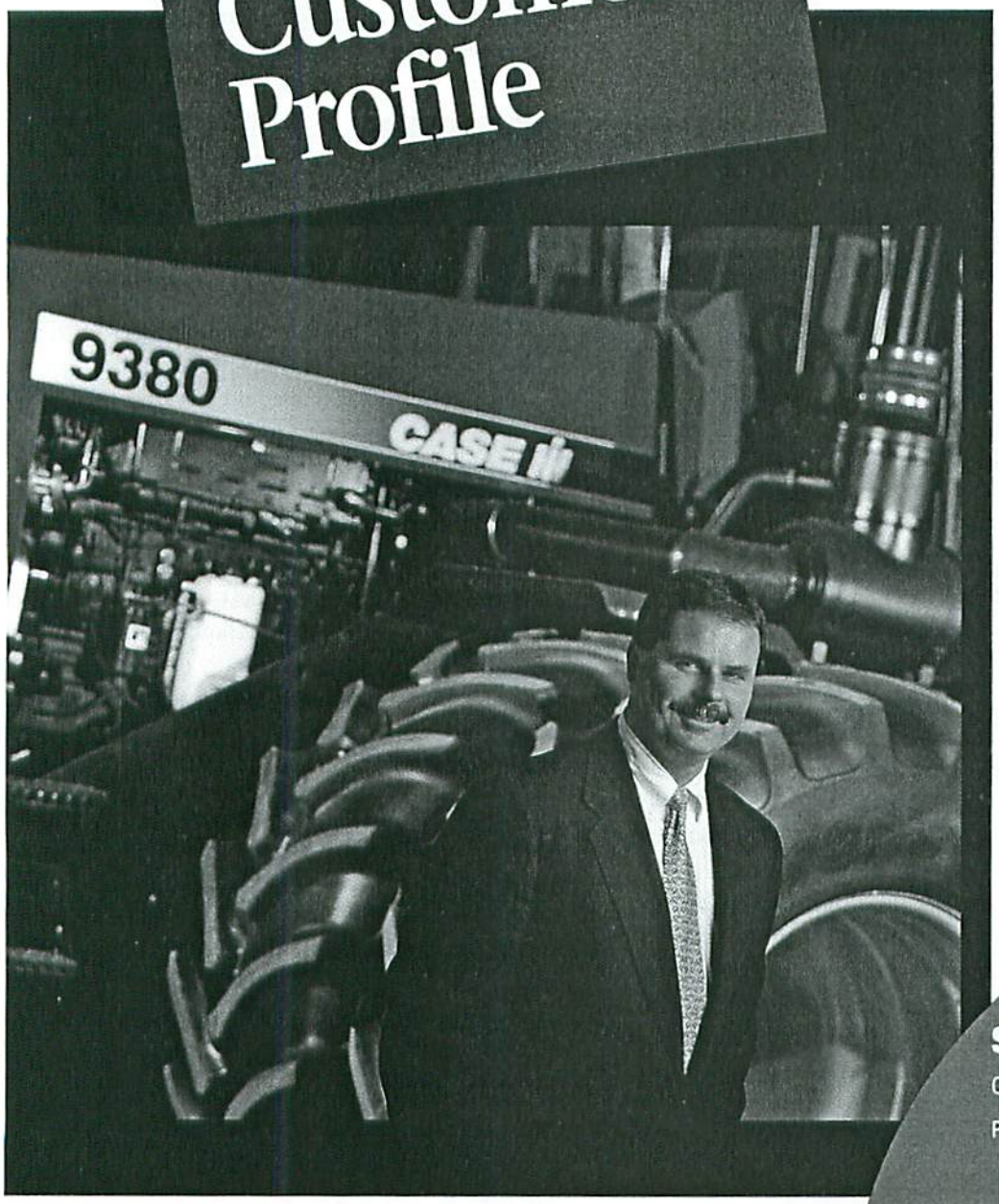
Customer Profile



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FOCUS Key to Case Corporation Reliability System

Case Corporation, one of the world's leading manufacturers of agricultural and construction equipment, prides itself on delivering rugged, durable products that get the job done.

The need to maintain consistently high product quality and reliability led to the formation of the Reliability Information System (RIS) group at Case Corporation's Burr Ridge, Illinois, technology center. The RIS's goal was nothing less than to provide a single warranty and reliability tracking and reporting system for all Case products scattered around the globe.

Snapshot

Organization: **Case Corporation**

Profile: **Leading manufacturer of agricultural and construction equipment**

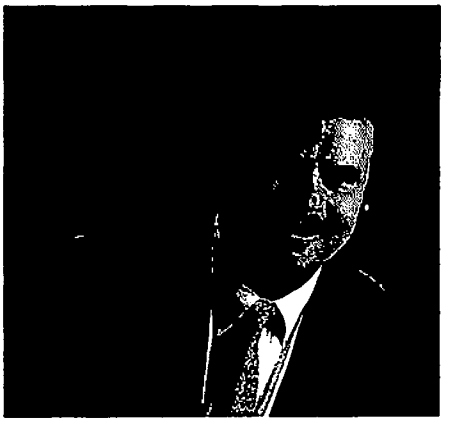
Headquarters: **Racine, WI**

The Challenge: **Provide a single warranty and reliability tracking and reporting system for all products worldwide.**

Results: **Using FOCUS, the company developed the "Casewarr" system, handling 10-13 million records per month.**

"During our original design, I felt Information Builders did a tremendous job in assisting me, giving me ideas, and allowing me to bounce ideas off them."

The philosophy behind the proposed system was simple. "The first step to improving products is to have knowledge about how they are operating in the field," says David Christine, Worldwide Manager for RIS. "By tracking warranty claims, repair frequency, and other reliability information, we have decision support knowledge that can be proactively used by Engineering, Manufacturing, and upper management to improve our product lines."



Prior to 1991, Case relied on an unwieldy and inflexible mainframe-based tracking and reporting system. "We did much of our reporting on a monthly basis in batch mode," reports Christine. "The selection criteria were hard-coded and changes to the system were extremely difficult to make."

The old reporting system really revealed its limitations when new product lines were introduced. "Reports reflecting these new products were long in coming," Christine says. "People in Engineering, Manufacturing, Finance – even the CEO – wanted customized reports with data arranged in ways they could use. It got to the point where maverick employees began devising their own mini systems for reporting. Had this trend continued, the result would have been information management chaos, in terms of information consistency, standardization, the possibility of erroneous reports, and so on."

That's when Christine turned to FOCUS to remedy the problem, creating a flexible, comprehensive, and highly responsive worldwide reliability tracking and reporting system called Casewarr that today handles from 10 to 13 million records per month.

Building the System

Using mainframe FOCUS 6.5, Christine's first step in modernizing the old system was to write a procedure that extracts the raw warranty and reliability data stored in IMS source files and places them in the richer reporting environment of FOCUS. Because of the volume of records, however, Christine wanted to ensure rapid response time for queries, so he created four FOCUS databases.

"We knew that users typically made queries that could be categorized logically," Christine says. "All we did was to provide a separate FOCUS database for these categories. Each of the databases is structured to reflect the logical arrangement of the queries. From the users' point of view, they are using only one database, because the logic built into Casewarr knows which database to go to, based on the nature of the query."

This structure was, in essence, a data warehouse, with each of the four FOCUS databases refreshed monthly from the IMS source files. All of the IMS reliability and reporting data, including the monthly updates, are reloaded into FOCUS. This procedure simplifies the update process, Christine says, while ensuring consistent data over time.

The calculating power of FOCUS was combined with its rich development environment to give Casewarr users an extremely efficient, interactive reporting system.

"We went with FOCUS because of its reporting horsepower," Christine says. "We wanted to give Casewarr users a comprehensive analysis environment that could respond to their diverse reporting needs. Since each of these organizations relies heavily on complex statistical

information for decision making, Casewarr needed a powerful calculating engine. We found that FOCUS was able to take a large quantity of data and calculate tremendous statistical information in seconds."

For example, one statistical task involves calculating the repair frequency of key products in a given year. With FOCUS, they can determine how many machines from the base population should be included in the statistical analysis, compared with how many failures occurred. But FOCUS doesn't stop there. "At the user level, any number of variables can be applied to the basic calculation," Christine says. "Users can look at this calculation in the way they want to look at it. And they get their results in minutes."

Throughout the development process, Information Builders' technical support team responded quickly to questions and problems, and offered useful advice. "During our original design, I felt Information Builders did a tremendous job in assisting me, giving me ideas, and allowing me to bounce ideas off them," Christine says. "They were helpful and non-condescending. They worked with me as a professional and they offered useful information to my programming staff. My key database administrator also found them to be very responsive."

Quality Control

One of Christine's overriding concerns was that Casewarr be easier to use than the old system. Most of the potential Casewarr users either worked in LAN environments on PCs with 3270 emulation capabilities or used dumb terminals. They could all access the reports generated by the old system, but the inflexible, cast-in-stone nature of the reports had become nearly meaningless. In addition, the presentation was flat and one-dimensional.

"I wanted users to be able to get to FOCUS reports quickly and easily," Christine recounts, "and to select the type of equipment, the type of report, and the location and time parameters they wanted. Easy menu navigation was a must."

Christine was fortunate. He had contact with a consultant who could guarantee the user-friendliness of Casewarr: his 12-year-old daughter. "As I used FOCUS to write Casewarr, I would occasionally ask my daughter to log on and put the system through its paces," he recalls. "My reasoning was simple: if she could navigate through the system without problems, then it should be a piece of cake for a Ph.D. or engineering professional."

As it turned out, his daughter found the system very simple to use. "She didn't know what the data meant," laughs Christine, "but she certainly had no trouble finding it."

With a system prototype in place, Christine went on to perform reliability testing with selected Case users. They also caught on quickly, and word about the usefulness of the system spread. Today, with the production version in place, 1,600 users worldwide rely on Casewarr, with up to 3,000 accesses per month. "The system was never meant to be a top-down implementation," says Christine. "It was a grassroots kind of thing. As more people used it, more and more logged on."

