



MicroAutomation Helps a US Department of the Treasury Agency Establish a Redundant, Disaster Recovery Site

Background

With the increasing amounts of delinquent, non-tax, debt owed to the United States, Congress passed the Debt Collection Improvement Act of 1996 (DCIA) which gave the Financial Management Service (FMS) agency of the US Department of the Treasury the authority to collect federal debt owed to all agencies – making them the central resource for all federal agency debt collection. FMS, now known as Bureau of the Fiscal Service, has the overall mission to disburse Federal payments, manage the Federal Government's collection and deposit systems, provide accounting and reporting services throughout the Federal Government, and coordinate the collection of delinquent debt via the Debt Management Services Operations Center (DMSOC).

The DMSOC plays several key roles in the operation of the Treasury Offset Program (TOP), a government-wide debt matching and payment offset system. TOP takes advantage of FMS' centralized disbursement process for Federal payments by matching a database of delinquent debts owed to various government agencies against payments made by the government. When a delinquent debtor record is matched to a payment being issued, the payment, such as an Income Tax Refund, is intercepted and applied to the debt owed.

One of the roles DMSOC plays for the TOP is operating the TOP Call Center. The TOP Call Center receives toll-free calls from agencies (creditor and paying) and debtors concerning Federal payments that may have been offset or are scheduled to be offset. During the peak tax season months of January through May, the TOP Call Center receives as many as 110,000 calls per day. Over 94% of the calls are serviced by a self-service Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system developed by MicroAutomation which allows taxpayers and agencies to get the status of their debts and offsets and creates legal records detailing the debt information provided to callers.

Challenge

In January, 2009, the FMS Assistant Commissioner for the Debt Management Services (DMS) agency identified the need to establish a parallel call center site for the DMSOC. His objective was to create a Unified Contact Center (UCC) from two physical call center sites that would seamlessly handle all operations for the DMSOC.

The UCC needed be designed with the goal of creating a virtual call center out of two existing US Department of the Treasury locations, Birmingham, AL and Austin, TX, that would operate as a single,

"virtual" call center with the ability for either location to operate as the DMSOC independently in case of a disaster.

To meet this objective, FMS launched the UCC project to expand the Avaya infrastructure and call center operations from the Birmingham, AL site to Austin, TX and establish a virtual call center. To achieve such an ambitious goal within the short time period between tax seasons when the call centers are used most heavily, FMS needed an organization to act as an objective source for coordinated consulting and technical Project Management to design and architect the UCC and oversee FMS subcontractors tasked with providing portions of the solution. The organization would need to have expertise in working with an Avaya switching infrastructure, an understanding of call center operations, experience with automated self-service systems such as IVR and CTI, and system integration skills to architect the solution and manage multiple contractors.



Identifying such an organization to oversee the project was imperative because FMS had attempted a similar upgrade in the past and found that they lacked the experience and technical background to ensure its success. As a result, the previous upgrade project had major schedule overruns and technical challenges which impacted call center operations for TOP during the tax season. The problems received national exposure and affected millions of taxpayers attempting to determine their debt status with the Federal Government. FMS was under such political scrutiny for the project that a smooth deployment of the UCC was critical.

Solution

MicroAutomation was selected to fill the role of the solution architect and technical project manager for the project because of our call center experience and familiarity with the components and requirements of the TOP call center. In the 10 years that MicroAutomation had worked with FMS, MicroAutomation had grown from small subcontractor responsible for developing the IVR and CTI solutions to a primary technical resource with a full understanding of all of the operations and technology in use in the call center. Moreover, MicroAutomation's expertise in integrating disparate call center systems, implementing effective Self-Service applications, and developing custom solutions was a critical factor in the selection process. This understanding and experience of the TOP call center and FMS goals coupled with MicroAutomation's expertise with telephone switching systems such as Avaya made MicroAutomation the ideal resource to oversee the project and serve as a consultant to the FMS Project Management for the project.



MicroAutomation's primary role in the UCC project was to provide Technical Consulting, Project Management, and the support staff to design and architect the UCC. As part of the responsibilities, MicroAutomation also coordinated the FMS subcontractors tasked with providing portions of the solution and prepared and executed the Acceptance Test Plan (ATP) for the project.

MicroAutomation's first task was to design and architect the UCC. Working with the Avaya design team, MicroAutomation designed a fully redundant solution that allowed the two call center sites to operate as a virtual call center but also independently if a disaster occurred at either site. MicroAutomation then coordinated the implementation of the UCC in a phased approach that first

Summary of Results

- Architected and designed a virtual call center solution from two geographically separated call center sites
- Coordinated the upgrade an Avaya switch into a redundant, geographically dispersed, VoIP infrastructure
- Established disaster recovery procedures and documentation which enabled either site to run full call center operations
- Developed and executed a detailed Acceptance Test Plan for the call center

established the secondary site, transferred operations to the secondary site while the primary site was being upgraded, and then enabled the virtual call center consisting of both active sites. MicroAutomation developed and executed a comprehensive Acceptance Test Plan for each phase to ensure that the solution was fully operational before transitioning to the next phase.

Results

At the completion of the project, MicroAutomation had successfully implemented a Unified Call Center for FMS that allowed FMS to establish an alternate, geographically separated call center to ensure availability of their services. The new, virtual call center is able to accept and handle calls at either of the two call center sites, and each site can operate independently in case of a disaster at the other site.

As part of the effort, MicroAutomation also developed a detailed Operations Guide to aid FMS in managing the transfer of their operations in case of a disaster. The guide consists of the technical specifications and design for the solution, regression test procedures to be used for future upgrades, and detailed, easy-to-follow instructions on how to distribute call traffic between sites and transfer partial or full call center operations to either site.

The new FMS UCC serves as a showcase for the US Department of the Treasury for call center operations and has the ability to provide additional services beyond FMS in the future. Most importantly, the solution was implemented on time with no impact to FMS call center operations.

About MicroAutomation

MicroAutomation is a full service integrator of call center solutions and provides a broad range of professional services and products. MicroAutomation solutions are based on creating an effortless caller experience through Speech-enabled Interactive Voice Response (IVR), improving live agent efficiency utilizing Computer Telephony Integration (CTI), and providing analytics tools to report, manage and refine each solution element to maximize the overall performance of your call center.

MicroAutomation also offers contact center products and professional services including:

- Contact Center Consultation, Design, Architecture, and Implementation Services
- The Award Winning Call Center Millennium™ Solution Series
- Comprehensive customer support
- GSA Advantage IT Schedule: GS-35F-0419L

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