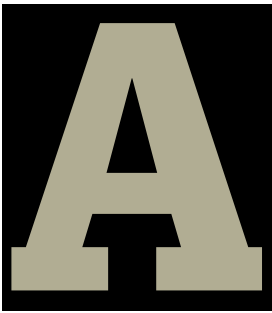


BY DAVID BAUM

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BLAKE DISCHER

WebFOCUS Brings it all Together for Amerisure



Amerisure Mutual Insurance Company's roots go back to 1912, when a group of leading manufacturers from the Michigan Manufacturers Association joined forces to provide workers' compensation insurance. Amerisure has since developed into one of the largest

regional property and casualty insurance groups in the United States. Amerisure services manufacturing, contracting and commercial enterprises through nine Core Service Centers in the Midwestern and Southern U.S.

While the insurance industry has changed considerably since the company's early days, having an efficient flow of information still translates into value for policyholders and a competitive edge for the

enterprise. Amerisure's reporting activities grew up on the mainframe where information was secure but the turnaround time for individual report requests was almost a week. Batch jobs, printing, and hand mailing of reports took at least four days each month, requiring boxes of paper and many hours of labor. When it came time to modernize its systems for reporting and information delivery, Amerisure chose Information Builders' WebFOCUS.

"We're an old technology shop by today's standards," admits Kevin Furstenberg, senior systems engineer at Amerisure. "We depend heavily on IBM mainframe technology, and only recently have we added a cluster of Microsoft Windows 2000 servers. WebFOCUS allows us to leverage our investment in legacy technology. We don't want to move our data anywhere else and we don't have to. We can keep those mature mainframe processes in place and use WebFOCUS to access them."

SNAPSHOT

ORGANIZATION: Amerisure Mutual Insurance Company (www.amerisure.com), a leading regional property and casualty insurance company

THE CHALLENGE: Update the presentation of mainframe-based claims reports and make them available over the Web; eliminate manual batch runs and hand mailing of paper reports; reduce the load on the mainframe

THE STRATEGY: Create a three-tier reporting environment that delivers Web-based information on demand via an intranet for internal users and via an outsourced data center for external users


THE RESULTS: Reduced turnaround time for individual claims reports, from days to seconds; fewer hours spent on paper-based mailing processes; greater productivity for internal users; increased satisfaction by external agencies.

INFORMATION BUILDERS SOLUTION: WebFOCUS, Mainframe FOCUS

Renewing Legacy Processes

According to Furstenberg, Amerisure's journey to Web-based reporting began when corporate officers decided they needed a more efficient way to produce their monthly Loss Reports. "It was common for our mainframe to work for 12 hours straight when we ran this monthly batch job," he recalls. "We were printing boxes and boxes of paper, which had to be physically hand sorted and mailed. Clearly it was time to move this process to the Web."

Information Builders worked with Amerisure to build a prototype for a



A Portal for Claims Data
Amerisure's Kevin
Furstenberg enthuses that a
single version of WebFOCUS
works for both internal and
external reporting.

**Insurance
Company
Boosts
Productivity
with Web-based
Reporting
System**

new reporting environment. “The prototype took about one week to develop and got a big thumbs-up,” says Kim Himes, systems engineer at Amerisure. “We got the green light for the rest of the project and were able to build upon that original prototype to complete the system. It only took us eight weeks to set up the new Web-based Loss Report.” Information Builders also assisted with the underlying server environment, implementing a Windows 2000 server cluster and three-tier software architecture. The front-end hosts Microsoft Internet Information System (IIS). The middle tier hosts the WebFOCUS Report Server. Data is stored on the third tier in an IBM DB2/UDB database.

“Information Builders helped us make a quantum leap to get things going,” says Furstenberg. “Their expertise extended beyond the WebFOCUS software to encompass our overall server environment, which was somewhat complex. We’ve always had a very good relationship with Information Builders.”

A New Reporting Policy

Amerisure’s primary objective was to replicate reports that users were accustomed to seeing from the mainframe, but make them available to users on demand over the Web. “Working with WebFOCUS is very easy because of our previous experience with Mainframe FOCUS,” Furstenberg says. “We attended a WebFOCUS training class in the Detroit area that was very worthwhile. It helped us learn the software so we can take full advantage of its capabilities.”

Internal employees now access claims reports on demand via the Amerisure intranet.

Report requests from external users – which consist primarily of independent agencies – are fielded by an external data center through an outsourcing arrangement with a hosting service provider. “We transfer data from our mainframe databases to the UDB warehouse once a month,” explains Furstenberg. “We are still running some of the same monthly procedures on the mainframe, but we now generate a monthly warehouse of information to satisfy internal and external user requests through WebFOCUS.