Easy Access

The popularity of the system is partially attributable to its accessibility. Casewarr resides on an IBM Mainframe located in Racine, Wisconsin. Users around the world, whether they work on PCs or dumb terminals, simply type in "Casewarr" to launch the reporting environment. They can manipulate data in FOCUS on the mainframe, then download their query results into personal productivity tools on their own PCs. For example, if users in the Engineering department want to find out how backhoe loaders are performing in cold climates, they can use Casewarr to create customized repair and warranty reports that reflect the product's performance in places like North America, compared with France or Spain. "They can quickly obtain very complex views of product performance," Christine says. "Feedback from the Casewarr reliability and

"FOCUS has allowed me to provide Casewarr users with interactive reporting capabilities in a very user-friendly environment."

reporting system gives us a significant advantage in monitoring and constantly improving Case's product quality and performance.

"FOCUS has allowed me to provide Casewarr users with interactive reporting capabilities in a very user-friendly environment," he stresses. "Its capabilities helped me to quickly overcome the original problem – the resistance of the hard-coded IMS reporting system to change. I can now go in and make user-requested changes or additions to Casewarr that would probably not even have been requested when the old system was our only reporting mechanism. We can look at things multi-dimensionally now, instead of being stuck with reports that simply list warranty or repair activity in flat files."

Case Corporation's RIS group is charged with helping the company enhance product reliability, durability, and quality through the most powerful asset a business can have: comprehensive, accurate information.

"By tracking reliability information as closely as we do, we can improve our product lines over the long term," Christine concludes. "With FOCUS, we have turned meaningless data into timely, meaningful reports." ❖

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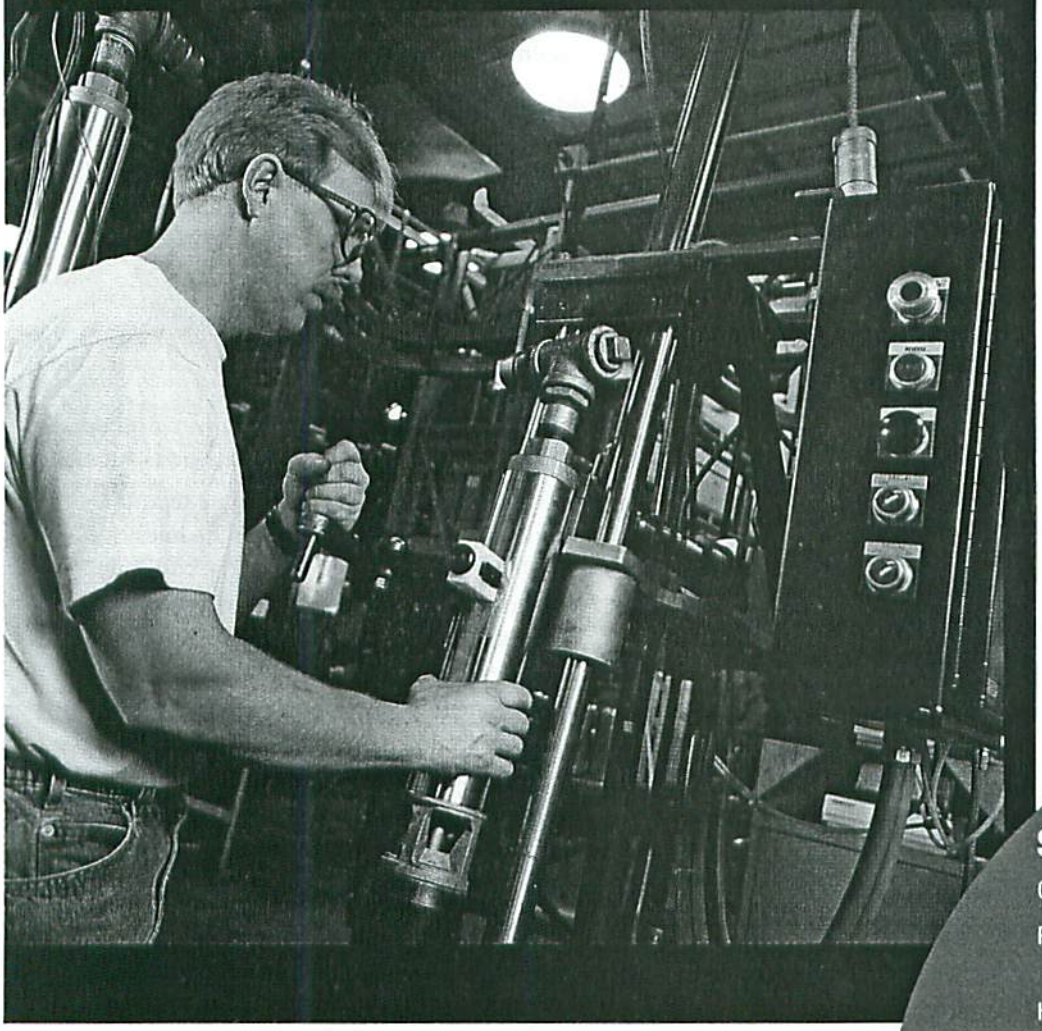

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FOCUS Gives Sta-Rite Managers a Clear View of The Whole Business Picture

Ask data processing professionals to list their most time-consuming tasks, and chances are most of them will immediately mention creating end user reports. Ask the data processing pros at Sta-Rite Industries the same question, and they will tell you creating those reports doesn't even make their list. Why? Because Sta-Rite's users do it themselves.

Sta-Rite Industries builds water system and pool/spa products. About three years ago, Sta-Rite began downsizing its IBM mainframe applications to an AS/400 midrange system. Today, with the AS/400 applications in full swing, it is exploring further downsizing, to PS/2 LAN workstations as a possible platform for production and development efforts.

Despite these changes in systems, applications, and software, one common

Snapshot

Organization: **Sta-Rite Industries**

Profile: **Global manufacturer of water system and pool/spa products.**

Headquarters: **Delavan, Wisconsin**

Objectives: **Give end users ability to write custom reports quickly from AS/400 data.**

Why FOCUS for AS/400: **Ties together Sta-Rite's numerous packaged applications. Makes it easy for even novices to generate their own reports.**

Results: **Productivity greatly increased. Division of labor frees IS staff to concentrate on application development and network maintenance.**

"The thing I really like about FOCUS is that people with just a little training can produce results."

thread has helped Sta-Rite achieve a unified view of the business: the FOCUS data management and reporting tools from Information Builders.

Integrating Data From Many AS/400 Applications

Sta-Rite mainly uses packaged AS/400 applications such as Andersen Consulting's MAC-PAC manufacturing software, the Lucas-Bear forecasting software, Lawson's financial system, and an order entry, inventory planning, and distribution requirements planning system from American Software, Inc.

"All these packages began as separate, non-integrated systems," explains Jon Bielefeld, Sta-Rite's Logistics Manager. "We needed a tool to bridge the gaps between these different systems." FOCUS gave him the robust development environment he needed to write custom reports with data from all these sources.

When Bielefeld arrived in 1990, he had experience with FOCUS from a former job. Though not a programmer, he was familiar with its strong data management and reporting capabilities. He recommended the Logistics Group bring in a copy of FOCUS for AS/400.

"I came from a mainframe background where I used FOCUS, and I was able to use FOCUS on the AS/400 the first day we brought it on board," Bielefeld says.

FOCUS: The AS/400 Developer's Dream

Since that day, Bielefeld has been able to take many complex reporting tasks into his own department. "The thing I really like about FOCUS is that people with just a little training can produce results," he says. "It has a very low entry level, but as your experience grows you find you can build very sophisticated reports."

At the most basic level, users can generate FOCUS reports by simply selecting criteria on TableTalk menus with a cursor or mouse. But the heart of the FOCUS environment is a powerful fourth generation language, which experienced users quickly learn to apply to their needs. Rather than coding report procedures in a traditional programming language, users describe their needs in brief English phrases that FOCUS interprets for the computer. TableTalk displays the FOCUS syntax it generates in a window at the bottom of the screen to facilitate learning the language.

Most developers within the Sta-Rite Logistics group rely on the FOCUS Text Editor (TED) to create their reporting applications, Bielefeld says. TED supports the entire development cycle, and since it is used across all FOCUS environments, users are ensured that their skills will be easily transferable.

Empowering Users

Today, Sta-Rite has dozens of FOCUS reports in production mode. Some reports monitor how well production schedules and inventory levels match actual customer demand. Others analyze scrap, check stock for different categories of product, report any variance in distribution inventories, and review the content of the master schedule in dollars. There are purchasing planning reports, annual budget reports, and reports designed expressly to look for mismatches between the various AS/400 application packages.

Typical users include plant scheduling personnel, production control supervisors, inventory control supervisors, and analysts on the Logistics staff, Bielefeld says.

As more and more users have taken their reporting needs into their own hands, Sta-Rite has learned a valuable lesson. "The people who know the information best are often the ones who can tell if the data is

correct," Bielefeld explains. "The incentive is there to learn the reporting tools since the users directly benefit from the results."

This division of labor has the side benefit of freeing up staff to do things that users can't, such as writing new applications, building bridges between existing applications, and keeping the network operating smoothly. "All the activities required to construct and maintain an effective information system," observed Bielefeld.

Guarding Valuable Data And Systems

At first, data processing professionals in the Information Systems Group (ISG) were leery about users doing their own report programming. But ISG maintains a "watch dog" role by constraining reporting activities that might be inappropriate or adversely affect the online performance of other applications. The ISG staff are still the keepers of the data, and FOCUS lets them manage the user environment so that improperly executed commands won't bring the system to its knees.

Bielefeld acknowledges that there have been a few hurdles to jump to coordinate activities between users and the ISG staff, but the ISG staff members are generally impressed with the quick progress these end users and line-level managers have made. "You can't argue with the kind of results we have been able to deliver," he says. "Without FOCUS, we would have been in real trouble. There was nothing packaged and in place that could provide the kind of reporting we needed."

Occasionally, Sta-Rite's ISG staff use their FOCUS applications as a starting point for creating other applications to perform very process-intensive tasks, often in conjunction with LANSA, a CASE development tool from LANSA USA, Inc. Reporting and front-end development work is done with FOCUS, often by the users themselves, while the CASE environment is used by the ISG staff for high-level analysis, design, and code generation.

Portability Eases the Move

Eventually, Sta-Rite plans to offload FOCUS development tasks to a LAN of PS/2 workstations running DOS and Windows, supported by an OS/2 server. Staff members in the Logistics group are beginning to use PC/FOCUS Plus for this purpose.

"It's cheaper and faster to work on the LAN," points out Bielefeld, who helped put together the new network and is now contemplating which AS/400 functions can be downsized. So far, key production control, inventory control, and material handling functions are in the early development stages, he says. Other production applications are expected to follow.

