New decision support and reporting system differentiates company from its competitors and boosts market appeal

A world-class provider of Pharmacy Benefit Management (PBM) services offers managed care organizations, large employer groups, unions, government agencies, and others innovative solutions designed to better manage costs while promoting the highest standards of care. Known for its outstanding customer service, this company has received top scores in industry-wide satisfaction surveys and sustains a consistent customer retention rate of over 98 percent year after year.

Always seeking new ways to increase the value proposition of its services to clients, the company made a strategic move to expand a key subsidiary’s decision-support capabilities and bring its online reporting system in house. The subsidiary delivers a variety of supporting products to the parent company’s core PBM offering and is responsible for managing prescription drug programs for over five million members in the U.S. and Puerto Rico.

EMC Consulting was engaged to develop a new, internally managed, decision support and reporting system. The solution, designed by the EMC consultants, blends cutting-edge Microsoft SharePoint Server 2007 (MOSS) technology with powerful new Microsoft SQL Server 2008 features and functionality to create a dynamic, highly flexible, and scalable Microsoft solution framework.

“EMC Consulting was able to develop some very innovative solutions to address our business intelligence and reporting requirements using the latest Microsoft technology,” says the director of Applications and Architecture. “They were also able to meet our needs within budget and often under aggressive timeframes. Even when we ran into roadblocks, they always found a way around them.”

Ownership brings competitive advantages to new heights

As one of the company’s most business-critical products, the existing online reporting system offered a suite of tools to enable internal users and external clients to monitor plan usage, detect fraud and abuse, evaluate trends, and facilitate cost/benefit analyses.

However, as an outsourced system, it did not allow the internal flexibility and control the company desired. In-depth discussions with EMC Consulting helped solidify the decision to move to an internally owned and operated solution and further clarified the strategic opportunities that a Microsoft technology-inspired decision support and reporting system would bring to the company. For example, the company could move beyond the design constraints of the shared third-party system and quickly develop and promote its own expanded line of proprietary reporting tools. In this way, it could differentiate itself from its competitors and better meet its clients’ needs by providing innovative new offerings, currently not available in the PBM market.

Freed from a shared reporting system environment, the company could also exert full control over system usage and optimize performance and uptime to further enhance the experience of its internal users and external clients. Replacing the outsourced solution with an in-house system would eliminate rising third-party provider costs as well and enable the company to significantly reduce operating expenses—all while leveraging a flexible, scalable system that would far surpass the capabilities of the existing solution.
“Until this point, most of our solutions were outsourced to a third-party, and our biggest challenge was our limited ability to customize applications to fit our clients’ expanding needs,” explains the director of Applications and Architecture. “Our business has grown exponentially over the last few years and we wanted to have an application that we could build from scratch; one that would enable us to quickly develop and deploy new features and functionality as required.”

A strategic plan accomplished in three stages

Developed and deployed in three stages, the rollout of the proprietary reporting suite builds in the same kind of reporting functionality that clients have come to rely on within the company’s existing third-party solution and adds many new enhancements designed to provide users with faster access to more data in more ways.

Throughout the entire process, weekly meetings were held between EMC Consulting and project participants, and online status reports and executive summaries were distributed to stakeholders. These communications conduits were used to convey information on completed work, outline scheduled tasks for the coming week, and provide information on potential issues, risks, and workarounds. In addition, bimonthly Executive Sponsors review meetings were conducted to review budget status and project milestones.

During the analysis and design stage, a tactical plan was constructed to reverse-engineer the existing application and develop additional functionality requested by the internal users and external clients. The solution involved architecting both extranet and intranet sites to support secure content delivery through MOSS technology, coupled with a strategy for creating a powerful decision-support and reporting system based on a Microsoft business intelligence platform. This platform leverages the latest Microsoft SQL Server 2008 database technology along with Microsoft SQL Server Integration, Analysis, and Reporting Services.

Facilitating tight integration between the MOSS-enabled intranet and extranet sites and the decision support and reporting aspects of the solution enables users to have secure and timely access to an expanded array of reports. Reports are based on various data parameters pre-calculated from approximately 135 million records residing within the updated Microsoft SQL Server-based data warehouse.

To accommodate internal or client needs for user-specified information, solution plans also included the implementation of Microsoft Report Builder, an ad-hoc Microsoft SQL Server Reporting Services tool that enables users to directly query data cubes and build their own reports.

“The EMC Consulting team was able to quickly develop a strategy to get us where we needed to go to reach our goals,” says the director of Applications and Architecture. “They also brought in the expertise to help us take full advantage of advanced Microsoft applications, like SQL Server Analysis Services, to enable us to provide users with better, faster, and more accurate results.”

During the prototype development phase, MOSS was easily customized to accommodate the look and feel, colors schemes, and other details to support the company’s brand. The Microsoft solution framework also helped streamline the creation of custom code necessary to develop a forms-based authentication module. This module is used to enable the company to meet the varying infrastructure and security needs of different clients and ensure compliance with various insurance industry regulations.

“Our experience has been that our objectives are just easier to achieve with Microsoft technology than with other technologies out there,” says the director of Applications and Architecture. “It’s easy to deploy and use, and we can readily add on to current investments to provide even greater functionality.”

Once developed, all aspects of the prototype were subjected to a rigorous testing process administered by both technical and business user teams. This thorough assessment included testing report filtering capabilities, security, performance against load, functionality and usability, system integration and compliance, data accuracy and consistency, and tool function compatibility on different versions of Microsoft Internet Explorer®.
Upon successful completion of the evaluation process, the new decision support and reporting system was successfully deployed to production. EMC Consulting worked closely with the company's IT team throughout the implementation process, providing knowledge transfer and hands-on training to enable the team to build the expertise and skill sets necessary to effectively manage and maintain the system post implementation.

Better performance, lower operating costs, and greater customer satisfaction

Although still in the early stages of operation, the advantages of the new in-house system have dramatically improved business intelligence and reporting capabilities for approximately 400 internal users and nearly 500 client users.

Today, the new system produces between 500 and 600 packaged reports per night including approximately 70 standardized reports for specific clients and around 350 unique report requests that are generated daily. Turnaround times for the development of new reports and other customizations have been reduced to less than half the time it previously took with the outsourced system.

Since deployment, user feedback has been enthusiastic and positive. Some of the most valued benefits relayed by users include the speed in which reports can be generated and returned and the expanded functionality of the system's Microsoft Reporting Services-based standard reports. These reports can now be easily imported into a client's own Microsoft Excel® application for further sorting and customization, for example, to show specific savings related to a particular drug therapy program. A report-rendering option also includes PDF, JPEG, TIFF, and XML formats.

“Operational expenses for the system have been reduced by approximately 50 percent, saving over $70,000 a month in outsourced services costs,” says the director of Applications and Architecture. “We expect a full return on the investment in approximately 13 months. In terms of the kind of solutions that we can now offer to the PBM marketplace and the operational improvements and cost efficiencies we have gained, this system is leading edge. We haven’t seen a system like this anywhere else. It definitely puts us at a competitive advantage.”