BUSINESS

Deluxe Corporation's Paper Payment Systems unit provides check printing and business forms services to the financial industry. It also sells direct mail checks to households and small businesses. The company is headquartered in Shoreview, Minnesota.

ISSUES

- Control increasing costs of monitoring and controlling widespread multiple LPARs and distributed systems.

- Respond quickly to market trends to give Financial Institution customers a greater competitive edge.

- Improve service quality at lowest possible cost.

- Proactively handle system alerts to improve system availability.

SOLUTION

Use Global MAINTECH's Virtual Command Center to improve service accuracy and availability at lowest possible cost.

BENEFITS

- Centralized, automated command center handles small problems automatically and escalates larger problems faster.

- Improved system availability means reliable on line check ordering services—faster, more accurate, at lowest cost.

- Global MAINTECH's VCC saves $225,000 per year and frees employees to move into higher level positions at Deluxe.

- Intelligent application of technology helps drive out costs while delivering better service.

Far more than just a check printer—although it has been renowned as the supplier of The Most Popular Checks in the World® since the company's founding in 1915—Deluxe Corporation is a sophisticated technology company providing a full spectrum of risk management services to financial institutions (FIs). Deluxe's Paper Payment Systems business segment maintains a vast financial database that instantly analyzes the financial profile of a prospective account holder. The bank or other FI can hold costs down by identifying high-risk applicants and set up accounts for qualified applicants quickly. And Deluxe has also refined its basic service—check ordering—with a new Customer Interface application designed to eliminate the need for check order forms. Customers can now order and reorder checks by contacting Deluxe on line via a terminal at the bank, a telephone, or even over the Internet.

The key: customer satisfaction

Deluxe's primary customers are banks and other FIs, and Deluxe works hard to maintain their loyalty by delivering the quality it promises—and by continually improving the services it provides. Deluxe strives to be a good partner by listening to FIs' requests and putting those requests into better processes and products. But customer satisfaction only starts there. The end users of Deluxe products are concerned with such factors as up-to-date graphic styles, printing quality, order accuracy, security, delivery time, and affordability. If Deluxe products fall short in any of these areas, there are any number of "off-brand" check purveyors who will gladly step forward and assume the business.

"We constantly work to deliver the best service available at the lowest possible price," says Dave Schultz, Deluxe's Director of Server and Data Center Operations. "It's the same old story—deliver more for less. We do it by holding IT costs down, by automating manufacturing, by maintaining the most current databases, and by making sure it's all available 100 percent of the time. For example, the most efficient way for us to take an order is online. Every other way is more expensive. Fax is not good quality; mail is slow. Of course, we still get the order out, but taking an order in hard copy costs more, it can delay the product reaching the customer, and there's more room for error."

Technology driving out costs

Deluxe is a Tivoli framework user, employing LPAR servers running IBM's CICS database management system. With availability such a critical factor, Deluxe IT managers sought a way they could centralize control of seven LPARs and literally hundreds of distributed UNIX and NT platform systems. They were determined to minimize system outages and reduce operating costs. "If anyone can drive costs out of business, I believe that the IT organization is the place to do it," says Schultz. "You have to do the right things, and you have to have the right data available at marketers and consumers fingertips. "But if we can do those things," adds Todd Pleau, Technical Analyst for Enterprise Automation, "we can be competitive with anybody."

Deluxe chose Global MainTech's Virtual Command Center (VCC) to consolidate the operation of all its LPARs through a single console in a remote command center. In so doing, they realized savings of $225,000 in expensive raised-floor space and reduced console operator headcount. At the same time, the company installed GMI's Watch/MVS across all LPARs, providing automated collection and management of MVS messages.

Seven LPARs, one console

Now the VCC watches the MVS console message stream and selects only the messages that the operator wants and needs to see. It holds the messages in a single alert window until the operator can respond to them, and then removes them from the window when the DOM (Delete Operator Message) is received.

All this is handled automatically. No messages are missed. Operators no longer have to continually monitor live consoles, because the VCC is doing it for them. Consolidating the messages into a single, easy-to-manage window saves staff energy and reduces the chances for production problems. Issues that require escalation are identified and handled sooner, either by the operator freed from the repetitive tasks now automated, or by a higher level MVS programmer when required.

Reliability and availability

"With the Global MainTech VCC system, we're able to monitor system reliability and ensure that our systems are up and running," Pleau asserts. "This way we can make sure we don't have a stop point. We don't want to get an error when the system is going down. We want a warning when we're just starting to reach a threshold. We trap messages on the mainframe and pass them to our problem reporting system on a different platform."

"The process of tracking errors and reporting on them gave us better availability and minimized down time," says Shultz. "We can keep up with the expanding need for availability and be more proactive with problems. It's nice to know that if a customer calls in to report an outage, we can say, 'We know; we're already on the way back up'."

Automated trouble tickets

The VCC traps MVS error messages from CICS and sends them to Scopus, Deluxe's trouble ticket system. This saves the manual work of cutting tickets, so they can be quickly routed to the appropriate

systems engineer or network specialist. Thus Deluxe has an automatic escalation process that can track open problems and do a trend analysis, too. Annual savings of 340 hours result from the elimination of manual ticket cutting.

Operating from anywhere

Although the VCC at Deluxe is located just a thousand feet away, it could as easily be located a thousand *miles* away. A single VCC could operate multiple LPARs in several locations simultaneously.

"Global MainTech has been very responsive to our needs. If we come up with something we want to enhance our system, they're right there, working with us to make it a reality."

— Dave Schultz, Director of Server and Data Center Operations,

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VCC technology has changed Deluxe's perception of computer operations. "We can manage data centers, regardless of their location, from *anywhere*," says Schultz. "We can concentrate our support staff and apply them independent from the location of the server platforms."

ROI: exceeding expectations

The VCC installation at Deluxe is notable for its very high return on investment. The company realized significant dollar savings in displaced software costs, displaced mainframe resource costs, and very low cost of ownership in the ease with which the VCC enables automated monitoring and operations.

Deluxe IT management initially felt the VCC was almost too good to be true, but soon found out it was even better. No operator training was required, and installation was extremely easy. "We believe that this product has a lot of potential to

grow over 3, 5, even 10 years," Schultz says, "and Deluxe has the potential to grow into it."

Operators become technicians – "come in from the cold"

One reason for moving the command center out of raised-floor is that it's very expensive. Another reason is security—most companies want to minimize access to the computer room, and the VCC provides an easy way of reducing the number of people who have to be in there. Plus, admits Dave Schultz, "It's cold and it's noisy. In contrast, our command center is an office environment. A person taking a call can actually hear the customer asking the question, and it's definitely more pleasant to the caller's ear. It's really an improved quality of life. People become more technicians than operators. They're happier because they feel like part of the group."

The growing employee bonus

What about computer operators who are displaced as a result of command center consolidation? "It's true we have fewer operators now," says Schultz, "but the ones who have moved on are growing their careers within Deluxe. Many have moved into the distributed world, which is a level-2 career path.

"Envision a situation where you give people the ability to become more technical and further their careers, so they are not in dead-end jobs. Global MainTech's VCC frees them from repetitive tasks, which allows them to dig into the more complex problems you used to have to send to MVS programmers. Now those MVS folks can fix more problems themselves instead of calling in level-3 support. It's win-win all the way."

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