"This is going to feed nicely into PC/FOCUS Plus," Bielefeld adds. "We now have production applications on both the AS/400 and the PC, yet we have the same reporting tool on both platforms."

Most development products let you build applications on the LAN, but you have to rewrite them substantially for the AS/400, Bielefeld adds. "With FOCUS, you can take the code pretty much intact, tweak the file definitions a little bit, and you are off and running. The code is basically the same on each platform – Information Builders has worked very hard to maintain this."

AS/400 Reporting Solution From An Industry Leader

Logistics team members now look to FOCUS to maintain their integrated view of the business, particularly as different types of platforms and operating systems proliferate. "Some of the packaged applications we use include their own report writers, but FOCUS integrates data from

"You can't argue with the kind of results we have been able to deliver. Without FOCUS, we would have been in real trouble."

all of them," Bielefeld says. "It is an interwoven part of our management."

Sta-Rite also values FOCUS because of the stability of the company that stands behind it. "Information Builders impresses me as a really top-notch organization," Bielefeld says. "A lot of software houses come and go, or their charter keeps switching from year to year. But Information Builders is here to stay. FOCUS isn't an add-on tool or a side-line product obtained through acquisition. It is the main bread-and-butter product that got the company started. We're very comfortable with that kind of stability."

This comfort level has given Sta-Rite the confidence to invest heavily in FOCUS development efforts, and, as a result, the critical information they were lacking initially is now being delivered. Plant managers and executives have a complete picture of what is happening at any given point in time within the business.

"Our high-level planners need to know things like manufacturing inventory, relative to production, relative to targets for any given product or plant," Bielefeld concludes. "That type of information invariably comes from three or four completely different systems, meaning the chances of a pre-existing report having exactly what you need are slim to none. The data processing people can't crank out custom reports for everyone, certainly not as fast as we need them. So it is up to us to do it for ourselves. In that sense, FOCUS has become an integral part of the business."

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FOCUS Gives Maritz a Tool for the Long Term

Information Builders and Maritz are both established market leaders in their respective industries. And like many businesses, Maritz needed a tool that would help them easily access their vast wealth of research information. So they chose FOCUS. "FOCUS from Information Builders is simply the best tool for what we do here," says Dave Hanson, Manager of Client Computer Services at Maritz Marketing Research.

The largest research operation serving U.S. business today, Maritz has helped American companies define, measure, and track customer satisfaction for more than 20 years. Headquartered in St. Louis, Missouri, Maritz specializes in custom-tailored research designed to meet each client's specific requirements.

Snapshot

Organization: **Maritz Marketing Research Inc.**

Profile: **The largest custom marketing research firm serving U.S. business, specializing in customer satisfaction measurement and full-service research.**

Headquarters: **St. Louis, Missouri.**

The Challenge: **Maritz needed a tool that would help them easily access their vast wealth of research data.**

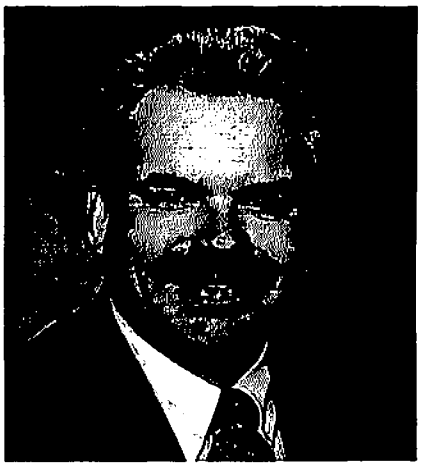
Results: **An advantage over competitors, thanks to faster turnaround using FOCUS on UNIX boxes and on PCs.**

Information Builders' Tools: **FOCUS and FOCUS Six.**

"FOCUS from Information Builders is simply the best tool for what we do here."

Helping Clients Stay Focused

"We use FOCUS because it's an easy language to utilize," says Hanson, who was hired by Maritz because of his long-time FOCUS expertise. "It's easy for users to pick up and it's easy for developers to work with. What we've been doing in our group for the last few years is maintaining customer databases for our clients." The Maritz client base includes some of the largest industrial companies in the country: earth-moving equipment manufacturers, agricultural equipment manufacturers, truck rental companies, chemical manufacturers, and more.



"We maintain customer records for them, and then out of those customer databases, we periodically send out surveys," continues Hanson. "We send out a survey maybe 30 days following a new purchase to find out about their purchase experience with the dealers and how they like the equipment. We continue doing this even up to five years later." The data from each survey is tabulated, and reports are sent to Maritz's clients. "Basically, we're measuring customer satisfaction."

Hanson's group also does a large yearly agricultural study for chemical manufacturers. "We go out and survey a lot of farmers," relates Hanson, "find out what crops they've planted, how many acres they're growing on, what pesticides they're using...things like that. We compile all the information into a FOCUS database on the PC. The results help our clients determine their marketing strategy for the coming year."

Two Platforms, One Solution

"With our large industrial clients, data comes to us in many different formats," says Hanson. "We like FOCUS because we can read a lot of different file layouts, standardize the data, and easily load it into our databases. You can't do that easily with some other database packages available."

Hanson's Client Computer Services group at Maritz programs in FOCUS on two platforms: UNIX and PC Windows. Each platform serves a different purpose. "On the UNIX side, we're mainly supporting the large customer-satisfaction research projects," says Hanson. These projects produce a tremendous amount of information, including purchase histories, purchasing trends, and satisfaction with the various manufacturers. The reporting process allows Maritz project managers to make decisions about the number of surveys to decide how many surveys are needed to gain meaningful information from the customers.

"We use the UNIX platform when all the data is going to stay in-house," continues Hanson. "We use it more as a mainframe-type environment. Plus, we're dealing with huge amounts of information. Some of our databases represent a couple hundred thousand customers, and a lot of information associated with those customers. Some of those databases are probably 500MB or larger, and they grow rapidly."

Hanson's group uses FOCUS Six (Information Builders' PC-based product) primarily for their yearly agricultural study. "We deliver the results to our clients in PC format so they can utilize it on their PCs and distribute it throughout their companies," explains Hanson. "Users can look at the data in virtually thousands of different ways.

"FOCUS is pretty much the same on both platforms, it doesn't matter which one we're programming in, and it's easy to port across platforms," he says. "Frequently, we'll start up a new project on the PC side just to get going on it. Then we'll port it over to UNIX and continue it there once it's in production."

A Need for Speed

Over the years, FOCUS has continued to meet Maritz's constantly growing needs. In fact, in a quest for faster turnaround times, the Client Computer Services group has just completed a switch from a Digital VAX VMS environment to new HP UNIX systems.

"FOCUS on the VAX systems was always reliable, and we never had any problems with it," says Hanson. "But the hardware was ancient and pretty slow. We did some benchmarking on the UNIX systems early on in the process and we were getting 100 percent increases in turnaround time."

The department began the migration process in the summer of 1995. They ran into some minor difficulties along the way, but got all the help and support they needed from Information Builders to complete the migration of programs and data by their target date.

"We ran into some problems and ended up having to go back to the VAX last fall. Information Builders came in and helped us out, and we got it all migrated over by February of 1996 – on schedule," reports Hanson. "I have confidence in Information Builders in terms of support. I really haven't had any problems with them in all my years working with FOCUS."

All in all, Hanson doesn't think the migration process is a difficult one. "When both systems are working properly, migration is very easy," he says. "For us, the programs migrated fairly easily, the databases were more challenging. But, large databases are time-consuming to migrate. That's pretty normal."

The Competitive Advantage

With the switch to the new HP UNIX systems now comfortably in the past, the Client Computer Services department at Maritz is planning on sticking with FOCUS for some time to come. The reasons are many. First and foremost, Hanson feels that FOCUS offers Maritz a competitive advantage.

"The way that we do business here involves real quick turnaround, and with a lot of other software tools we wouldn't be able to turn things around as fast," says Hanson. "But with FOCUS and the expertise that we have, we're able to turn projects around pretty quickly. Our clients often say that they need something tomorrow and we can deliver it to them in that time frame. That's a real competitive advantage."

With users adding and changing data on a daily basis, Hanson also appreciates how simple it is to maintain FOCUS databases. "Maintenance processes are easy to create and manage for our developers," he adds.

"We have quite a knowledge base of FOCUS here at Maritz," explains Hanson. "Everybody's pretty comfortable with it, so it's easy for us to develop systems quickly, and that gives us another advantage over our competitors. We can get new systems up and running fast, move code from one system to another in a modular way. FOCUS is just a really easy tool to use – for programmers and users alike."

But perhaps most important, Hanson stresses the value of the support that Information Builders provides. "Information Builders is terrific in terms of support. Any time you call them, they open a case and they'll get somebody working on your problem pretty quick. And you can always talk to somebody, you don't have to wait on hold."

Hanson's biggest problem these days? Finding more FOCUS programmers. "We're seeing a dramatic increase in business – and a substantial increase in workload. There's a demand right now for FOCUS people, and I don't know where to find them." Could it simply be the price of success? ❖

"Our clients often say that they need something tomorrow and we can deliver it to them in that time frame. That's a real competitive advantage."

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Information Builders

Customer Profile

FOCUS/EIS Gives Konica Executives a Powerful Management Tool

"These days, everybody's looking for the 'killer app,'" muses Carmine Morello, IS director of Konica Imaging, U.S.A. "Companies the world over are searching for a software application that fundamentally changes the way people work, think, and manage the enterprise, so everyone and everything becomes more productive.

"We're building our own 'killer apps' here," he continues, "and we're using FOCUS/EIS to do it." Konica Imaging's new "killer apps" are part of a PC-based, point-and-click Executive Information System (EIS) that puts up-to-date corporate information at the fingertips of senior management. The result is a fundamental change in the way the company's executives monitor their enterprise and guide its growth.

