

DATABEACON SCORES TECHNICAL KNOCK-OUT IN MAINE EVENT

Challenge

Self-serve, user-friendly interface to pharmacy information queries in accordance with State of Maine RFP

Solution

Web-based Pharmacy Benefit Management (PBM) system featuring Databeacon

IT Infrastructure

Microsoft Analysis Services for SQL Server, MS Access, Crystal Reports

Return on Investment

Paid for itself 4x over in first year of use

User Population

Maine Bureau of Medical Services, Insurance Providers

Future Plans

Extend Databeacon Web Reporting and Analysis capabilities to other clients

Industry

Government-sponsored healthcare

Organization

GHS Data Management

Location

Augusta, Maine

Web site

www.ghsinc.com

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Maine may be a small state, but like any other, its citizens are still faced with paying for pricey prescription drugs. Many self-insured companies in Maine as well as Maine’s Medicaid program (now known as “MaineCare”) are faced with the challenge of the rising cost of prescription drugs. With millions of dollars at stake, spending wisely and efficiently is crucial to the fiscal health of private-sector businesses and State government alike.

GHS Data Management of Augusta, Maine provides “Pharmacy Benefit Management” (PBM in industry jargon) for the private sector and MaineCare. Jason Skeffington, a Project manager at GHS, is responsible for helping ensure that when it comes to prescription drug costs, our private sector and MaineCare clients are able to purchase in the most efficient manner possible.

“For our clients we provide an online, real-time claims adjudication system. The private sector module is known as GHSRX, and the MaineCare module is known as ‘MEPOP’ the Maine Point of Purchase system,” Skeffington says. “To put it simply, when a pharmacist enters a patient’s information into his PC to process a prescription, we’re at the other end of the pharmacy computer. Our system takes care of client info, drug pricing, co-pays, prior authorization, pharmacy billing – if it’s medicine, we do it.”

In November of 1999 GHS built a Data Warehouse to perform more robust reporting. And in June of 2001, GHS had begun developing an upgraded version of

their Data Warehouse to further enhance their reporting capabilities. Everyone on their development team agreed on the need to provide a higher level of data analysis, and to put tools in the hands of their customers via the Internet.

“We’d been using the simple query tool that comes with SQL Server as well as MS Access and Crystal Reports, but it was an inefficient and time-consuming process. Every time our customers needed to know something, they had to pick up the phone and we had to run a query and write out a report,” Skeffington explained.

With the MEPOP contract coming up for bid in February 2002, GHS wanted to be able to offer a web-based analysis tool. Coincidentally, it also became a contract requirement stated in the new MEPOP RFP. Under the new RFP, the State of Maine Bureau of Medical Services (BMS) required bidders to provide a quick, “user friendly” interface to query pharmacy claims information, something they never had before.

Skeffington’s team had built their data warehouse with Microsoft Analysis Services, the SQL Server OLAP module. “It is so fast using pre-aggregated data cubes,” he observed. But the data needed an appropriate front end.

Skeffington looked at open source options and studied the offerings from major players like Brio and Cognos. “I wanted to test every one and find one that would fit our needs,” he said. GHS would invest in the technology if Skeffington was convinced that the

customers would really use it. Finally, he settled on Databeacon.

Skeffington selected Databeacon for several reasons. The interface was simple enough that he felt comfortable that his end-users would be able to understand how to use it without a lot of configuration assistance and training. "When you can say 'here', and they can run with it, it makes a big difference," he said.

Databeacon also offered strong pre-sales and post-sales support. Prior to the purchase, Skeffington was able to try the full-featured product in a trial version. His team took the state OLTP data, built a fact table and star schema, and compiled OLAP cubes. With Data-beacon, Skeffington said, "you just tell it which data-base to connect to, and it dynamically builds the interface with the dimensions and all the measurements. It is really plug and go."

Since Databeacon has been installed, GHS has been in the position of supplying its clients their data in their own hands. "It allows them to get answers fast. And they can dig in more," Skeffington said. "They can see cost patterns. And they can come to us with more informed questions." In the past, a question about the number of prescriptions written in the previous week would have to be answered by an analyst. Now, analysts can explore more complex questions.

The decision support system has become a significant part of the GHS product offering. In fact, when it bids on new contracts, GHS uses the client's data for the demonstrations. "They see their own data and they are astounded," he said.

When it came time to present Databeacon to the State of Maine, Skeffington was feeling confident, but nothing prepared him for his customers' reaction.

"I think they were expecting a Flash demo or a PowerPoint presentation or something" he says. "So when we walked in with their actual data on a laptop in a Databeacon cube, they simply could not believe it. And once they saw how intuitive the interface was and how blindingly fast the application worked, they just dove right in and started using it. They were doing real queries on real data; we just sat back and let them at it!"

When GHS won the new MEPOP contract, a period of intensive testing followed to make sure Databeacon could handle the large size of GHS's pharmacy claims database without

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running into scalability problems. The application sailed through with flying colors and in mid-2002 GHS deployed Databeacon internally and put it through a further two months of user testing before making the product available to the Maine Bureau of Medical Services.

With the Databeacon Web Reporting and Data Analysis application in production, Jason Skeffington's phone has pretty much stopped ringing.

"Our customers hardly talk to me anymore; they just go online," he says, with the satisfied smile of a man who knows that every self-serve Databeacon reporting session is a call he doesn't have to take, a query he doesn't have to make, a report he doesn't have to write and money he doesn't have to spend.

Skeffington estimates that Databeacon has paid for itself four times over in the first year of use. There's even a business development angle. "Generally, most State contracts can go out to bid every few years," Skeffington says. "Last time around, having Databeacon in our service offering helped us in a big, big way to win our contract with MaineCare. Now we're using it to attract other potential clients."

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