

Delaware Division of Revenue Streamlines Call Distribution

Verastream Host Integrator helps provide new web interface that speeds up phone responses



“The time is right for the State to fully incorporate the Internet into the way it conducts its daily business of providing service to its citizens ... making it easier to interact with government.” Those were the words of Delaware Governor Ruth Ann Minner in her State of the State address, which set the stage for a range of technological innovations in Delaware state government.

The renewed emphasis on service prompted the Delaware Division of Revenue to evaluate the ways they were using technology to interact with taxpayers. The DOR targeted the Bureau of Tax Collections’ Automatic Call Distribution (ACD) workload as their first service-improvement project, because it had the highest impact on both constituents and staff. The bureau chose Attachmate® Verastream® Host Integrator to integrate mainframe-based legacy applications and take core ACD support functionality to the intranet, laying the foundation for subsequent integration projects.

A Taxing Phone-In Process

Before Verastream Host Integrator, the 30-person Bureau of Tax Collections struggled with an inefficient call distribution system. ACD support was one of five functions running on their IBM mainframe-based billing and collections application, which had been developed over the course of several years.

The application was functionally rich but hard to use because repetitive data was spread across multiple green screens. As the application grew, there was no practical way to integrate selected information on individual or corporate taxpayers.

When someone phoned the DOR, they would be prompted by a call router to press a key for the group they wanted to talk to. The call would then be routed to the appropriate group in the Bureau of Tax Collections, where a contact center agent would traverse multiple screens just to find out

QUICK VIEW

Problem

- Phone call routing took too long, requiring traversal of multiple host screens.

Solution

- Used Verastream to integrate mainframe functionality with a web interface.

Result

- Fewer call transfers and shorter response times.
- Simplified and less costly staff training.
- A rapid-application development platform in place for future projects.

what agent was in charge of that taxpayer’s account. Then more digging was needed to get the history of the account. At that point, tax collections staff often had to re-route the call yet another time for someone else to do follow-up or further research.

Costly Consequences Drive the Vision for Improvement

Valuable time was being lost and expensive mistakes were being made, directly resulting from the complexity of the mainframe system. In addition, staff training was intensive and lengthy, because trainees had to learn how to work with several mainframe-based application functions to retrieve information.

In establishing goals to streamline their ACD, the bureau made a commitment to a “first-level response” in responding to taxpayer questions. They knew that accurate, accessible information would be key to meeting that objective.

Irv Schechtman, director of MIS for the DOR, wanted to provide a simple web interface for the call system’s 41 screens. “We needed to simplify the system for internal users, to make them more productive,” he said. “And in order to deal more effectively with outside agencies, we needed to restructure our business processes.”

Verastream Answers the Call

Schechtman added that the DOR had spent \$2 million on the bureau’s software. To get the most out of that investment, they decided on an integration approach that would extend the life of the legacy mainframe system. Because

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– Irv Schechtman
Director of MIS
Delaware Department
of Revenue

Verastream let the bureau continue using the IBM S/390 mainframe (Series z) as their backbone of operational support—with no altering of mainframe code—they were able to preserve existing logic and proceed with no disruption to daily operations.

Verastream Host Integrator encapsulates mainframe data and logic via the screen interface and exposes business processes as web services, XML, Java, and .NET components that can be mixed, matched, and reused in new projects. Verastream lets organizations like the DOR take an incremental approach to their large-scale

business initiatives. Once the IT staff created services for the tactical ACD project, they had a repository of services ready for their upcoming strategic initiatives.

How Does it Work?

The DOR’s mainframe-based software system contains millions of lines of code to manage and process a range of functions including tax returns, abatements, accounting, refunds, audits, penalties and interest, and reconciliation. Isolating the billing and collection function, and then the ACD function, from those tightly integrated modules would be a monumental undertaking, Schechtman said. And rewriting the screen layout and application logic would be too expensive and time-consuming. Besides, that process would result in a green screen-like application appropriate only for the bureau’s super users.

Attachmate technical consultants worked closely with the DOR, mentoring their IT staff in web development and best practices, as well as providing overall project guidance and implementation support. The joint technical team decided to use Verastream and the Attachmate Consulting Services rapid application development methodology to deliver a new application as fast as possible. That approach let them remove redundant data from the various screens and integrate critical information for quick access via the intranet.

Using Verastream Host Integrator, the bureau maintained connectivity with the host, both during the development efforts and during the actual running of the application in production. The IT staff used Verastream to encapsulate data and logic from the source application and expose the business functions as reusable services.

The services, which retain all of the information about the mainframe application behavior, were deployed for use on the Verastream Host Integrator runtime server. Active Server Pages were used to call the services and format the HTML pages for the user interface.

A Solution With Ongoing Potential

Now, when taxpayers phone the Division of Revenue, the agent to whom the call is routed can quickly enter the caller’s Social Security number. ASPs combine mainframe application screens with an Access database

that pulls up the taxpayer name, corresponding account agent, and relevant account history. Staff can answer questions quickly because integrated information is readily available from their web browser.

This solution has the potential for ongoing value to the DOR, due to the reusability of the services created with Verastream Host Integrator. Now, each new web application can be developed faster than the one before it, because the “building blocks” have already been generated. In fact, the bureau has already begun reusing the services to streamline the four other functions in their billing and collections application.

“Verastream has been easy for our developers to work with and learn the host modeling,” concluded Schechtman. “It’s a robust product that has been significant in its impact on us.”

About Verastream Integration Solutions

The Attachmate Verastream product line accelerates the reuse of legacy applications in service-oriented architectures. This suite of solutions provides a complete range of mainframe, web, and desktop modernization tools—from basic rejuvenation to customized presentation and sophisticated high-performance integration.

Verastream-generated services can be mixed, matched, and reused selectively to extend legacy functionality to new users or new composite applications. No code changes to legacy applications are required, so you can avoid risk while speeding up application integration, application development, and workflow enhancement.

About Attachmate

Attachmate helps businesses extend, manage, and secure their IT investments. We offer a broad range of solutions—from terminal emulation, legacy integration, and PC lifecycle management products to innovative systems and security management tools. With our technology, more than 65,000 businesses worldwide are putting their IT assets to work in new and meaningful ways. Learn more at www.attachmate.com.



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