

Primerica improves efficiency and gains more flexibility



Capitalizing on the latest improvements in IBM DB2 for z/OS technology

Overview

The need

In the face of intensifying competition and demand for new services, Primerica continually seeks to improve performance, speed up development and work more flexibly with partners.

The solution

The company chose to upgrade its core database platform to an IBM DB2 10 for z/OS data server.

The benefit

Primerica achieved an estimated 6 percent workload performance increase and expects CPU savings of up to 10 percent for specific applications.

Headquartered in Duluth, Georgia, Primerica is the largest independent financial services marketing company in North America, with offerings that include term life insurance, mutual funds, variable annuities and loans. Through a network of some 90,000 licensed sales representatives, the company focuses on the middle income market segment. In addition to an insured base of more than 4.3 million lives, Primerica has approximately two million customers who maintain investment accounts with the company.

A strategic readiness for innovation

The insurance business is by its very nature focused on being ready for the unexpected, for being prudently prepared for what comes down the road. To Primerica chief information officer (CIO) David Wade, that philosophy is also embodied in the company's strategic technology planning approach. "We've long believed that staying current with our software is strategically important for us," says Wade. "We never want to be in a position where some potentially game-changing technology becomes available and we'd have to tell our CEO, 'Sorry, but we're not going to be able to embrace it because we haven't kept up with our core technology upgrades.' To us, leadership means capitalizing on the latest advances."

One important measure of that dedication is the company's longtime commitment to the IBM System z® as its most strategic technology asset. When Primerica decided in 2011 to upgrade to the powerful new IBM® zEnterprise® 196 (z196) server, it marked a 30-year relationship



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—Bill Raser, senior vice president of data administration and mainframe systems support, Primerica

with IBM. Its commitment to investing in foundational technology is also seen on the software side in its decision to upgrade to an IBM DB2® 10 for z/OS® data server. As with the IBM System z, DB2 data servers support the company’s hundreds of core business applications, from internal processing to the many applications accessed through the web, allowing thousands of Primerica agents to take an application from a laptop, iPad, PC, Mac or any device that supports traditional HTML web standards.

Making the case for change

Taking advantage of the latest technology advancements in DB2 10 was essential for helping Primerica remain competitive, and speed was a crucial factor. For customers and agents, the prevailing expectation for processing new applications, once a matter of days or weeks, is now measured in minutes. For Primerica, which takes in some 80 percent of its new business electronically, that translates into faster and more efficient processing from start to finish.

The ever-changing dynamics of the insurance marketplace also put a premium on flexibility. Customer and agent needs for new products and applications are always evolving, as is the need for Primerica to share data and collaborate with third parties in the insurance ecosystem. That means the more nimble Primerica can be in developing new applications and linking with partners, the better it can compete.

Mitigating risk with flexible upgrade options

These business rationales underpinned the decision to upgrade the company’s DB2 data server to Version 10. Relying on a small team of database administrators and System z programmers, Primerica completed the first phase of its upgrade, to conversion mode, in approximately five months, the majority of which was spent in testing. Bill Raser, senior vice president of data administration and System z support at Primerica and a

Solution components

Software

- IBM® DB2® 10 for z/OS®
-

leader of the project, points to the flexible upgrade options of the DB2 10 for z/OS as a key reason for the project's success. "The fact that we could upgrade first in conversion mode and then step up to new function mode made our process very reliable and seamless," Raser explains. "It gave us a high degree of confidence that our core business applications wouldn't be disrupted."

The path to greater efficiency

At this point in the project, Raser points to an improvement in workload performance as the most direct benefit of the upgrade. "Our overall impression is that we have already seen a roughly 6 percent performance increase by taking advantage of support for large [1 MB] pages in DB2 Version 10," says Raser. "Later on, we project CPU savings of as much as 10 percent for some applications."

Raser believes that the next phase of the project, deploying the DB2 10 for z/OS data server in new function mode (NFM), will unleash a series of additional benefits, including faster and more flexible application development capabilities made possible by stronger Extensible Markup Language (XML) support.

"A big part of rolling out new applications is our ability to share data and processes with business partners," says Raser. "By giving us stronger pureXML capabilities, we are better able to communicate and interact with our partners using web technology and thus are more flexible in rolling out advanced new applications that ultimately enable us to serve the customer better." And the big picture? "DB2 provides us with a foundation such that two and three years down the road, we know we won't be impeded in developing new applications with our partners or in rolling out new smartphone apps to our agents. We also believe that by exploiting temporal technology, we'll be able to generate further application development cost savings in the future."

For more information

To learn more about IBM DB2 for z/OS, please contact your IBM marketing representative or IBM Business Partner, or visit the following website: ibm.com/software/systemz

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