

ACUCOBOL™-GT Saves Another Wang Casualty

Industry: Insurance
Current Environment: IBM RS/6000
Application: Claims Processing
Acucorp Products: ACUCOBOL™-GT
Previous Environment: Wang VS
Previous COBOL: VS COBOL

PARTNERS IN SUCCESS



Alaska National makes a successful conversion to the 21st century under the guidance of John Ramey Sr., Vice President of Information Systems.

By Jo Foster

Alaska National Insurance Company operates as a property and casualty insurance company, with its principal office in Anchorage, Alaska. The company maintains Alaska's largest market share of workers compensation and commercial auto liability insurance, and is a leading writer of other commercial lines. Alaska National also has an office in Seattle, Washington, that specializes in multi-jurisdictional employee risk coverage.

A Need for Sound Advice

Alaska National's proprietary applications resided on a Wang VS, running the Wang 7.21.09 operating system. Over 130 users, in both the Anchorage and Seattle offices, relied on the system for the processing of all policy, premium and claims-related information. John Ramey Sr.,

Vice President of Information Systems at Alaska National, describes the organization's main concerns. "More and more users in Alaska were leaving the Wang platform, and we were increasingly doubtful about how much longer Wang would be available to support us. It was this uncertainty that became our driving force in the search for a new hardware vendor," he explains.

Another issue facing Alaska National was Year 2000 compliance. The company had invested a consider-

able amount of time and money in customizing the COBOL system on the Wang VS, but it would have

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***John Ramey,
Alaska National Insurance***

required substantial revisions to make it Y2K compliant. "We contemplated purchasing a package system," says Ramey, "but felt more comfortable staying with the system we had developed to meet our specific needs." Ramey's goal became migrating Alaska

National's system to a reliable and stable environment to ensure Y2K compliance.

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Finding the Solution

Alaska National's application now resides on an IBM RS/6000 running a UNIX operating system complete with dual Power PC processor cards. "We had to rely completely on the migration vendor to upgrade our COBOL programs," explains Ramey. "We eventually selected Unicon Conversion Technologies because they had a substantial understanding and in-depth working knowledge of both the Wang and the UNIX environment." In fact, Unicon had been specializing in Wang to Open Systems migrations since 1985 using its own automated conversion software. In addition to migration, Unicon also performed conversions to full millennium compliance, again using its own automated tools.

Unicon converted Alaska National's VS COBOL source code to pure ACUCOBOL-GT without any proprietary middleware, such as screen drivers, file handlers or emulation software. Unicon also converted the COBOL programs to full millennium compliance. Unicon's pure solution enabled Alaska National to run its converted applications in a native Open Systems environment. More importantly, it meant that Alaska National was free to benefit from all the features and functionality offered by ACUCOBOL-GT and Open Systems, both now and in the future, without any restriction or ongoing dependence on a migration vendor.

By choosing conversion to pure ACUCOBOL-GT, Alaska National was able to retain all the investments made over the years in customizing existing applications, while moving them to the forefront of open systems technology, all with the absolute minimum of disruption to operations.

Premium Choice

Alaska National went live with their new system in May 1998. Ramey describes the entire process as "smooth." Extensive testing and practice runs meant the migration was practically transparent to the users. He applauds Unicon and Acucorp's patience and support, as well as their technical expertise. "The two companies have helped us through all our issues and have seen the project through to successful completion."

The updated environment, which combines both new hardware and ACUCOBOL-GT products, has proved a major step forward for the insurance company. "The system is incredibly reliable, and performance levels are noticeably better than with the old Wang VS," says Ramey. "Users appreciate the quicker response time for on-line activity. A report that would have taken an hour or more to run, now takes only minutes." Programmers have also found that program compilation is nearly instantaneous. All programs can be compiled in just 15 minutes, compared to compiling overnight on the Wang.

Alaska National has begun to experiment with the different approaches to screen displays that are possible with ACUCOBOL-GT. "We are running as a UNIX terminal emulation, and, while we don't expect to go with a full GUI, we can use pop-up window displays. Also, scrolling is significantly easier," Ramey tells us. The company also plans to evaluate ACUCOBOL-GT's innovative and easy-to-use web browser functionality, knowing that progressive technology such as this will be pivotal to success in the next millennium. Ramey concludes, "Our new system has proved very reliable; the applications are running much faster than

they did previously; productivity has increased; and we didn't have to spend an excessive amount of money on a software product or retraining our staff. We are delighted with the results and the work performed by both Unicon and Acucorp – we feel more than ready to take on the next millennium!"

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