Snapshot

Organization: **Konica Imaging, U.S.A.**

Profile: **Manufactures and sells high-quality color printing film, chemicals, and supplies used by newspaper and magazine publishers.**

Headquarters: **Glen Cove, New York**

Objectives: **Replace cumbersome printed reports with a point-and-click graphical sales information system.**

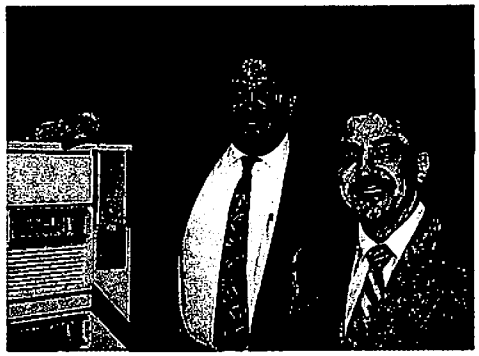
Why FOCUS/EIS: **Most powerful, cost-effective EIS available for Windows and AS/400.**

Results: **Extraordinary popularity and productivity of FOCUS/EIS-based system is pointing the way to new ways of re-engineering Konica Imaging's international business operations.**

"From conception to actual rollout with three applications, took us only two-and-a-half months."

The "ESP" System

ESP – the name comes from the company motto: Encouraging...Striving...Providing – runs under Microsoft Windows on the desktop PCs and laptop computers of Konica's executives and sales force. In just a few months, the new EIS has made its users more knowledgeable, productive, and effective.



The ESP system deployed by Morello is actually a suite of three FOCUS/EIS applications, each of which is custom designed to deliver current, meaningful information. The system is graphical, so Konica executives can use a mouse to activate easy-to-understand features like maps, pushbuttons, and "traffic lights" that summarize regional performance in green, orange, and red. ESP contains applications for tracking sales, product margins, and the "Top 100" products and customers nationally, regionally, and by territory. It also has security features that prevent users from accessing inappropriate data.

Thanks to ESP, Konica's executives and sales force are now leveraging vast quantities of instantly available enterprise data, including two years' worth of historical information for comparisons. Better yet, users can view this information in ways that are highly intuitive and understandable. This represents a quantum leap over the information systems and management style of just a year ago, when the company's executives often needed a completely different kind of ESP to monitor their operations.

Struggling to Manage an International Business

A division of Japan's Konica Corporation, Konica Imaging U.S.A. manufactures and sells high-quality color printing film, chemicals, and supplies used by newspaper and magazine publishers, as well as professional photographic imaging systems. Headquartered in Glen Cove, New York, the company services customers in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico, and often contributes its manufacturing muscle to help the company's Japanese facilities fill European orders. A planned worldwide restructuring of Konica's operations is expected to vastly increase the U.S. organization's manufacturing and marketing responsibilities within a few years.

But even though product quality is uniformly high and manufacturing operations are world-class, managing the North American business and guiding its growth was a major challenge before the introduction of the ESP system. And planning for the crucial restructuring and expansion into new markets was uncomfortably close to guesswork.

"Despite their expertise in manufacturing, Japanese managers generally have fewer expectations for their business automation," explains Morello. "In fact, when I joined the company a few years ago, most of our back-office technology could have come straight out of the 1970s!" Furthermore, many of the company's managers had only limited experience with PC tools, and some executives had never used a PC. Instead, the executive workstyle revolved around painstaking analysis of comprehensive, printed reports on every aspect of the business.

In this environment, business planning was tedious and difficult, and forward planning was often uncertain. Most alarming, potential problems could go undetected until they were eventually spotted in a monthly printout.

Eyestrain and Shoulder Strain

Morello's first challenge was to increase data availability. He quickly replaced the company's old mainframe with a high-performance IBM AS/400 F70, along with over $1.5 million worth of enterprise applications. By autumn 1993, he had practically two years' worth of current and historical data available almost instantly from his DB2/400 databases for decision support and comparative analysis.

But this information still came in hefty printouts – the only way Konica's executives could track the performance of products and salespeople and ensure margins were being respected. Senior managers met twice a month and pored over hundreds of pages of detailed reports on sales, margins, customers, and product shipments and preferences. Business planning, forward planning, and day-to-day management were as cumbersome as ever.

"Sometimes it took hours of study to answer a single question," recalls Morello. "Plus, at the end of the day, management wasn't sure where we stood. Saleswise, they could only make informed guesses about where we were headed. All they could say was, 'let's do more of this' or 'let's avoid doing that in the future.'"

While corporate executives risked eyestrain, Konica's sales force suffered from shoulder strain. "When I go on visits with my district managers and sales reps, I never know what a customer is going to ask," summed up one regional vice president of sales. "So I had to load up all my reports for each visit – into two six-inch briefcases! If the customer asked, 'What did I buy?' I would turn to page 307 of a 500-page report for the answer."

Management by Mouse

Obviously, the next step was getting rid of all the paper. "Management still expected comprehensive reporting, but we needed a way to collate years' worth of data for them without printing it all out twice a month," explains Morello. "We could have done it with RPG applications, but they would have lacked the graphics we got with FOCUS/EIS."

Graphical, point-and-click operation was a key requirement, since the company's executives generally lacked experience with PC tools. "We had people here who had never touched a PC before," Morello continues. "So we had to put everything on a menu where people could just click to drill into the AS/400 data, without using a lot of computer commands."

Passing the Hands-On Test

By the end of 1993, Morello had identified six different EIS products that either ran on the AS/400 or worked with his AS/400 data, including FOCUS/EIS. After further examination, several of the candidates fell out. "We didn't want proprietary [systems] and we didn't want OS/2 because we're a Windows shop," he explains.

Costly, custom-built EIS systems weren't what he was after, either. "Rather than sell me a big package with consulting, sell me one license and let us work with it ourselves," Morello continues. Software vendors who couldn't or wouldn't "unbundle" an EIS front end for testing purposes didn't make the final evaluation.

Hands-on application development was another top requirement. "Our philosophy is, don't tell me what it can do. Give me the product, let me sit down with it and see what it can do," says Morello. "If we can't learn it in two weeks and get an application out in another couple of weeks, I don't want it." After a disappointing test of Track/400 (an AS/400 EIS with a graphical PC front end), Morello bought a copy of FOCUS/EIS 3.3 with short-term consulting.

"Amazing Value!"

Within two weeks, the application requirements had been nailed down and a prototype was being developed. "That's when the process started to snowball," recalls Morello. Konica Imaging's President, Mr. Iwama and CFO John Orlando were

"We've been able to meet management's expectations for comprehensive reporting, while giving them the option of exception reporting."

impressed by the prototype's usability. Also, FOCUS delivered excellent performance, even when processing very large dumps of current and historical data from the company's AS/400.

By March 1994, Morello was rolling out the ESP System with his first three FOCUS/EIS applications: two sales applications tracked sales nationally, regionally, by territory, and by sales rep, with options for examining budget vs. actual sales, margin, and sales in dollars or in square feet of film sold. The third "Top 100 Customers" application lets managers view top customers' rankings by country, region, territory, product family, and so on.

"From conception to actual rollout with three applications, took us only two-and-a-half months," Morello notes. "It still amazes me that we were able to get the whole thing up and running in my timeframe! FOCUS/EIS truly represents an amazing value."

Once executives started using the system, its popularity soared. Morello needed more FOCUS/EIS licenses for the sales force's laptop computers. But modifications were necessary to several applications, since Konica's salespeople needed different aggregations, sortings, rankings, and drill-downs.

The object-oriented programmer's workbench of FOCUS/EIS, along with the easily modified FOCUS 4GL code, allowed Morello's developers to turn on a dime and meet the new application requirements quickly. In almost no time, the ESP system went into much wider use in the company.

Built-In Exception Reporting

ESP's popularity is largely due to the exception reporting capabilities FOCUS/EIS provides through easy-to-understand maps and "stoplights" in red, orange, and green for drilling down into actual data. Before the ESP system was launched, "Konica's managers were used to poring over everything," recalls Morello. "They didn't appreciate the concept of exception reporting. Now we find they're gravitating to the red areas displayed by the application – they can hit a green area if they want, but the red and amber areas are the most interesting."

Exception reporting gives Konica executives an efficient new way of viewing and managing their operations with virtually no trade-off in comprehensive reporting. Managers really get the best of both worlds. "We've been able to meet management's expectations for comprehensive reporting, while giving them the option of exception reporting," Morello points out. "And now, people are basically saying that the EIS system – for the first time – lets them discover which questions to ask."

"When I have a 1,000-page report, where do I begin to know what to ask?" says Mr. Iwama. "However, if I have something predetermined – whether it's budget vs. actual or gross margin – and if I've got a graphic map of all my territories with red or orange showing what's below my target...well, it's very easy to point to that." ❖

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Information Builders

Customer Profile

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Sun Microsystems Rightsizes With FOCUS for UNIX

Rightsizing is a key element in many companies' plans to improve information access, increase productivity, and lower costs. For Sun Microsystems, the decision entailed more than addressing basic operating concerns.

Sun is the world's leading vendor of computer workstations and servers. Its UNIX systems are used worldwide in commercial and technical applications. By rightsizing to UNIX, Sun is gaining all the business advantages noted above, as well as supporting their own marketing message. When Sun moved its manufacturing and sales applications from the mainframe to UNIX, Sun's Information Resources staff chose FOCUS, from Information Builders, as its new 4GL.

Snapshot

Organization: **Sun Microsystems, Inc.**

Profile: **Global supplier/manufacturer of client/server solutions that feature networked workstations and servers to store, process, and distribute information.**

Headquarters: **Mountain View, California**

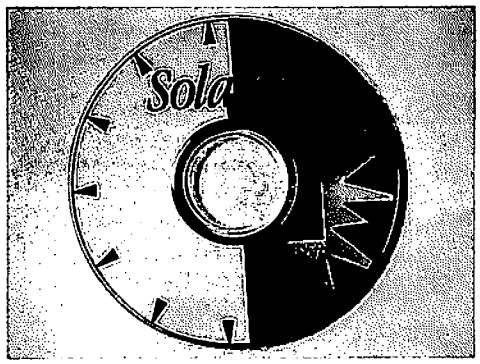
Objectives: **Increase end user productivity and efficiency. Free MIS staff to concentrate on new development.**

Why FOCUS for UNIX: **Gives end users instant, online access to information. Makes it easy for even novices to run their own reports.**

Results: **Access to information greatly improved. Rightsizing plans accelerated.**

"Many users were requesting FOCUS because they had used it on other platforms and already knew and liked it. We left the other tools up and gave users the choice. About 90 percent chose FOCUS."

When Sun Microsystems made the decision to rightsize, approximately 400 users, mostly in sales and accounting at its three California offices in Milpitas, Palo Alto, and Mountain View, and its Massachusetts office in Chelmsford, needed to access data and run their own reports. They found the mainframe tools difficult to use and very limited in reporting capability. What they needed was better response times, improved reporting capabilities, and an online ad hoc query and reporting tool that was easy to use, even for novice users.



