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MCO Update

Software Drops Error Rates

Ohio health plan gains accuracy and timeliness in processing claims, billing statements and enrollments.

By Robert N. Mitchell

Accuracy and timeliness are essential quality metrics for the thousands of claims, billing statements, enrollments and other documents processed each day by OSF HealthPlans, a Peoria, Ill.-based health plan affiliated with OSF Healthcare Systems.

The health plan, which serves 80,000-100,000 members, wanted to increase its productivity in job management applications, so it installed ActiveBatch from Advanced Systems Concepts, Inc. (ASCI) of Parsippany, N.J.

Adam Carlton, application manager at OSF HealthPlans, said that enterprise job scheduling management software, which kicks off at pre-assigned times to run batch processes, also reduces the manual error rates and improves on-time customer service levels.

In early 2005, Carlton began looking for a new system. "A driver behind our selection of ActiveBatch was that we were moving to a new version of our managed care software, TriZetto Facets. We decided to migrate to version 4.21, which was running on a Sybase database and AIX operating system. Facets generated a series of proprietary jobs, such as billing and claims adjudication, that were running on UNIX. We were also running some custom jobs through our internally developed COBOL application. Operators ran AIX jobs on a pre-set schedule at the time we decided to switch to version 4.21. TriZetto was also switching its proprietary batch jobs to a Windows platform, running them on an application server," Carlton said.

Uniqueness of the process

The ability to improve efficiencies, claims processing and other transactional programs would enable OSF HealthPlans to provide better services to its members and providers in its network. "Nobody wants to see a claim letter that indicates a claim still hasn't been paid after a month," he said. "A lot of compliance issues and legislation require claims processing speed and accuracy of the transactions."

OSF HealthPlans, which had developed internal systems in COBOL, had up to that time used a minimal amount of Visual Basic. Carlton noted that when he came to the health plan, he moved toward developing on more modern development tools to leverage the organization's enterprise contract with Microsoft. Programmers and analysts now work on .Net, SQL Server and BizTalk.

OSF HealthPlans had been one of the early adopters of Facets' version 4.21 after TriZetto announced it would no longer support 2.96.

Each day, the operator would process batch jobs according to a schedule/checklist. When a job ran successfully, the operator would kick off the next job. "Problems arose when the operators ran jobs for both IT and other departments in the corporation. They'd run an IT job and then they'd run a business office job, so it was an entirely manual process. If someone forgot to check a box and then returned to a job, he or she might have found that the job hadn't run," he said. "Operators were very good at running the jobs; however, even a 1 percent error rate, if there were 100 jobs a night, could cause other jobs to fail down the line and later in the process. Some jobs could be run concurrently, while other jobs had to be run individually to avoid

an error or failure that would impact another job. All jobs were run as if they weren't concurrent, which has now changed with ActiveBatch. We started looking at constraints and dependencies that affected the time that it took to run a batch cycle."

Member benefits

Carlton said that health plan members now see a more efficient health plan, one that is responsive to their questions. "We spend less time trying to figure out what went wrong with a batch run, new projects, new developments. Members don't see the direct impact of ActiveBatch, but they see the indirect impact in our ability to respond to them quickly," Carlton said.

Improved responsiveness will reflect positively in the health plan's overall quality and member satisfaction scores. "Obviously, our turnaround time on claims processing and check processing will be impacted positively because we're not having to re-run batch jobs," he noted.

Mr. Mitchell is managing editor of ADVANCE for Health Information Executives.

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ActiveBatch: www.ActiveBatch.com

Online Article:

http://health-careit.advanceweb.com/common/EditorialSearch/AViewer.aspx?AN=HX_06jun1_hxp20.html&AD=06-01-2006