



AFFINA: The Customer Relationship Company

“By moving our applications from the mainframe environment, we significantly reduced costs and gained control over the reliability of our IT environment.”

Ron Nelson, Technical Manager, Information Technologies, AFFINA

Highlights:

- Reduced annual IT expenditures by \$100,000 per month while maintaining enterprise applications
- Gained control over previously outsourced environment
- Enabled quick response to changing client needs
- Reduced batch processing time by 30%
- Improved integration across platforms

Migrating mainframe applications to open systems

AFFINA manages almost 25 million inquiries from consumers each year, handling inbound phone, Internet, and postal mail inquiries on behalf of about 100 of the world’s most highly-recognized companies and brands plus federal government agencies. Through seven contact centers across North America, AFFINA delivers enhanced sales, maximized ROI and increased customer loyalty and retention through carefully managed customer interactions.

Naturally, to successfully handle thousands of transactions each day, AFFINA cannot afford to have a computer system go down unexpectedly. So AFFINA must have a reliable IT system to handle and route call traffic and other data sources without fail. After 25 years of relying on a mainframe system, AFFINA has moved into its next generation of service to customers on open systems as the foundation for its important inbound customer relationship management application.

The company migrated its trusted and essential applications easily and efficiently from an IBM® CICS® transaction-based platform to open systems using UniKix™ mainframe rehosting software from Clerity.

Sophisticated services require IT performance and reliability

AFFINA’s service offerings include an outsourced contact center, mail and fulfillment, data analysis, and customer interaction consulting.

AFFINA has been maximizing the customer interactions of its clients for the past 30 years. Over three decades, AFFINA has been successful by evolving ahead of its clients’ needs and expectations. Clients rely on AFFINA as their strategic marketing partner to provide technical support, order taking, relay of company and product information, outlet referrals, complaint and crisis/recall management, as well as promotional campaign support.

Mainframe environment becomes too costly, too complex

With the addition of new platforms and applications to their mainframe system over the years, AFFINA reasoned it would be wise to close down its internal IBM CICS processing mainframe and move to an outsourced system. Doing so would help AFFINA manage the complexities of mainframe communication with its other applications and lower the high cost of running its own IBM® MVS® operating

environment mainframe, which required nine dedicated systems programmers. Ron Nelson, technical manager, Information Technologies at AFFINA, noted that at the time the company was using several different applications, including IBM's Lotus Notes, Wilke/Thorton's CRS and Graham Technology's GT-X, which all needed to communicate with the mainframe applications.

However, after the move to an outsourced mainframe, AFFINA found that many of the same issues remained. It was still complex for the mainframe to communicate with other systems—and still too costly. In addition, the outsourcing company wanted to take the system offline for extended maintenance periods. Nelson explained that AFFINA's around-the-clock business could not be unsupported during those times. Because so many issues remained, AFFINA decided that the outsourced mainframe was not its final answer and another solution was needed.

AFFINA's solution: open systems and IBM CICS application migration

The company studied several possible solutions, including running IBM CICS application servers on a smaller system. AFFINA even considered eliminating a mainframe altogether, but didn't see how it could abandon that platform because the company had amassed an extensive number of valuable IBM CICS applications that needed to be preserved.

In its search for a better, less costly solution, AFFINA learned of UniKix mainframe rehosting software, which has been used to successfully migrate mission-critical enterprise applications to open, affordable UNIX® systems at more than 1300 sites worldwide.

AFFINA first decided to use UniKix software to develop just a backup system for its outsourced mainframe, IBM CICS transaction processor, and JES2 batch environment. This backup system would be used only if the outsourced application happened to go down.

AFFINA then migrated its applications, comprised of following characteristics, to the new platform:

- 300 online COBOL programs
- 1,700 batch COBOL programs
- 1,000 files
- 32,000 screens

The application performs nearly one million transactions per day. When a consumer calls a toll-free number, the company's Automatic Call Distributor sends the call directly to a customer service representative (CSR) trained on that client's customer service program.

Consumer inquiry calls handled by CSRs involve every question or comment imaginable, so that even with extensive training, CSRs need access to scripts to help answer the varied inquiries. Scripts are dynamic, continually changing, and extremely sophisticated. In fact, AFFINA employs four people dedicated solely to generating new scripts from client change orders. With UniKix, scripts are placed in a VSAM file, which means no compiling is required. This allows AFFINA to change scripts within minutes or hours of a client change request, giving CSRs access to the most up-to-date information.

Backup project is a success

In spite of the complexity and size of the applications, AFFINA's applications were migrated to the new platform in just nine months.

Because of the success with its initial backup project, AFFINA decided to move the entire application off the outsourced mainframe and onto the UNIX system. AFFINA and UniKix services personnel worked together as a unified team to realize both the successful backup and the application rehost solutions.

Nelson considers the move to open systems as the best possible solution. It provides a lower cost and more reliable IT system, and did not involve the high risk of rewriting tried and true applications. Also, it allowed AFFINA to control its IT environment, something it could not do with an outsourced system. As a result of the migration, AFFINA has improved resource and information integration across platforms and reduced batch time processing by 30 percent.



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