



Premier e-business solution provides cure for health and well-being marketplace

To respond to consumer needs for easy access to contracted providers, United HealthCare worked with IBM to develop an interactive Web site that supports a broad base of information about physicians, hospitals and other provider services within the United HealthCare network.

“We decided to work with IBM because they had solutions available that really helped to improve our product development cycle.”

—Marty Toomb, United HealthCare Director of Information Systems

“Powered by IBM DB2 Universal Database, the site is growing into a premier e-business solution in the health and well-being market. It’s available to anyone who can sign onto the Net,” says Marty Toomb, Director of Information Systems in the Strategic Business Services Division of United HealthCare.

United HealthCare, one of the largest health and well-being companies in the United States, has supplied consumers and health

care providers with health care coverage and related services since 1974. “It might be insurance products; it might be health care products; it might just be information products,” explains Toomb. “It’s a wide diversity, a combination of managed care, insurance and other products to service the health and well-being market.”

A prescription for customer service

The value of IBM’s e-business solution is defined in a clear-cut savings of time and money for United HealthCare and its members. United HealthCare’s Web site allows the company to customize and dispense current information, replacing the former method of providing printed literature that was usually six months old by the time it reached the user. “Our Web site allows us to provide information in a searchable format upon demand,” Toomb explains. “It also gives us the opportunity to refresh that information weekly. So the information is never over five days old. It’s information that’s searchable and can be looked at in different ways.”

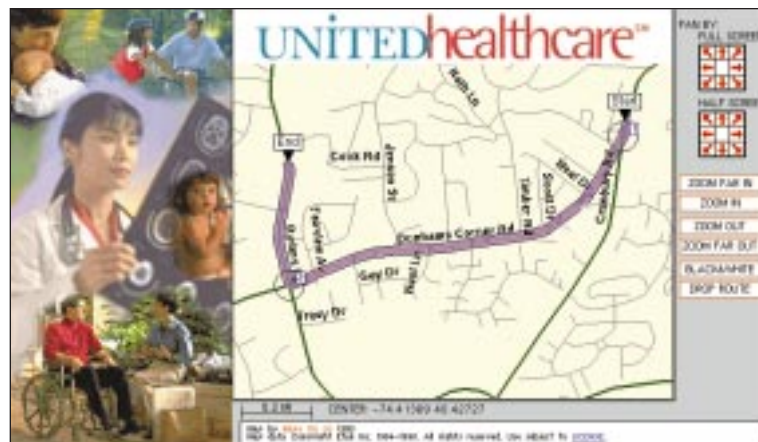
Application Internet and intranet site providing online information about United HealthCare’s contracted physicians and hospitals

Business Benefits 840,000 hits per month; 97% improvement for information updates; reliability for 24x7 uptime in 99 plus percentile; improved customer service

Software IBM® DB2® Universal Database™
IBM Net.Data™

Hardware IBM RS/6000®

Services IBM Content Hosting Services



United HealthCare’s interactive Web site lowers operating costs while providing up-to-date information.

With its first account, Toomb estimated a significant savings in printing expenses. That account, with 8,500 employees, relied exclusively on the United HealthCare Web site to perform physician selection. The cost of setting up the Web site was more than covered with this initial savings. "So, right out of the gate we were saving money putting this application up," Toomb says. "As we move forward with all of our additional customers, the volume of paper and the number of paper directories that we're producing is being reduced. Over the next two years, we expect to see significant savings by reducing paper print costs at United HealthCare."

Being able to access and have control of information on a 24x7 basis has increased customer satisfaction and proved to be another big value. In the first month of operation, the Web site saw 10,000 hits. Today, over 840,000 hits are recorded monthly, and that number is expected to be close to 2 million within one year. Toomb summarizes: "There's been a dramatic growth, not only in the size of our database, but in the access we provide to it and the number of customers who come to visit it. The tremendous scalability of DB2, which is at the center of our e-business solution, has helped us sustain this growth and move closer to our goal of becoming the largest and best company addressing the health and well-being marketplace in the United States."

United HealthCare's Web site allows consumers to look at where and with whom United HealthCare does business in the physician and hospital provider communities. Users are able to conduct searches by zip code for products, types of providers, hospitals, physicians and practice specialties. "The data that we have is put out onto the Web as an extract of our core database that we use to support all provider system processes," Toomb explains. IBM Global Services hosts the DB2 UDB data repositories in its data center, and Net.Data is used to quickly and efficiently transfer the data to the Web site. "So, the information that's being looked at by our consumers out on the Internet, is the same information that's used to pay claims and answer customer inquiries when you call us on the telephone."

He continues, "We now have over 120 customized hot link interfaces to our application

from our strategic accounts. Each one of these customers has a custom view of information that specifies the products and markets they purchase from us, as well as any specific language that they need describing their health plan or limiting any particular FAQs regarding their health plan."

Just what the doctor ordered

Running against a three-month clock to make the site operational by the start of United HealthCare's enrollment period, a core team of United HealthCare and IBM people met this challenge by implementing a solution with the scalability to handle the predicted future growth demands of the site.

Hosted on an RS/6000 Web server, United HealthCare is currently upgrading to the newest version of DB2 UDB to supply more intensive programming capability to HTML interfaces.

"Our reliability for up-time is in the 99 plus percentile," Toomb reports. "Our server response time has been very good, and with the scalability that's been provided by IBM, we've had very little contention to stay ahead of the curve as our volume continues to grow."

In light of the increased popularity of the site, United HealthCare plans to add new processes to the site in 1999. First on the list is the inclusion of IBM MQSeries® messaging to simplify connections between the Web site and back-end data systems, including an e-mail interface to customers. Toomb adds, "Our goal is to enable our host application data directly to our customers through the Internet. This will provide access to realtime services. Our new processes will provide access to data and services that would normally have to be done through mail or by telephone to a customer service center."

Diagnosis: e-business success

Toomb concludes that IBM has been key in moving the United HealthCare Web site into a premier e-business solution. "We are a large company. We have a lot of demands. We have to meet those demands head on," he says. "We decided to work with IBM because they had solutions available that really helped to improve our product development cycle."

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