



Medical Mutual reduces fees by **\$500K** through real-time processing, security

Ohio health insurer Medical Mutual wanted to take on more trading partners and more easily align with government protocols, but was without the proper robust and secure infrastructure needed to support the company's operations.

"We needed to set up trading partner software and a B2B infrastructure so we could move the data inside and outside the company," says Eleanor Danser, Medical Mutual's EDI Manager. "The parts that we were missing were the trading partner software and the communications piece to support all the real-time protocols that are required by the Affordable Care Act (ACA)."

Medical Mutual already had IBM WebSphere MQ and IBM WebSphere Message Broker, as well as IBM WebSphere Transformation Extender (TX) in its arsenal to move the company's hundreds of daily file transfer protocol (FTP) transactions. Health insurers are constantly moving data and setting up connections between different industry sectors—efforts that involve securing information from providers and employers who then send out to clearinghouses and providers.

"It's constantly moving data back and forth between different entities—from claims data, membership data, eligibility and benefit information, claims status—all the transactions that the healthcare industry uses today," says Danser.

However, as the healthcare industry evolves, so does its need for streamlined and easy communication. Medical Mutual also realized that its current infrastructure didn't provide the company with the necessary authentication and security. It needed a Partner Gateway solution with batch and real-time processing that could match or exceed the 20 second response window in order to stay HIPAA compliant.

Medical Mutual sought a solution to aid with the communications piece of the transaction, or "the handshake of the data," explains Danser. "You have to build the security protocols for authentication of the trading partner to sign in and drop off data to our systems. It's the authentication and security of the process that must take place in order to move the data."

Without the proper in-house expertise for such a project, Medical Mutual called upon TxMQ (www.txmq.com), an IBM Premier Business Partner and provider of systems integration, implementation, consultation and training.

Choosing a solution and assembling a team

Since Medical Mutual already had an existing infrastructure in place with IBM WebSphere MQ, IBM WebSphere Message Broker and the IBM WebSphere TX translator, choosing an IBM solution for the missing trading partner software and the communication piece was a practical decision.

“We went out and looked at various vendor options,” explains Danser. “If we went outside of IBM we would have to change certain parts of our infrastructure, which we really didn’t want to do. So this solution allowed us to use our existing infrastructure and simply build around and enhance it. It was very cost effective to do that.”

In December 2012, Danser and her team received approval to move forward with IBM WebSphere DataPower B2B Appliance XB62—a solution widely used in the healthcare industry with the built-in trading partner setup and configurations Medical Mutual wanted to implement.

The project kicked off in early 2013 with the help of four experts from TxMQ. The TxMQ team of four worked alongside Danser’s team of four full-time staff members from project start through the September 2013 launch of the system.

“[TxMQ] possessed the expertise we needed to support what we were trying to do,” says Danser of the TxMQ team, which consisted of an IBM WebSphere DataPower project manager, an IBM WebSphere DataPower expert, an IBM WebSphere TX translator expert and an IBM WebSphere Message Broker expert. “They helped us with the design of the infrastructure and the layout of the project.”

The design process wrapped up in April 2013, after which implementation began. According to Danser, the TxMQ project manager was in the Ohio office once a week for the first few months. The IBM WebSphere Message Broker expert was on site for almost four months. Some of the experts, for IBM WebSphere DataPower as one example, had weekly meetings from an off site location.

Overcoming implementation challenges

TxMQ stayed on until the project went live in September 2013—two-and-a-half months past Danser’s

TxMQ’s experience and connections set Medical Mutual up for success

Danser’s team completed a great deal of research before last year’s project start and credits this effort, along with the outside consulting provided by TxMQ, as a source of confidence throughout the project and in the days since full implementation.

The consultants not only helped execute the project, but they were instrumental in the initial decision to go with IBM WebSphere DataPower. Although no one had implemented IBM WebSphere DataPower in the same way as Medical Mutual, TxMQ was able to put Danser in touch with some other players using IBM WebSphere DataPower and “that made us more comfortable that we had the infrastructure to support what we were trying to do,” Danser explains.

“We also wanted to make sure that the solution would support us for years to come, not just a year or two,” Danser continues. “By the time we were done, we were pretty confident with the decision that we made. Overall we feel the solution was appropriate for Medical Mutual.”