"We needed to find a way to build a reporting environment where users could run their own queries," recalls Staff Information Resources Manager Suzanne Landon. "In addition to having very limited reporting capabilities, our users were dependent on the programming staff to generate their reports. There were crunch times when our waiting lists were literally months long. Then the requirements would change, and reports would have to be completely redone," she continued. "Even in the best of circumstances, because of the mainframe's batch queue, reports were the lowest priority. It would often take at least a week to get them out."

Long Waits and Little Flexibility

Sun stores its management information in three IDMS/R databases on its corporate headquarters host: SUNBIAS, for inventory and other manufacturing-related data; SCORE (System for Corporate Reporting), Sun's domestic sales information system containing billings, bookings, and backlog data; and SUNGLOBE, its international sales information system. Sun used Cullinet's OLQ for online querying and reporting. Service, however, was limited because the Cullinet tool was too difficult for end users and all reports had to be run by the MIS staff in response to user requests.

"We were servicing only about 20 users when we were on the mainframe system," Landon remembers. "We really had to limit usage, because we just couldn't support any more." Although several other front-end products were already in-house, none met the main requirements of fast and efficient data access and sharing. More important, "nothing we had was easy enough to use," Landon said. Users also needed expanded reporting capabilities, including the ability to produce matrix reports. Reporting capability was very limited on their existing tools.

Finally, because Sun plans to move SUNBIAS to Oracle in the future, portability and a consistent interface across databases would be needed in any new development environment.

FOCUS Provides Solution

"Many users were requesting FOCUS because they had used it on other platforms and already knew and liked it," Landon said. "We left the other tools up and gave users the choice. About 90 percent chose FOCUS."

FOCUS offers extensive reporting capabilities, including a virtually unlimited range of formatting options. In addition, FOCUS provides access to every major data structure across all computing platforms – a total of 55 data drivers are available – with a consistent interface throughout.

When Sun began the move to FOCUS, Landon and her group chose about a half-dozen pilot users, representative of each user group. She then created scaled-down versions of two of Sun's major applications: SUNBIAS and SCORE.

Implementation and Training

With help from Information Builders' consultants, Landon converted several queries from the old system to FOCUS,

"just to show people what it could do." She then wrote a customized training class for the users and brought in Information Builders instructors to teach it. "The developers didn't really need a lot of formal training," Landon added. "FOCUS is easy."

Systems Technologist Jeanne Shay also noted the use of FOCUS Talk Technologies, a series of menu-driven user interfaces, as training tools. "Talk Technologies make it easy even for novices to teach themselves the FOCUS syntax," she said. She observed that a typical new user will work with the Talk Technologies for the first few weeks, after which they begin working in interactive FOCUS, creating complex reports easily.

Sun deployed several of its SPARCservers in its corporate sales and accounting departments and at each remote location. Individual users were equipped with Sun SPARCstations. Sybase was chosen for the UNIX database. The mainframe applications were then rewritten in FOCUS and deployed to the SPARCservers. Data is now extracted from the mainframe database on a daily basis and downloaded to the three Sybase databases on the SPARCservers for reporting purposes.

The Results

Immediately, Sun realized a quantum increase in user access to data. FOCUS enabled the developers to create simple front ends that end users could interface with directly. Consequently, the number of users jumped from 20 to over 400. These users now directly access downloaded data from SCORE, SUNBIAS, and SUNGLOBE and produce their own reports. About 1,500 reports per month, ranging from simple one-line queries (someone checking the status of an order, for example) to complex annual reports, involving sorts on databases containing upwards of 700,000 records per table, are run by about 200 users accessing the SCORE database alone. The smallest of the three Sybase databases, SCORE currently totals about 6 gigabytes.

Users now enjoy menu-driven environments, far more flexible reporting capabilities at their own desktops, and vastly improved response times. "What used to take weeks to obtain from Cullinet now takes a matter of minutes," Landon notes. "We've given users the ability to share data as well as query strategies, something they never had before," Landon said. This level of flexibility provides quicker access to a broader range of data for dispersed individuals and teams in such diverse disciplines as finance, credit, billing, marketing, sales, and manufacturing. Because query strategies are easily adapted and reused across many different functional disciplines, these individuals are able to concentrate on mission-critical processes such as customer service and product development, instead of spending time writing new queries. They are thus better able to do their jobs, and Sun's ability to respond more quickly to demanding customers, intense global competition and rapidly shifting markets and opportunities is enhanced.

Other FOCUS features that have been of particular benefit to Sun's users include its extensive formatting flexibility such as matrix reporting capabilities and its ability to join data from multiple databases.

Finally, a great deal of development time has been freed up to be applied to other projects. "From a support standpoint, the burden is much less," Landon said.

Future Plans

When Sun moves SUNBIAS, its manufacturing database, to Oracle, FOCUS' portability and consistent interface across databases will aid greatly in the effort, as all the query strategies users are presently writing will be instantly adaptable to the new environment, meaning users will suffer no loss of productivity.

Eventually, the company plans to retire its mainframe permanently. "We are in the process of moving all of our data processing to Sun systems," Landon said. "That will happen faster now, because of the development time that's been liberated." FOCUS has helped enable the company to accelerate its rightsizing effort. ❖

"What used to take weeks to obtain from Cullinet now takes a matter of minutes. We've given users the ability to share data as well as query strategies, something they never had before."

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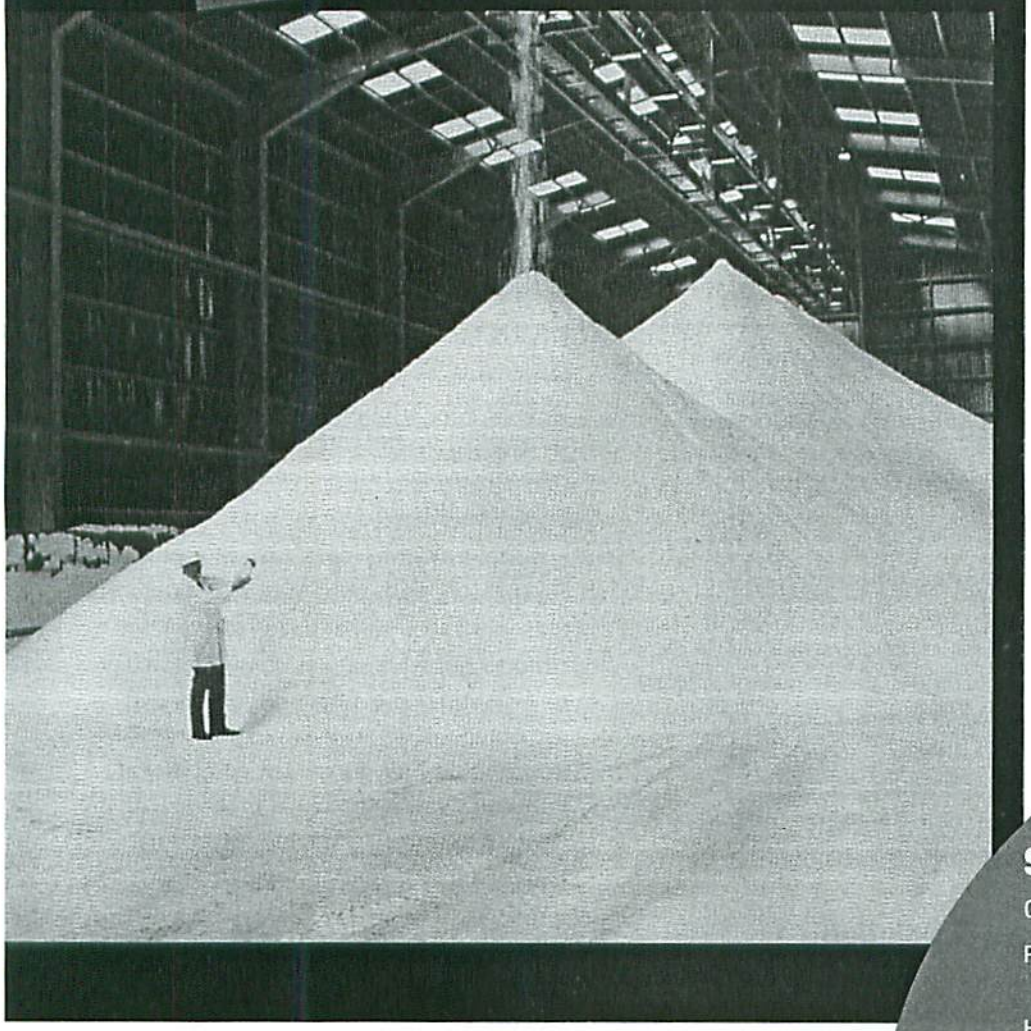

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Salt Union Sprinkles FOCUS Throughout Its Regions

Did you know that if all the world's oceans were to evaporate, enough salt would be left to cover the entire surface of the earth to a depth of 400 feet? Or that the word salary is derived from *salarium argentum*, the salt ration paid to Roman soldiers guarding the via Salaria, or Salt Road, which connected the salt mines of Ostia with Rome?

Despite its acceptance as one of life's more ignored commodities, salt has quite an interesting history and plays a vital role not only as an essential life-sustaining mineral, but also in the industrial, commercial, and domestic life of the United Kingdom. Apart from its domestic uses as a food additive and water softener, salt also has textile, pharmaceutical, and industrial applications that make it a very important and valuable commodity.

Snapshot

Organization: **Salt Union Ltd**

Profile: **Largest producer and supplier of salt in the UK**

Headquarters: **Cheshire, England**

The Challenge: **To leverage its IT investment by providing a mobile computer access solution for the company's regional sales managers**

Results: **Quicker, easier access to management information, resulting in far greater productivity**

"We spoke to several suppliers and found the ideal IT solution in FOCUS for Windows."

UK's Largest Salt Provider

Salt Union Ltd, established in 1992, is now the UK's largest producer and supplier of salt for commercial and domestic water softening, road de-icing, and domestic consumption. The company is headquartered in Cheshire, England and operates the White Salt Mine at Runcorn and the Rock Salt Plant at Winsford. Its customers include local authorities for road de-icing rock salt as well as a commercial and industrial client base for white salt.

