

## Reference story: American Medical Response

When being a non-event is the highest praise!

### Highlights

This is a remarkable story about how Mark Hagan and his team at American Medical Response (AMR) pulled off a major success in a very challenging project. Their achievements included:

- ⊗ Moving a massive, mission-critical billing system:
  - ⊗ Technologically: from old HP servers to cutting-edge IBM platforms
  - ⊗ Geographically: from Birmingham, AL to Denver, CO
- ⊗ Reduced the monthly accounts closing cycle from seven days to three hours
- ⊗ Consolidated five servers into one
- ⊗ Introduced high-availability clustering
- ⊗ Saved lots of money

Having done all of this in just 12 weeks, AMR's VP of Billing paid the team the ultimate compliment when he remarked *"The whole transition was a non-event"*.

### Paragon's role

Mark very generously recognizes Paragon's contribution. *"Working as an integral part of the team from the initial study, we had Paragon technical people who gave us the confidence to attack such a critical project in such an aggressive way."* In addition to fine words, AMR has recognized the value of Paragon's contribution with long-term contracts to retain this excellent support.

### Background

AMR is a national ambulance dispatch company. Their \$1B annual revenue results from over 4.5 million bills each year! So, next to actual ambulance dispatch itself, billing and accounts receivable represented their most critical business processes. These processes were being executed in Birmingham, AL with 1,100 users around the country. The IT implementation had been very successful and had grown to include five servers from one of the traditional UNIX suppliers.

### The challenges

There were several things that AMR wanted to change or improve:

- ⊗ The servers were old technology; five HP UNIX machines as well as some Wintel servers. Although they worked, the speed was too low and the maintenance costs were too high.
- ⊗ It took too long to close the books at the end of each month. Some processes took seven days - while bills worth \$3M kept pouring out every day.
- ⊗ Ideally the IT functions would be consolidated in Denver.
- ⊗ AMR's IT functions felt that they should be doing more with high-availability technology. Plus, they were paying a lot for outsourced disaster recovery services that provided a slow recovery process.



### **The project**

Having developed a clear picture of the business objectives, the first thing Mark Hagan wanted to do was get an equally clear picture of which types and platforms of IT were most likely to serve them well for many years to come. So, he assembled a team from his current server suppliers, IBM and Paragon to "sell" AMR on the best technologies and products in which to invest. But make no mistake, the "sell" that Mark's team demanded was a very detailed and technical one. It was during this six-week, intensive analysis that the Paragon team began to shine.

In the end, IBM solutions were chosen to replace the HP and Wintel servers. This decision turned out to be easier than expected. The impressive track record and future promise of the Power5 technology was matched by the excellence of the pSeries servers and the AIX software environment. Paragon and IBM were able to show AMR that it would be possible to consolidate all five of the old HP servers onto one 4-way pSeries server and that the savings in maintenance alone would fund extending the solution to a High Availability Cluster Microprocessing (HACMP) configuration.

It was about this time that Mark had a silly idea. Why not tackle all of those objectives in a single project over the next few weeks? Two things made him comfortable with such an aggressive project:

- ⊗ The technical team from Paragon who always seemed to have good solid answers and good solid judgment.
- ⊗ Some early, real-life trials in Birmingham that confirmed the accuracy of the technical predictions and the compatibility of pSeries/AIX.

As a result, Mark's "silly idea" became a reality. Just eight weeks after the first pSeries was delivered; the migration from Birmingham to Denver, from five servers to one and from old-world UNIX to cutting-edge pSeries/AIX/HACMP was complete!

To the 1,100 users and the VP of Billing, the transition had been a "non-event".

### **Non-event becomes main-event**

Once the anxiety of such dramatic change died down, the upside began to sink in. More responsive systems; more available systems; month-end closings that happened so fast it was difficult to believe. Behind the obvious operational advantages were substantial expense reductions and that warm feeling that comes from knowing that you have more available technology today and a whole world of exciting possibilities for a long time to come.

### **The future**

AMR continues to work on improving their Disaster Recovery. They have acquired one of the latest IBM p520 servers and FAStT storage to support DR and, as you could probably guess, Paragon is deeply involved in this project too.

### **Paragon partnership**

Mark needs no prompting to make it clear that he enjoys a great partnership with Paragon. So, we asked him for a one-word summary; if you had to describe Paragon to their prospective customers what one word would you use? His answer was *"You can't do this sort of project if you have a typical vendor/supplier relationship. It has to be based on openness and honesty. So, the one word I pick is - trust."*