IBM

Cross Country delivers prompt roadside assistance with MQSeries.

A workaholic, you finally set off for a much-deserved vacation with your family. But as luck would have it, your loaded four-wheel drive sputters to a dead halt in the middle of nowhere. Or maybe, you rush out of a meeting already late for the next appointment, only to realize you've lost your car keys and are locked out. Hold your horses — help is just a toll-free phone call away.

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— Edward Feldman, Vice President of Information Technology, Cross Country Automotive Services

Around-the-clock roadside assistance, once the domain of auto manufacturers and dealers, is fast becoming a standard service offered by just about any kind of service provider — insurance companies, credit card companies and even cellular phone operators.

This is good news for Cross Country Automotive Services (CCAS). For more than 20 years, the $100-million

Application	Emergency automotive dispatch and customer-care services
Business Benefits	$150,000 annual cost savings in IT support; $50,000 annual savings due to integrated fax dispatch system; enhanced customer service
Software	IBM MQSeries® for HP-UX Lotus® Domino™ Lotus Notes®
Business Partner	Stellar Software Corporation

Backed by a system running MQSeries, Cross Country representatives are well-equipped to help get stranded motorists back on the road.

e ™

e-business

It's about business, not just technology.

Based in Boston, CCAS's parent company, the Cross Country Group, helps businesses understand and serve their customers well, both through call centers and on the Internet.

company has been providing private-label emergency automotive services for clients such as USAA, Progressive Insurance, Liberty Mutual, Hartford, BMW, DaimlerChrysler and Acura, as well as other leaders in the insurance and financial sectors. Its client list includes 24 of the 35 leading auto manufacturers in North America. Today, more than 30 million motorists in the United States and Canada rely on roadside assistance provided by CCAS.

Part of the Cross Country Group, which offers service programs designed to help corporate clients improve customer acquisition and retention, CCAS places utmost emphasis on rendering quality customer service. Says Edward Feldman, vice president of information technology (IT) at CCAS, "The service we provide, particularly when a customer is facing a crisis, is critical to maintaining customer loyalty."

And, it falls upon the company's IT professionals to ensure that its call centers — in Boston, Massachusetts and Tucson, Arizona — can indeed guarantee high-quality customer service. Together, the two call centers process nearly 4.5 million roadside emergency calls a year. More than 1,000 service representatives work at these centers, which operate 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Relying on the company's IntelAgent application to access customer accounts, representatives verify insurance coverage, dispatch repair crews and bill the insurance provider and customer.

To provide prompt service, the representatives must have immediate access to customer and client data. So, working with IBM Premier Business Partner Stellar Software Corporation, CCAS has created DirectAccess, a middle-tier application infrastructure that leverages the flexible messaging capabilities of IBM MQSeries to enable direct, realtime communication between IntelAgent and clients' back-end customer databases.

"Using them [Lotus Domino and Lotus Notes] together with MQSeries, we've easily integrated the IntelAgent and customer care applications with the fax dispatch system, reducing the time it takes to send help to a customer."

– Edward Feldman

A challenge overcome

To ensure the privacy and security of client data, CCAS maintains separate copies of each of its clients' customer databases on its local servers. Service representatives access and modify information on the local database server as they process service requests for each client. Changes to data, thousands a day, are transmitted daily to the back-end client database either through EDI transactions or Remote Job Entry (RJE) file transfers. Even so, data inconsistencies creep in, and once a year data reconciliation is required to synchronize the databases.

Feldman explains, "There are many challenges in managing multiple databases. Every database must be up-to-date, or we may not be able to provide the right service. We can ill-afford a system failure, and if there is a failure we must have immediate recovery. Sometimes, we may need to reload the database from scratch. All this requires intensive IT support both at CCAS and the client site."

The direct way

In contrast, DirectAccess eliminates the need to replicate client databases or periodically synchronize multiple copies of the same database. Using MQSeries for HP-UX, DirectAccess provides a direct, realtime interface between IntelAgent and the back-end customer database residing at the client's site. Customer service representatives access data from the source database and update changes directly to it. The result— no database redundancy or inconsistencies, no data storage in multiple locations and minimal IT support required. And, the asynchronous messaging technology of MQSeries assures message delivery even when programs or networks fail or the target system is temporarily unavailable. Says Feldman, "The benefits, both for CCAS and our clients, are significant. Reduced IT support and productivity gains result in cost savings between $100,000 to $150,000 per year, as well as more accurate and prompt customer service."

Among the first clients to adopt the new system is USAA Auto Insurance. Feldman recounts that this business relationship was contingent upon CCAS's ability to access the USAA database in a secure environment without the need for its data to reside outside its corporate firewall. DirectAccess allays this concern. "We would not have won this client account without the flexible and secure architecture we've created with MQSeries," says Feldman.

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Thanks to Cross Country's DirectAccess system, help for stranded motorists is just minutes away.

Quick — the customer needs help

Using MQSeries, CCAS has also been able to automate its dispatch services, both for roadside assistance and additional customer-care services, such as recall campaign management, personalized trip routing and travel planning. The latter two services are supported by Lotus Notes and Lotus Domino workflow applications, accessible over the corporate intranet. CCAS has also developed a Lotus Notes and Domino application to notify BMW dealers about customer requests by fax. BMW customers who call into CCAS customer management services and require dealership help, receive a return call from a local BMW dealer. The customer care representatives use the Lotus Notes system to find the dealership closest to the customer and notify the dealer by fax regarding the customer request. All the data obtained from the customers, including the date and time sent to the dealership, is stored as a Lotus Notes document.

Approved service requests, both from the IntelAgent and from the customer care applications, are routed by MQSeries to VSIfax, automated fax software that sends the documents to the appropriate vendors, authorizing them to provide the service. In the past, these documents were faxed manually. Says Feldman, "Domino and Notes are very flexible solutions for workflow applications and have become the corporate standard for all intranet applications. Using them together with MQSeries, we've easily integrated the IntelAgent and customer-care applications with the fax dispatch system, reducing the time it takes to send help to a customer. This has reduced costs by nearly $50,000 a year."

Unanimous choice

Though Stellar and CCAS discussed alternative messaging technologies, including Microsoft MSMQ and XIPC from Momentum, MQSeries was a unanimous choice. Tom Krpata, Stellar's president, notes, "MQSeries has a dominant position in the messaging products marketplace. Other products just don't have the flexibility that it does. With its support for multiple platforms, MQSeries provides us a universal solution. It also has a very simple application programming interface, which makes it easy to integrate with existing applications."

While CCAS has a UNIX®-based client/server IT architecture, most of its clients have IBM S/390® Parallel Enterprise Server™ running IBM CICS® and IBM DB2® on the back end. "We met with some of our clients who are using MQSeries internally to integrate multiple systems, and they recommended it highly," recalls Feldman. "MQSeries will make it easier for CCAS to roll out DirectAccess to existing and new clients, reducing the setup time. Many clients are expressing their desire to use DirectAccess when they see the potential benefits."

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