Because the Salt Union regional sales managers work from home and also spend a great deal of time at customer sites, contact with company headquarters is minimal. Salt Union's Project Manager Paul Thomas explains, "The real problem was keeping our people up-to-date with the latest customer information. With the regional sales managers spending so much time working out of their homes and visiting customers, the impracticality of regular visits to headquarters is obvious.

"We needed to deliver relevant, timely information to our highly mobile regional sales managers in order for them to respond more efficiently to customer inquiries," Thomas continues. "One option was to employ more sales managers and reduce the size of their territories. But, that would merely compound the problems. Communication channels were the issue, so we sought to improve matters not by shortening the managers' sales trips, but with a high-tech, mobile computer access solution."

The Ideal IT Solution

The challenge then became to find a means of providing sales managers with access to all the updated customer information held on the central database at Runcorn, where they run a DEC VAX4400 with a 4GL package supporting an integrated customer accounts and sales ledger system. "We had a definite list of technical criteria a new system had to deliver," Thomas claims, "but above all, as we do not have the necessary technical resources in house, we sought a stable, proven company that could provide ongoing support."

The criteria Salt Union deemed most important were optimum data management capabilities, controlled user data on the VAX without duplication, an open system architecture for future growth and flexibility, the ability to share processing loads between the VAX and PCs in the field, a Graphical User Interface (GUI) for front-end ease of use, and an ad hoc report/graphics writer. "We spoke to several suppliers," Thomas continues, "and found the ideal IT solution in FOCUS for Windows."

With subsidiaries and representatives in over 65 countries and ranking among the world's leading independent software providers, Information Builders not only met Salt Union's technical criteria, but also its desire for security and reliability.

FOCUS for Windows was implemented on sales managers' Toshiba T195OCT notebook computers, allowing them to simply dial up the corporate database from customer sites or their homes and gather instant online information.

"For the first time, we feel connected to the company in a very real sense," adds Malcolm Duck, Sales Manager for Salt Union's northern region. "Now, before I go to a customer site, I have only to plug in my notebook PC and dial up the information I need from the computer at Runcorn. I know that what I am viewing is current, and the customer is assured of getting a true picture of supply levels."

Windows Implementation – First Of Its Kind

The Salt Union installation is the first implementation of its kind in the UK. FOCUS for Windows is used as a front-end system, operating through EDA/SQL to dial up information on a corporate VAX from remote sites.

FOCUS for Windows is a complete database information management system offering comprehensive, portable 4GL facilities for

information and medium-volume production systems. It supports more than 35 hardware/operating system platforms besides Windows: VM, MVS, AIX, OS/400 for IBM, DEC/VAX, UNIX, AT&T, DEC/ ULTRIX, HP, Sun, Apollo, and NCR – plus many others.

And this LAN-ready product comes bundled with an ODBC driver interface and can access more than 60 database sources: Btrieve, ADABAS, Datacom/DB, dBASE III & IV, DB2, DBMS, IMS, Informix, Ingres, Oracle, RMS, Sybase, System 2000, Cincom/TOTAL, and VSAM.

Since going live with the new system in December 1994, Salt Union benefits from FOCUS for Windows in many ways: a rapid end user learning curve and quicker, easier access to critical management information have resulted in far greater productivity. And the powerful FOCUS application toolset empowers users to build more comprehensive and up-to-date reports based on corporate data.

"The sales managers are very happy with the new system," Duck continues. "We all learned the main functionality within minutes and now have a handle on the new front-end applications. With no time wasted in complicated and lengthy retraining, we can get out there and give our customers quicker, better service."

The host computer at Runcorn provides sales managers with sales graphs, monthly sales trends, quarterly sales trends, and product analysis reports, as well as useful "Pareto" reports on the performance of the company's top customers based on net sales income. This represents important ammunition for each sales visit and means sales managers approach each meeting fully briefed. And because of its graphical user interface, FOCUS for Windows can quickly and easily highlight any sales anomalies and create "what if" scenarios that can be addressed and resolved on the spot.

"On one occasion," Duck remembers, "I was at a customer site and noticed from the online data that their sales trends were slowly dropping. When I pointed this out to my contact, he informed me that they were cutting back on their orders with us and ordering from a competitor because they thought they had accrued an additional charge for the pallets the salt was delivered on. I explained this was a simple misunderstanding, and as a result, our previous supply levels were resumed. It might have taken months before I could spot that trend previously – by which time we could have lost the account to the competitor entirely."

Powered for the Future

Salt Union is now using the system as a productive report generating system and is very pleased with the results. However, the powerful application development toolkit included in FOCUS for Windows could also allow Salt Union to create two-way communications procedures.

"We are aware of the need to gather information on changing market conditions from the field and feed them back to headquarters," Thomas states. "In that respect, Duck and his colleagues work at the front line and could provide a valuable source of information on competitive activities, customer opinions, and such. So I see a time in the future when we will use Information Builders' consultants to help us enhance our existing application procedures to empower users to update data in the field and port it back to the host at headquarters for analysis."

Whatever the future plans for FOCUS for Windows within the company, Thomas and his colleagues agree that so far the system is certainly worth its salt! ❖

"I see a time in the future when we will use Information Builders' consultants to help us enhance our existing application procedures to empower users to update data in the field and port it back to the host at head-quarters for analysis."

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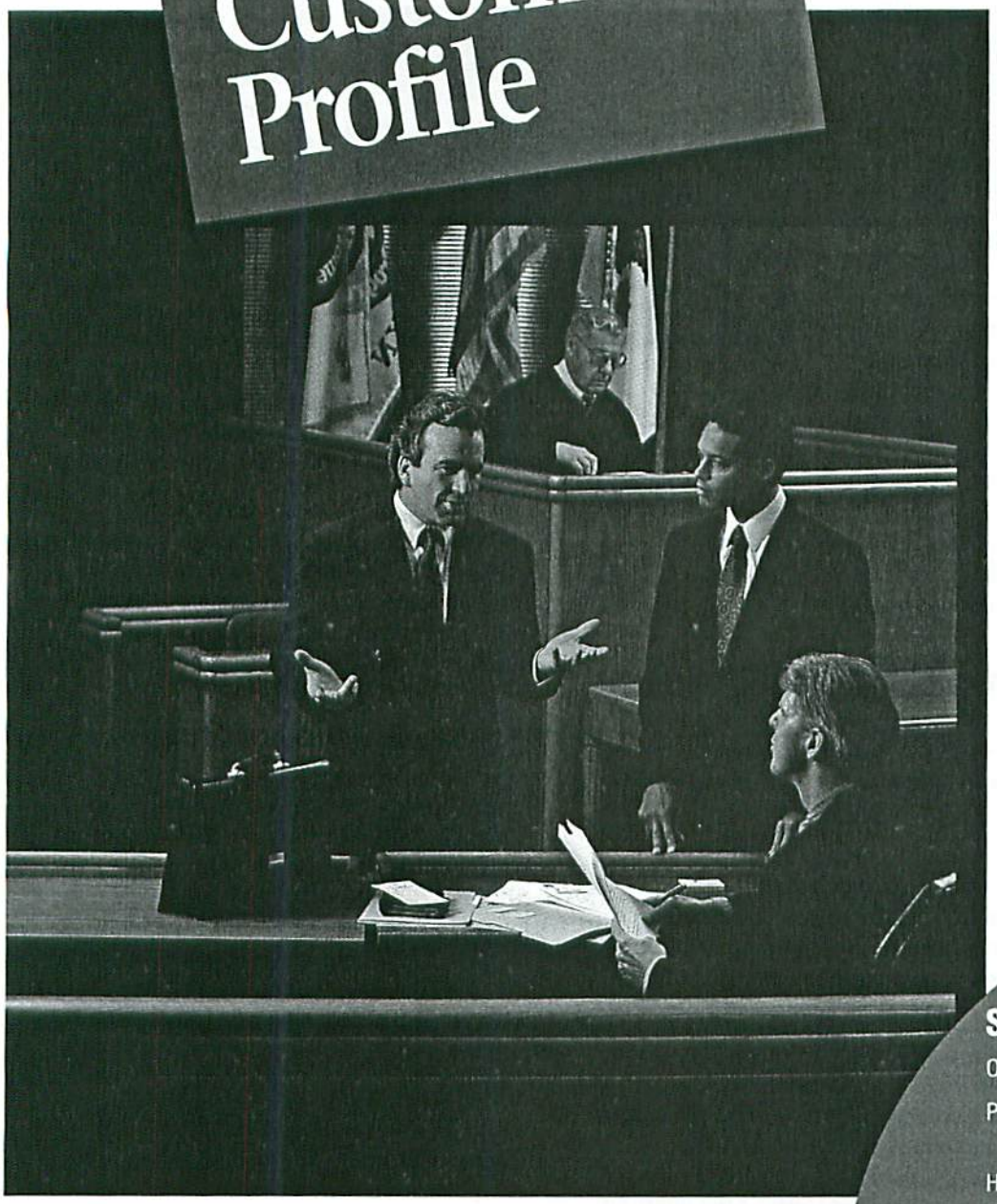


L.A. County Court System Rightsizes With FOCUS

Confronted with the state's budget crisis, the Los Angeles County Court system knew it was time to rightsize its civil and small claims tracking systems, developed by the county's Internal Services Department (ISD). ISD's custom-written systems and programs, which track civil and small claims cases for 23 outlying judicial districts, help manage one of the largest county court systems in America.

Six years ago, ISD Manager Teresa Lin and a staff of five programmers created the county's largest fourth generation application using FOCUS. This year, the innovation continues as the systems move from mainframe to open systems platforms and PCs. The power and flexibility of FOCUS has provided the county court system with new versions of programs that can be implemented on UNIX and PC platforms. And, the applications are now being marketed to outside judicial districts.

Snapshot

Organization: **Los Angeles County Courts**

Profile: **Largest county court system in the U.S.**

Headquarters: **Los Angeles, California**

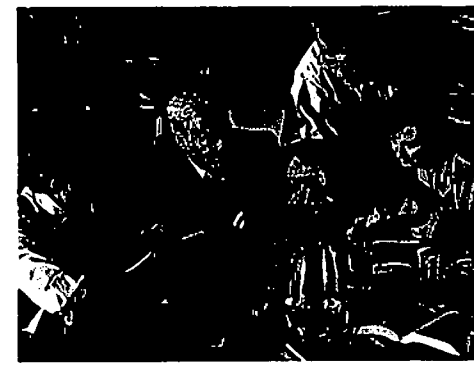
Objectives: **Reduce operating cost, make applications on multiple platforms more widely available, maintain a single set of code for all platforms.**

Why FOCUS: **100 percent portability and compatibility across platforms, and rapid prototyping capabilities.**

Results: **Computing cost reduced, easier and faster access to information, computer utilization cost reduced from $1 million to $400,000, maintenance minimized with a single set of programs.**

"FOCUS demonstrated 95% compatibility across its platforms. Rather than managing three different sets of code for such a massive system, the programmers engineered a single version of its applications with generic operating system calls."