TxMQ President Chuck Fried and IBM WebSphere SME at TxMQ Bob Beckett worked with Medical Mutual from the inception of this project to get it off the ground, and during the project the TxMQ team acted as IBM WebSphere DataPower administrator until Medical Mutual got up to speed.

“The one thing that really stuck out to me on the project,” adds Beckett, “was that a lot of our biggest challenges were not business. The biggest challenges were mostly technical, and those are the kinds of things that require a company like TxMQ, which has those network gurus to help solve some very technical problems. We had the right people to put on the right task at the right time.”

Although the company is an IBM Premier Business Partner, according to Fried, TxMQ is self-reliant and self-sufficient, which allows the company to be cost-competitive to their clients. “We own the knowledge,” says Fried.

Part of the challenge was tailoring to Medical Mutual’s specific network and architecture. “It’s not cookie cutter,” explains Beckett.

According to Beckett, to make the infrastructure more robust, TxMQ consultants built some additional functionality on IBM WebSphere TX.

“That actually ended up being one of the really nice services that we were able to provide for our client,” notes Beckett. “They already had some in-house resources to do WTX, but they were rather inexperienced so we brought in a couple of really big guns. These guys have been doing XB62 and they’ve been doing transfers for quite a long time and were able to come in and provide not only the more sophisticated transformations but also provide direction and knowledge transfer to the existing resources. So it was definitely a win-win.”

Additionally, explains Fried, “What’s also nice about WebSphere TX is, when you have the mappings, you can migrate and import them directly into DataPower, yielding some nice reuse of technology and capability there as well.”



Company at a glance

Company name: Medical Mutual of Ohio

Headquarters: Cleveland, Ohio

Industry: Healthcare

Employees: 2,500

Founded: 1934

Website: www.medmutual.com

Company details: Medical Mutual has been a trusted health insurer for 80 years, and is the oldest and largest health insurance company headquartered in the state of Ohio with two primary locations in Cleveland and Toledo and several sales offices across the state.

IBM solution:

- IBM WebSphere DataPower B2B Appliance XB62

original delivery date estimate. The biggest challenge that contributed to the delay was Medical Mutual's limited experience with the technology, which required cross-training.

"We didn't have any expertise in-house," explains Danser, adding that the IBM WebSphere DataPower systems and the MQFTE were the steepest parts of the learning curve. "We relied a lot on the consultants to fill that gap for us until we were up to speed. We did bring in some of the MQ training from outside, but primarily it was learning on the job, so that slowed us down quite a bit. We knew how our old infrastructure worked and this was completely different."

Another issue that contributed to the delay was the need to search and identify system-platform ownership. "Laying out ownership of the pieces took a while, given the resources and time required," explains Danser. "It involved trying to lay out how the new infrastructure should work and then putting the processes we had in place into that new infrastructure. We knew what we wanted it to do—it was figuring out how to do that."

And because Danser's team wanted the system to work the same way as the existing infrastructure, heavy customization was also needed. "There was a lot of homegrown code that went into the process," she adds.

Project realizes cost savings, increased efficiency

Since the implementation, Medical Mutual reports real cost savings and increased efficiency. As was the goal from the beginning, the company can now more easily take on trading partners. According to Danser, the use of IBM WebSphere DataPower creates an infrastructure that greatly improves the time needed to set up those trading partner connections, including a recent connection with the Federal Exchange. Medical Mutual is now able to shorten testing with trading partners and move data faster.

"Before, it would take weeks to [take on a new partner], and now we are down to days," says Danser.

"We're not restricted to just the EDI transactions anymore," she continues, explaining that Medical Mutual's infrastructure is now not only more robust, but also more flexible. "We can use XML [Management Interface] and tools like that to move data also." IBM WebSphere DataPower additionally moved Medical Mutual from batch processing into a real-time environment. The new system gives trading partners the ability to manage their own transactions and automates the process into a browser-based view for them, so onboarding new partners is now a faster, more scalable process.

Additionally, Medical Mutual has been able to significantly reduce transaction fees for claims data by going direct with clearinghouses or other providers. According to Danser, Medical Mutual expects an annual savings of \$250,000 to \$500,000 in transactional fees.

For more information about TxMQ, visit www.txmq.com. 



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