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APPLICATION STUDY

M.I.S. Print speeds Commerce Insurance through conversion process

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Think of it as a technological insurance policy. When Webster, Massachusetts-based Commerce Insurance Company decided to replace its existing printers that, after years of serving staffers well, were ready for retirement—the decision was made to transition to modern production printers to handle the 1.3 million impressions generated monthly by Commerce Insurance's data center. The question for Commerce Insurance's data center: how best to seamlessly migrate its legacy files—all created using Metacode—to industry standard PostScript?

"All of our in-house forms, invoices, billing and declaration pages were stored as Metacode," explains Mary Doyon, manager, computer operations for Commerce Insurance. "We needed a way to switch our documents over to PostScript to run on the new printer. And we needed a way to do it that was uncomplicated and affordable."

Established in 1972, the Commerce Insurance Company—a subsidiary of The Commerce Group, Inc.—has grown to become the largest provider of private passenger automobile insurance in Massachusetts, insuring nearly one of every four registered automobiles in the state. In addition, the company is the second leading provider of homeowners insurance and fourth leading writer of commercial automobile insurance in Massachusetts.

"We run a pretty straightforward operation," says Bill O'Hare, data center manager for Commerce Insurance. "Not a lot of graphics, not a lot of distinct forms. But we do generate a substantial number of invoices, declaration pages and month-end reports. So we needed a solution that would transition us smoothly without down time."

Commerce Insurance's data center operators work two 13-hour shifts. Among its workload: 30,000 invoices are generated every night. They are printed on a semipro printed form on which the printer overlays the form. "It's a perforated colored box," explains Doyon. "We lay our company logo on top of it and then lay the invoice on top of that. Not really complicated but very important."

Migrating from Metacode to PostScript

Commerce Insurance looked for advice as to how it could migrate to PostScript without bringing its data center to a screeching halt. The solution:

M.I.S. Print from Rochester Software Associates.

"We did our due diligence to make sure it was a good solution for us," says O'Hare. "Everything in RSA's portfolio checked out. They offered us a very finite, very well defined migration process. They had a great track record, knew products inside out, had reasonable pricing and offered a guarantee."

After the new printer was brought in to Commerce Insurance's data center—which includes four AS/400 servers—work began to migrate the company's existing Metacode files to PostScript. Two weeks later the work was completed.

"It was very impressive," says O'Hare. "We did have a couple of form glitches, which we were expecting. But they were just unbelievable in turning the problem around, establishing a fix and building it into their base code."

Even unconventional code didn't slow the process. "In the implementation of the Metacode translator 10 years ago, we went with a very unconventional approach," acknowledges Doyon.

"So there it was. What was impressive about RSA was that we hooked them up on a tele-conference, outlined what we were facing and they told us that they'd have a fix in two business days. And they did. Every time they made a commitment, they nailed it. And they did in this case as well. It could have been a major issue. But it wasn't. Everything got handled."

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Manager, Computer Operations

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And it worked. "We ran parallel for a couple of weeks just to make sure everything was running smoothly," says Doyon. "But once that two weeks was up, we threw the switch."

Adds O'Hare: "M.I.S. Print enabled us to switch over with very little effort on our part."

High praise for support

RSA continues to monitor Commerce Insurance's success. "Software enhancements in the form of a new release, generally take place once a year," says O'Hare. "and in all cases the user is responsible for applying all modifications to the software upgrade. Fortunately, RSA included all our modifications in their standard code which took a huge burden of continual maintenance off of us."

Within days of completely switching on the new system, Doyon had five night operators come separately into her office thanking her.

"They were practically on their knees," she recalls, laughing. "They really liked the overall performance of the machine. Workflow improved because they weren't dealing with paper jams or other recurrences.

"The majority of our printing is done through the evening hours," she explains. "We have 8:00 availability for our users, at which point we'll go into our backups and production cycle which continues through the night. Most production is complete by 6:00 a.m. the next day."

In addition to M.I.S Print's capabilities, Doyon has high praise for the people behind the equipment. "Their ability to react and to be part of the team was impressive," she says. "They were always there, ahead of the issues."

According to O'Hare, staying ahead of the technology curve remains a daily challenge for data centers. "In today's environment there are so many pieces of componentry in terms of software, switches, servers and you name it-that touch every aspect of the system. So when you get an organization like RSA to stand up and say we'll handle it-and they do-that's really a big plus."

Commerce Insurance's flexible print system well positions the company as it continues to grow. "We're ready to react quickly to whatever comes our way," notes O'Hare. Commerce Insurance's data center will offer network print capabilities as company needs indicates such a move. "Part of the printer's appeal was that it could be a network printer," says Doyon. "For example, manuals for new crews of trainees could be sent down here to print instead of running the job outside as many of these projects currently are handled. For larger jobs, this could be an option."

And RSA continues to be part of the plan. "We plan to continue our relationship with RSA as we move into different types of forms in the future," says Doyon.

As for the conversion, O'Hare still can't believe it went as smoothly as it did. "I never would have anticipated we could go through a process like that so quickly," he marvels. "Granted, we're not a huge shop with hundreds and hundreds of forms, but to get through it in such a short time frame-these guys did a wonderful job."

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