



SUNGARD EXP

Case Study:
GHS Data Management

GHS Data Management (GHS) in Augusta, Maine, is one of the largest data capture facilities in the Northeast, serving state and local agencies, pharmacies, various medical associations, HMOs, hospitals and private corporations. GHS is also a Pharmacy Services Administration Organization providing online prescription processing for pharmacy benefits.

As a service bureau for the healthcare industry for over twenty-four years, GHS has managed the flow of data from surveys, proxy and claim forms and created useful information for their clients in a world of complex, everchanging technology and customer expectations. In addition to GHS's cornerstone data capture department, the company also provides data processing and analysis as well as image archival services. GHS began a quarter century ago as a heads down, data entry service bureau. Today, the company has evolved into a leader in government and healthcare data processing, thanks in part, to the implementation of advanced technologies.

THE CHALLENGE

In June of 1997, GHS Data Management received a letter that would change the way they did business. In the letter, GHS was advised that the “heads down” data entry system they had come to rely on, would no longer be supported by the vendor’s technical staff. For GHS, this news appeared to be a mixed blessing. While the system was old and outmoded, the GHS staff had become quite proficient on the GEN 5 system and produced some of the highest keystroke-per-hour averages in the industry.

Also contained in the letter was a proposition that GHS management felt was too good to turn down. The trusted vendor who had supported their “heads down” system so faithfully over the years suggested a move to a combined scanning/OCR system that the vendor would design and then train GHS staff to run. Along with moving to a more technologically sophisticated system, GHS was told they would be able to achieve production numbers in the 200 document-per-operator hour range. With assurances on production numbers nailed down, GHS and the vendor inked the deal.

Unfortunately for GHS, results fell short of expectations. Not only was the system unreliable, but production numbers were close to 75 percent less than their manual system. In the meantime, GHS had a workload that included thousands of daily HCFAs (an insurance industry claim form) that by contract, required processing within 48 hours of receipt. Because the new OCR/scanning system was unreliable, operators resorted to keying from image to meet the 48-hour deadline. Still, a backlog of work mounted while the vendor frantically tried to patch holes in the system.

In an effort to keep up with the client workload, GHS added a second shift of 24 keyers. Many of these keyers were hired as temporary workers and required a considerable amount of training. As in many rapid keying environments, injuries were prevalent. Repetitive stress injuries and physical therapy appointments took one to two employees off the work floor per week. Turnover and morale had never been worse.

After two years of false starts and dozens of system Band-Aids, GHS data entry staff still only processed 64 documents per operator hour. Instead of improved work conditions using state-of-the-art technology, the technical staff found themselves nursing an ill-designed system. The addition of mandatory overtime, cancellation of holidays and interrupted vacation schedules further eroded already waning morale.

During this time, the claims processing division’s top account voiced their concern over the new system. GHS’s ability to turn documents in 48 hours lengthened by days and at one point by weeks. The service bureau’s top account was getting nervous. Without consistent performance on turnaround, the client would cancel their contract. Determined to get their production numbers back on track and keep their longtime client happy, a group of technical and business managers met to discuss the problem. After several lengthy meetings a consensus was reached, the service bureau had no other option but to scrap the system and start again from scratch. While the episode was a painful and costly period in the company’s history, it did provide invaluable lessons for the future.

THE SOLUTION

In late 1999 with the holidays fast approaching, a small procurement team comprised of a data services manager, a systems expert and the company’s top brass met to review bids and critique vendor demonstrations.

“We called three vendors to the table initially,” said Jeanne Smith, data capture manager. “But that number was whittled down to two fairly quickly. After researching competitive solutions and hearing glowing testimonials from their clients, we knew we had to go with SunGard EXP.”

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SunGard EXP of Birmingham, Alabama, is developer of the award winning data-capture solution, EXP FormWorks. Besides EXP FormWorks' open-system architecture that enables users to customize and modify system modules as needs change, the SunGard EXP team bundled their presentation with an additional benefit. Knowing that the service bureau had already taken on a significant expenditure in their previous procurement, SunGard's Manu Uppal suggested a unique financing option. Rather than asking for an investment commitment from the already gun-shy GHS team, Uppal suggested a "per click" fee structure. GHS would still need to finance the purchase of a new scanner and five new servers to upgrade the hardware for the project, but the software and services expenses would be billed only as claims were actually processed.

"We had already been burnt, but this time we knew what questions to ask," said Jeanne Smith, a 25-year veteran with GHS. "We traveled to a SunGard EXP site in Atlanta and spoke to many of their customers on the phone. SunGard EXP was willing to give us the software with no up-front costs. Their willingness to stand behind their product is what finally swayed us."

During the early weeks of system development, SunGard EXP systems engineer Luis Chalmeta, GHS project manager Darren Hartford and Smith held numerous conference calls to flush out critical business rules and logic requirements – a six-week process that would make or break the success of the system. During the design stage, GHS's document process was examined and graphed to set the groundwork for customization of the EXP FormWorks solution.



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With EXP FormWorks, future customization will be just as user friendly. That's because SunGard EXP's office in Blacksburg, Virginia, is also home to an exact replica of the GHS system. There, Chalmeta monitors the back-up system and tests new code and rules before they are implemented live at GHS.

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Today, GHS processes approximately 150,000 claim forms a month. Contractual obligations, which spell out processing deadlines of 48 hours with a one percent reject rate, no longer keep employees overtime. Now, Smith's department processes over 200 HCFA documents per operator hour and has added a second industry claim form to the mix. The UB-92 – previously keyed from paper by a half-dozen employees – is now automated for the first time in the company's history using EXP FormWorks and two employees.

As for the two rocky years GHS spent weathering the storm of a costly technology misfit, they are now behind them. Today the company is on an even keel. GHS finds itself in an enviable leading edge position when new business comes calling. For employees, repetitive stress injuries and mounting deadlines have given way to flex time and improved work conditions. Both management and data capture employees are enjoying weekends and holidays again. And Smith, the manager who saw the data capture department through the roughest of waters, well, she just returned from a long-deserved vacation.

About SunGard EXP

SunGard EXP helps empower large organizations to capture, manage, store and deliver content in order to automate workflow, enhance processes, track productivity, promote collaboration and deliver time-sensitive client communications. EXP features industry-leading technologies with EXP FormWorks, EXP MACESS, EXP Web, EXP Mailing and EXP SCORE, creating a comprehensive, single-source solution for the managed care industry. Offering single department to enterprise-wide solutions, EXP uses a proven implementation methodology that helps ensure the predictability of results.

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