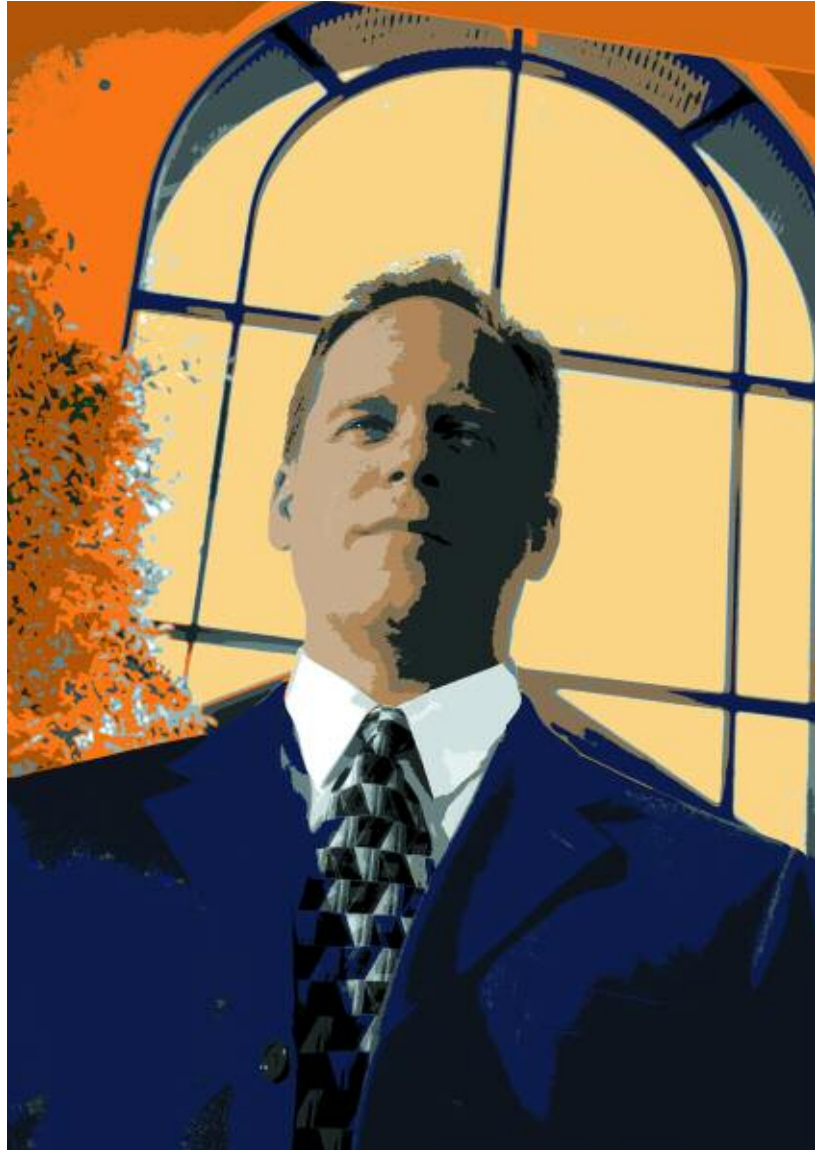
“WebFOCUS has enabled us to provide our best agencies with a portal for claims data,” adds Furstenberg. “The external data center is a carefully controlled environment. We know who these users are when they log in. They click on a link for report selection. Behind the scenes, we pass the variables back and forth to the data center through a CGI call. We don’t need to have two separate versions of the system. We can use the same version of WebFOCUS for both internal and external reporting.”

Furstenberg and his team are getting positive feedback from hundreds of users about the new system. “The response is overwhelming,” he says. “Users can instantly

obtain reports with a click of a mouse instead of waiting several days for custom reports or making do with the standard monthly and quarterly reports we distribute.”

Agencies typically log onto the system to view account histories as their accounts come up for renewal. They can receive reports in PDF or Excel format. “The users did not require any special training,” explains Himes. “Agencies have told us that our system is easier to use than other insurance sites.”

Internal employees use the system in a similar manner, but with additional analytical capabilities and fewer security restrictions. For example, external users only have access



to information about accounts for which they are responsible. Authorized internal employees can enter queries for all accounts and agencies, and they can also query by policy. “It was easy to set up user-based security with WebFOCUS,” says Himes.

Reducing IT Claims

The new WebFOCUS system has boosted productivity

internally, making specific information available on demand while reducing human errors that naturally occur in extensive hand-mailing procedures. Best of all, Amerisure's agencies are more self sufficient and more productive, which boosts morale and frees up the IT staff. "It's a great example of Web-based information delivery and user empowerment," sums up Furstenberg.

Amerisure plans to use WebFOCUS in other ways in the future. "This is just the tip of the iceberg," Furstenberg adds. "Right now we are only using the system for claims information. That has made a huge impact, but there is a lot more we can offer. For example, we can leverage the data-

Amerisure is also considering using software from iWay Software to set up a real-time gateway between the mainframe and the Windows 2000 cluster and is investigating using WebFOCUS Two-Way Email to provide wireless access to information for agencies in the field. This would allow agencies to send queries and receive reports through any handheld device – including BlackBerry, Palm, two-way pagers, Pocket PCs, and cell phones – without having to build custom interfaces or change existing communication infrastructure.

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**-Kevin Furstenberg,
Senior Systems Engineer,
Amerisure**

access infrastructure we've developed to create reports on sales production, producer experience, retention and persistency, comparison of actual revenue against projected revenue, and more."

These subsequent reports already reside on the mainframe. Most have been written in FOCUS and are stored in FOCUS databases, making them readily accessible to presentation by WebFOCUS.

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David Baum is a freelance business and technology writer residing in Santa Barbara, Calif.