

THE BACKGROUND

Business offices at tax-supported institutions such as municipalities, county governments and utilities struggle under the challenge to deliver high-level service under tight fiscal restraints. Most are under the supervision of elected officials, boards, and councils that are understandably reluctant to impose new levies on their constituents.

Hence, when more things can be accomplished with fewer dollars, it's "win-win" all around. Sometimes, solutions are found in cooperative vendor relationships, such as the business partnership between SunGard HTE and ACOM -- one that has helped nearly 100 municipalities and other government agencies with iSeries (AS/400) environments to improve service levels, upgrade office efficiency and conserve taxpayer dollars by optimizing back office practices that typically have been performed manually.

THREE GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

City of Great Falls, Montana

At the City of Great Falls, Montana (which uses the SunGard HTE financial back office system) modernization of form and check production processes was under consideration for a long time, with neither the city administration nor the city council satisfied with the way things were being done, according to Systems Analyst Tom Pike.

The processes involved the costly periodic purchase and inventory of pre-printed, pre-numbered forms for payroll and accounts payable checks, as well as all of the other forms used by the City. Once the forms or checks were printed, burst and sorted, there was the manual follow-up, signing, stuffing and mailing.

Pike evaluated several systems and selected two software systems developed by ACOM Solutions, Inc.:

- **EZeDocs/400** -- an electronic document design, production and distribution solution.
- **EZPayManager/400** -- a comprehensive payment management solution, with both MICR laser printer and electronic payment capabilities.

Both solutions are host resident on the iSeries (AS/400) and allow users to replace expensive preprinted check and document forms with electronic templates.

And when ACOM announced its new PC-resident EZDesigner/400 32-bit GUI-based form and check design tool, Pike immediately purchased it as well.

One of ACOM's installation specialists created their first form, after which Pike designed check forms for payroll, direct deposit advices, utility statements, 2003 W2 statements and 1099 forms. Later, he also designed forms for GMBA accounts payable checks and put them into service.

Pike has been extremely pleased with ACOM's solutions. The bi-directional design capability of EZDesigner/400 allows him to quickly drag-and-drop form elements to create templates on the PC, upload them to the AS/400, and download them back to the PC for easy modification.

City of Rancho Palos Verdes, California

Rancho Palos Verdes is a community of 45,000 residents, comprised primarily of private homes and a smattering of multiple residence buildings. The city has no industry and only a small amount of commercial activity. Its income is derived mainly from property taxes, utility taxes, license fees and franchise taxes.

When city officials decided to modernize their accounting system, they transitioned from an IBM System 36 to an AS/400. The business management software that had been in use was clearly unusable and the city's finance director selected SunGard HTE to replace it. The accounting side includes: general ledger, accounts payable, cash receipts and project costing. It is supplemented by specialized SunGard HTE modules, including Business Licenses, Payroll, Land and Parcel Management.

Finance Director Dennis McLean also indicated that he had no further interest in impact printers but instead wanted to output reports, forms and checks on a laser printer using blank paper stock. He examined two solutions that were compatible with SunGard HTE and selected ACOM's EZeDocs/400 and EZPayManager/400 along with two of ACOM's MICR-enhanced laser printers for producing checks on blank security check stock.

The finance department staff assumed responsibility for implementing the check and form templates. Using an existing form as a model, the accounting staff created an electronic template of their accounts payable check in only one and one-half days.

With the learning curve negotiated, the staff next created a payroll department direct deposit form template. Check forms were followed by the business license form, which was a more complex implementation process since it was an odd size designed for use with a carriage printer, and which involved producing a copy. The department used 8.5" x 11" stock with two perforations, printing on the top two sections -- one copy for the client and one for the city -- and discarding

the bottom thirds. Other forms now in use include: W2s, 1099s, quarterly payroll tax forms, and purchase orders.

"Now it's easy to print checks daily, instead of running them every two weeks and manually typing up individual checks," McLean says. "Loading the printer is simple and fast, since we don't have to burn forms to adjust register when we print and we don't have to worry about secure inventory and logging numbers. It's a streamlined, cost-effective process."

San Bernardino Department of Water

The City of San Bernardino (California) Department of Water issues 40,000 utility bills per month, in runs of 5,000 or more in a single day. It also issues between 200 and 400 checks per month, most for utility refunds.

For years, utility bills and disbursements were churned out on pre-printed multipart forms using dot matrix report printers that were fed data by an IBM mainframe computer. The forms were burst and decollated, then manually sorted, stuffed, and mailed. IT operations ran in 24-hour mode and it was not unusual, says IT Director Pat Rogers, for a billing or payment process to consume seven or eight hours of staff time.

When the department decided to upgrade its back office processes, it migrated to an IBM AS/400 and a customer information software (CIS) suite from SunGard HTE Inc. The software included SunGard HTE's utility billing module, land management module and a customer reporting module.

Initially, a laser-printer-based third party check and document output solution was selected, but after assessing its cost and experiencing extensive implementation delays, the contract was cancelled. Rogers settled on ACOM's EZeDocs/400 and EZPayManager/400 software solutions, which integrate seamlessly with HTE software and cost only about one-quarter as much as the outsourced solution.

Rogers and his staff installed the software and worked on forms design for about a day, consulting with ACOM by telephone. Within two or three days, they were testing templates and within two weeks, the department was live with the ACOM solutions.

Processes that often went on all night in pre-HTE/ACOM days are now accomplished in only a couple of hours, Rogers says. Two 33-page-per-minute laser printers have long since paid for themselves through savings in labor and equipment costs. An OCR barcode capability has enhanced efficiency by imprinting postal codes on bills and by allowing the use of an automated remittance processor for returned stubs. And in late 2003, Rogers further built out his SunGard HTE solution, adding modules for general ledger (GMBA), human resources, applicant tracking,

payroll, and fixed assets, all of which will use electronic templates and laser printed production.

SUCCESS!

The problems confronted and solved in Great Falls, Rancho Palos Verdes and San Bernardino are shared not only by most government agencies, but also in business back offices throughout the land, anywhere that expense control and efficiency are continuing challenges. If you have a similar problem you are looking to solve, you can visit ACOM online at www.acom.com/iseries, or call ACOM at 800-603-6768.

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