Government Solutions

CICS for OS/2 helps reduce fraudulent assistance claims

Application	Integration of claimant information
Software	IBM CICS for OS/2 IBM DB2
Hardware	IBM mainframe PC's

The real cost of fraud
Where there is money, there is the opportunity for fraud. In the private sector, fraudulent activity can seriously affect a company's bottom line - in the public sector, the cost can be measured in human, as well as financial, terms.

Massachusetts Department of Transisitional Assistance, based in Boston, is a state and federal government-funded organization responsible for administering welfare programs for individuals and families within the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. These include emergency help for the elderly and disabled, financial assistance for families in need, food stamps for people to buy provisions, and refugee support.

The vast majority of claims for financial assistance are genuine and the department's 2,000 social workers deal with these as sympathetically and efficiently as possible. But fraudulent claims are a reality of the department's work, and paper-based systems made it difficult for social workers to track claimants' historical data, allowing some false claims to slip through the net.

In November 1993, the department's MIS development team came up with a conceptualized, client/server-based solution called PRISM (Priority Reporting Integrated System Match). Designed to enable social workers to access and match personal and financial data from various sources, PRISM helps ensure claims are genuine. Underpinning PRISM is IBM's CICS for OS/2 transaction processing software.

Fran Hinckley, director of technical operations at the department, explained the thinking behind PRISM: "The underlying business reason for developing the system was to reduce the amount of errors we have in the department. If we give out money in a fraudulent situation, but we had the information beforehand and did nothing about it, we can be penalised by the federal government for such an error. We wanted to avoid this and ensure the money was going to the areas of greatest need."

"Tracking information on a claimant from a number of different sources was beyond the department's current manual-based systems," according to Hinckley. "All of our eligibility systems were developed on the mainframe back in the 1960s. We decided it was essential to totally re-engineer our business and technical environment over the next couple of years but, before diving into this huge systems development effort, we wanted to implement a technical pathfinder project. PRISM was it."

*** Picture of Massachusetts Local Government Administration Office ***

Boston-based Massachusetts Dept of Transitional Assistance uses CICS for OS/2

PRISM is a matching system whereby information about people on the food stamp program database can be sent out to other government agencies, banks, etc, received back and then matched to the case information. The system alerts a social worker to any case irregularities, such as income not reported, whether a person has not listed an asset on a claim.

Hinckley and his MIS development team used a CASE tool called KnowledgeWare to do the planning, analysis, design and construction of PRISM and for the back-end reporting. "KnowledgeWare produces COBOL which works very well on an OS/2 platform, so that is how we created the application," added Hinckley. "On the database side, we were already running DB2 on the mainframe host. When we were building the client/server system we wanted to put together things that made sense - DB2 fitted with the KnowledgeWare CASE tool and with DB2/2 and CICS for OS/2."

CICS for OS/2

The department was a long-time user of IBM's CICS on the mainframe, although this was not to be used for this system. Recognizing that IBM had developed CICS for the client/server environment, the department opted for CICS for OS/2.

"We process food stamp cases involving around 40,000 families, or 120,000 recipients," said Hinckley. "The system had to enable 200 welfare social workers at 43 different locations using PCs to access host data via an OS/2 application server. The system had to support up to 63 users simultaneously, with each workstation shared by up to four workers. Given the number of transactions which would be involved each day, we had to ensure total reliability and speed of response - we were assured we could rely on CICS for OS/2 to deliver."

The department faced two major challenges with the implementation of PRISM. Firstly, this was a pathfinder project for the MIS organisation and the department's first real foray in the client/server world. "We had to learn fast about what it takes to support client/server and the dozens of layers of software involved, including spreadsheets, productivity tools, wordprocessors and email," explained Hinckley. "Had we not done a pilot project like this we would have been in seriously dire straits when trying to re-engineer the whole department."

The second challenge was to train the users. Added Hinckley: "Social workers on the food stamp program are the most computer-phobic people we have, so we had to change them from a paper-based alerting process to this PC-based client/server computerized system."

IBM's expertise

"With the implementation of CICS for OS/2, we called heavily on IBM's expertise and regional support centres," said Hinckley. "IBM was very responsive in sending key personnel from its R&D staff to work with us, but it wasn't out of the package and into the machine - there was a lot of fine tuning, but I think we resolved all the issues in a relatively short amount of time."

The time frame for implementation of PRISM was fast by any standards. Business requirements were mapped out between November 1993 and January 1994, when the MIS team did the preliminary design. Construction began in April, the pilot program commenced in July and went into state-wide implementation in October 1994. Joint application design involved business experts in a nine-person MIS team.

Benefits

Users are now enjoying the benefits of seeing case information collected together in one place. Said Hinckley, "Feedback from users has been excellent - they love the system. They like seeing the information together and think the GUI is terrific. I first saw on the computer screen a client who was receiving assistance in food stamps and was collecting unemployment compensation, but who also had assets and bank accounts with significant money in them. During the third week of production, a fraud case involving 100,000 pounds in unreported bank accounts was uncovered using the system."

The next stage of development of the system is to expand it from the food stamp program to the department's other programs. "That is the immediate goal," added Hinckley. "Beyond that there are some 'nice to do' things like integrating some forms so that they are on-line, rather than paper-based."

"With PRISM 2, we will either review an increase in the number of OS/2 application servers to three or four, or upgrade to a midrange server running CICS for AIX and DB2/6000. CICS and the rest of the IBM client/server suite of products give us the flexibility to develop in the required direction."

For more information please contact

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The IBM software home page can be found on the internet at
http://www.software.ibm.com

The CICS software home page can be found in the Internet at
http://www.hursley.ibm.com/cics

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