Although FOCUS had been used on the mainframe for more than six years, the ISD usually designed PC and UNIX applications in a third generation language. "We always followed the traditional way of designing systems," Lin said, "using a third generation language. But the court told us they couldn't afford to wait three years to see a system. They asked if there was anything we could use to do it quickly," she continued. "Our users wanted something in six months."



FOCUS earned the rightsizing opportunity because of its rapid protoyping capabilites. These capabilities enabled computerization of a process that previously had clerks and judges swimming in dockets, the paper road maps that move cases through the court system. The FOCUS application supplies human resource management information that administrators once calculated manually.

Designed With Users in Mind

ISD had three goals for its rightsizing effort: to reduce costs, make its application more widely available, and maintain a single set of source code for all platforms.

The migration was no small effort. More than 3 gigabytes of data are stored in the new system, and as many as 200 active users access the software at peak times. "This is a large, complex mainframe application," Lin said.

Today, the computerized systems keep audit trails electronically and provide statistics to help the courts manage resources efficiently. According to Lin, the Civil Automation System (CIVAS) and Small Claims Online Tracking (SCOT) System answer the question "Who worked on that case, and what's its status?"

"Before, they couldn't tell," Lin said. "They had to look at each docket and find out who did each task." The FOCUS application can also drill down to specific cases to help verify total personnel hours used.

"Courts in our system never deal with paper dockets anymore," Lin said. "We're aiming for a paperless environment." On-screen dockets now make it easier to retrieve information instantly, with files that contain fewer errors.

Lin and her staff are proud of their system, in part because it was designed under the watchful eyes of their users. Specifications were generated by a vital steering committee chaired by Earl Bradley, Newhall Court Administrator, and the results have users raving," Lin added.

"One of our users refers to the application as a system for clerks that's designed by clerks," Lin said. "Once we implemented everything in FOCUS, we found out that if a statute was changed, we could modify the programs quickly and easily. The users really fell in love with that."

The system is being quality tested by the CIVAS/SCOT Countywide Help Desk for computer services. This acceptance testing of modifications has been an integral part of the development process for these systems.

Rightsizing Helps County Survive

With the new system, ISD significantly reduced personnel time needed for typing, filing, and tracking. But with the ongoing budget crunch across most of California, Los Angeles County officials also looked for a way to reduce computing costs while maintaining better service. Rightsizing with FOCUS was the key – overall computing costs were reduced, and access to information is easier and faster.

Anticipating the savings that rightsizing with FOCUS would provide, Lin said the county reduced the future budget for computer utilization from $1 million to $400,000 this year.

Meanwhile, migrating away from the mainframe gives the county a new source of revenue. By creating versions that run on UNIX and PC platforms, ISD is marketing its software to other judicial districts in California and throughout the U.S.

"Since our system is written in FOCUS it really has an advantage," Lin said. "We maintain the same functionality on all different platforms, so when we go out to

market – no matter what kind of hardware other counties have – the system fits. Not only does it save them money, it creates the ability for us to generate potential revenues by marketing the systems to others."

Moving Applications to the Most Efficient Platform

ISD used PC/FOCUS as a staging ground in its rightsizing project, since both PC/FOCUS and FOCUS for UNIX are ASCII-based implementations. "Subsequently, when we went from PC to UNIX, it made the move a lot easier," Lin said. The conversion from the mainframe's EBCDIC character scheme to ASCII was accomplished during the mainframe-to-PC rightsizing. The UNIX migration easily leveraged that work, Lin added.

The county chose PCs as development tools to minimize costly mainframe time. "PCs are cheap and easy to use, and they save us a lot of development costs," Lin said. "Developing new features on the PC gives us far greater productivity than developing on the mainframe and waiting for time-sharing."

At the same time, passing the applications through the smaller memory space of the PC ensures they'll run quickly on larger platforms. "FOCUS for the mainframe is much more generous with its memory space than PCs," Lin said. "If it runs on the PC, it's going to run on the mainframe."

Rightsizing to PC/FOCUS gave the systems mobility. ISD now demonstrates its system on a 486/66 PC, providing a response time of five seconds for the most complex online requests. "The users were really amazed when they saw that," Lin said.

Later this year, ISD won't be running the new application on its mainframe at all. An HP 9000 I50 will work as a UNIX-based server. The systems will also run on 486/66 PCs with Windows to give judges and clerks access over Novell local area networks. "FOCUS demonstrated 95 percent compatibility across its platforms," Lin said. Rather than managing three different sets of code for such a massive system, the programmers engineered a single version of its applications with generic operating system calls.

UNIX Adventures

"The primary landing pad for the rightsizing is UNIX," Lin said. "UNIX is built for large multiuser applications and is much more advanced than the PC environment. When we tested in the PC environment with local area networks and multiuser modes, it wasn't as stable as we wanted." Response time from the UNIX systems is even better than PC versions, she added.

Initial plans called for the courts to use existing 3270-style terminals and mainframe coaxial links to the HP 9000. "Since we have so many users, it's not possible for our customers to change everything to PCs overnight," Lin said. "Once you change to a PC, you have to install the wiring as well."

"FOCUS is portable, but the operating system commands are not portable at all," Lin said. "We modified our FOCUS programs so they would run on any platform."

"FOCUS gave a quick and highly productive start for a development staff that had no UNIX training whatsoever." Lin said. "Most of the work is done for you; that's the advantage of FOCUS."

Rightsizing has become so imperative in L.A. County's ISD that the department offers its own UNIX training – once it had to contract for outside education. "Our department has seriously moved into UNIX and rightsizing mainframe applications to open systems platforms," Lin said.

Positioned for the Future

The technology leaps and lowered costs from rightsizing have created marketing opportunities for L.A. County. By adding platforms for the application to serve many more clerks across the country, the system's marketability is being expanded to include prospects with small to medium user bases who have already made a hardware decision.

"The portability of FOCUS makes all this possible and practical," Lin said. "Our ultimate goal is to leverage a very successful mainframe FOCUS system and extend its reach to new computer platforms, while we minimize maintenance with a single set of programs. This lets us distance prospective customers' application decisions from their hardware decisions." Users of the new application get better choices of price versus performance by rightsizing, a move that's proved to be a sound judgment for everyone. ❖

"FOCUS gave a quick and highly productive start for a development staff that had no UNIX training whatsoever. Most of the work is done for you; that's the advantage of FOCUS... Our ultimate goal is to leverage a very successful mainframe FOCUS system and to extend its reach to new computer platforms."

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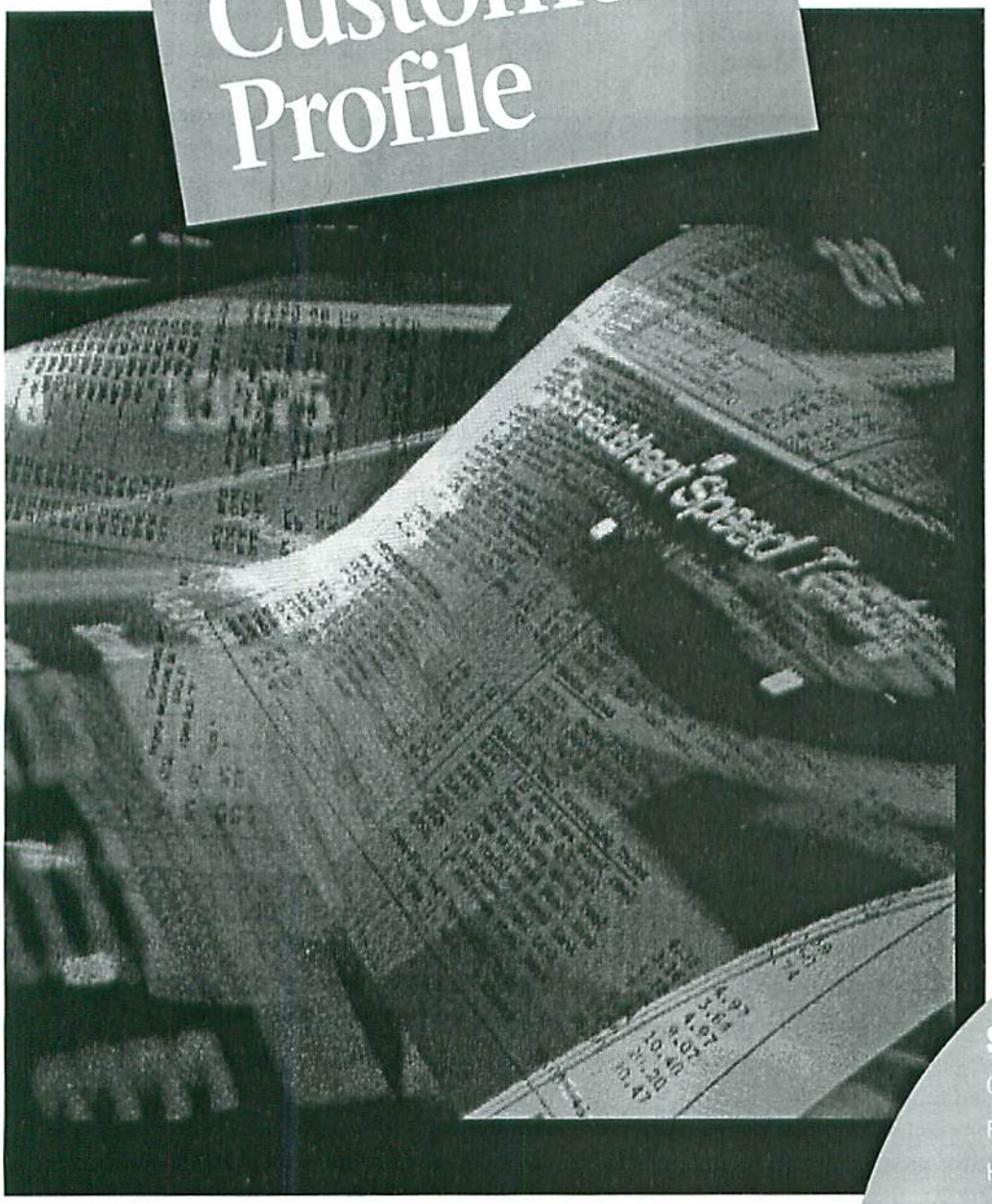

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FOCUS Reduces Rightsizing Risk for Insurance Brokerage

Insurance broking and consulting services require fast information distribution to manage risk. Sedgwick, a major risk analysis service headquartered in New York City, kept pace with those demands by migrating from a mainframe to a UNIX server. FOCUS, from Information Builders, was given the central role in this massive rightsizing project.

Sedgwick offers its customers INFORM™, a risk management system written in FOCUS. Risk management systems monitor claim payments, monthly activity, reserve changes, and cash flow based on an organization's insurance claim information. The data is used for actuarial forecasting, property and asset inventories, managing related litigation, and controlling losses.

Snapshot

Organization: Sedgwick

Profile: Provider of risk analysis services.

Headquarters: New York City, NY

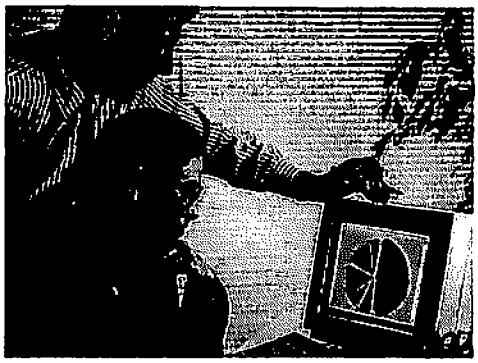
Objectives: Reduce mainframe computing cost, increase competitiveness, meet customer need for faster response time.

Why FOCUS: Multiple platform capability, ease of use, seamless integration of existing systems, powerful and flexible reporting systems, extensive Professional Services support.

Results: Drastic reduction in operational costs, better customer service, improved responsiveness for creating incident, loss, and consolidation of claim reports.

"We were running up some substantial bills by the time we finished with the mainframe and clients just couldn't support it. After rightsizing with FOCUS, our P&L statement improved dramatically."

INFORM gives companies an integrated management perspective on their total risk management program and helps analyze and report on the multitude of claims data provided by insurers and third-party administrators. Reports help employers minimize accidents, improve marketing strategies, analyze the effectiveness of new programs, and even determine the frequency of injuries by body part. This allows Sedgwick's customers – from Fortune 500 corporations to small businesses and not-for-profit organizations – to get the most for their premium dollar.



From the Mainframe – Down

Because INFORM services were first developed in the early 1980s, they were run from mainframes. But mainframe power came at a tremendous price. Alan Josefsek, Manager of Sedgwick's Information Systems Division, says the cost eventually affected his division's competitiveness. Personal computers had revamped customer's expectations regarding computing costs – downward. Furthermore, mainframe processing costs were uncertain and as attitudes changed, these indeterminate expenses made new business harder to obtain.

"Customers don't want to commit to open-ended financial situations," says Josefsek. "When you quote expenses, you can not leave processing costs as an open-ended issue."

Sedgwick had already done its share of migration in response to client requests for reports and analysis of claims data. A TransAmerica data center that had provided Sedgwick with mainframe services for nearly a decade had moved from IBM's 3090 systems to an ES/9000 and finally up to a top-end Amdahl 1400 system with 110 MIPS of power.

Rightsizing Challenges

With more than 13GB of data online and as many as 50 users accessing the system each month, INFORM is a system that requires plenty of storage and CPU cycles. As clients demanded faster response times and the need to upgrade the mainframes became more apparent, Josefsek became convinced that it was time to rightsize to UNIX.

Sedgwick didn't have to worry about code compatibility as it planned its migration because INFORM had been written in FOCUS. Josefsek recalls, "We had originally chosen FOCUS because it runs on a lot of platforms." However, as with many operations that grew around mainframes, the staff that managed the large system had little UNIX experience. Sedgwick chose to tap Information Builders' Professional Services to advise them.

Realistic Goals Set

Before Sedgwick began its year-long rightsizing effort, the division set reasonable goals for its migration. Josefsek says, in addition to cutting and stabilizing expenses, he wanted FOCUS "to reproduce what was on the mainframe in terms of capability, accessibility, and capacity."

System capacity is measured by the number of users able to access the RS/6000 simultaneously. As many as a dozen users dial in from across the United States to use INFORM at once, and capacity exists for even more. While the mainframe version of FOCUS manages this concurrent access itself, FOCUS for UNIX relies on SINK front-end processing software.

Efficient Platform Development

PC/FOCUS was chosen as the development platform because it achieves the best response time. Work was later transferred

to the RS/6000. By integrating a natural language system to complement its mainframe FOCUS application, response time for ad hoc reports was improved. Rightsizing also replaced the need for an add-on access utility.

The Sedgwick staff identified a core set of programs in its FOCUS application. Josefsek says, they then concentrated on making "a standard directory of programs and master files work. Then we migrated the custom subsystems. It was a big task – there were thousands of programs."

Parallel development enabled Sedgwick to continue to provide reports to clients during the rightsize. Clients who only receive batch reports found the change particularly seamless. Josfesek adds that his own staff "found the pure FOCUS code between the two systems to be extremely compatible."

Changes for the Better

Speeding information delivery was not the only benefit Sedgwick realized from its rightsize. "Today, there are many more ways we can get data to clients," says Josefsek.

Some third-party administration firms send tapes with claims data. These are now front-end processed on the RS/6000, then converted using PC/FOCUS with a PC version of INFORM, and distributed to clients. Many clients now dial into the RS/6000 system and download report files that are then spooled to local printers. A batch option gives clients reports as print files that later appear in their directory on the RS/6000. Leased communications lines enable clients to print directly to printers at their own sites.

The shift to FOCUS for UNIX has also given Sedgwick more room to customize applications for clients. "You can customize an application right down to the user level more easily in the UNIX environment with FOCUS," Josefsek says. "If a client wants a report run every

Information Builders' Professional Services Lends Rightsizing Expertise

When Sedgwick took its first steps into the world of UNIX, seasoned experts from Information Builders' Professional Services Team were there to lend a helping hand. Sedgwick Information Systems Manager Alan Josefsek says Professional Services consultants contributed greatly to the rapid and successful completion of their rightsizing project.

"Our concern was that we weren't experienced with UNIX," Josefsek says. "Changes needed to be made in the UNIX environment – and that's where Professional Services helped us get our applications converted. They were an invaluable resource in getting these applications rightsized in a timely and cost-effective manner, significantly cutting down the time to deploy the application."

For example, in their Memphis, Tennessee data center, there are several SINK software modules at work on a single RS/6000. This SINK technology replaced the multiuser functions of the Sedgwick INFORM application being rightsized from an Amdahl mainframe. But SINK was new technology to the Sedgwick staff, so Information Builders consultants wrote the program scripts needed to drive the machines, Josefsek says. Information Builders' expertise helped the staff make the most of the FOCUS capabilities, easing the migration to UNIX.

"FOCUS made it much easier, and the consulting group helped out significantly," Josefsek adds. "We were short-staffed and didn't have sufficient knowledge in the UNIX operating system. Professional Services helped set up directories and paths on our UNIX system and helped us move some of the files."

Professional Services offers more than just programming assistance for FOCUS projects. They provide the expertise to completely plan and implement rightsizing strategies such as the one at Sedgwick. They cover strategic short- and long-term planning as well as tactical areas. Their expertise can take many forms, but all of it is designed to bring business-critical information systems into production faster and easier.

Although Sedgwick moved away from the MVS/TSO mainframe environment to the flexibility of UNIX, they left behind proven operating system safeguards. Professional Services helped them find the same functionality in Sedgwick's new environment. "Security under UNIX was another issue we weren't sure about," Josefsek says. Professional Services established a security structure "that really helped us get through the project. Using a knowledgeable consultant clearly was the best way to go," he affirms.

The range of services offered by Information Builders extends beyond their product line. Information Builders offers extensive UNIX workshops and classes that help users learn how to use FOCUS in a UNIX environment, and there are classes that are beneficial to non-FOCUS users as well. The Education Department offers a three-day UNIX fundamentals course, and a rightsizing curriculum for both executive-level and technical users.

Industry analysts say that extent of support is important to a successful rightsizing implementation. The complex nature of UNIX demands a turnkey approach in many projects, according to Database Decisions President Jeffrey Tash. Complete integration support is a sound investment, especially if FOCUS is playing a leading role as it did at Sedgwick.

In the long run, customers save a lot of money because a solutions provider such as Information Builders is intimate with the product. Extending the reach of an existing resource such as FOCUS in an organization can keep users from recreating work in less efficient languages. The scalability of FOCUS makes it a prime choice for development on any platform. There's no need to rewrite FOCUS code – just tweak it so UNIX can accommodate it.

Monday morning, I can do that a lot easier in FOCUS than I could in the MVS environment. It's simpler to execute."

The Bottom Line

Hard dollar savings are easy to spot, too. Computing operation costs dropped drastically, reducing the division's expenses. "We were running up some substantial bills by the time we finished with the mainframe and clients just couldn't support it," Josefsek says. After rightsizing with FOCUS, "Our P&L statement improved dramatically."

Sedgwick customers are getting better service as well. "We needed to improve our response time – and we did," Josefsek says. "Incident reports, loss control reports and consolidation of claim data reports, are arriving faster than ever."

"I visited with a client the other day," Josefsek reports, "and they said, 'In the last six months I've seen definite improvements in service. I'm getting my information sooner.' That's because the RS/6000 is able to process the information faster for us and we've eliminated the need to support the natural language system."

Josefsek still is working out some details on rightsizing. An '800' number for dial-in lines was needed to replace the IBM network. But overall, rightsizing has transformed his cost structure and revamped service to INFORM users.

"You have to look at how your colleagues are going to adapt to UNIX, and whether the UNIX system will support your needs years from now," he concludes. "From what I've seen, it will." His rightsizing review is succinct: "If I had to do it over, the only thing I would do differently would have been to do it sooner. The bottom line is that megaflops on the RS/6000 are just cheaper." ❖

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