

# Emtex U.S. Case Study: **ALLISON** PAYMENT SYSTEMS, LLC

## Delivering the Impossible

- From Bare Walls to State-of-the-Art Production in 45 Days

### **FlexServer**

The good news was that Allison Payment Systems would be printing and mailing a broad range of documents for the Medicare system in multiple states. The bad news was they had to be up and running with a dedicated operation in just 90 days - a deadline suddenly shortened to less than 60 days when business needs changed and the time to complete the project was cut in half.

The documents to be produced included checks, letters, EOBs and a variety of related reports for Medicare recipients in multiple states. Such documents were business as usual for Allison, an Indianapolis, Indiana-based high-tech specialty commercial printer known as an industry leader print and mail services. Allison provides a broad range of highly customized data processing and personalized printing solutions to banks, insurance companies and other financial services customers. Xerox printers are used for most highly customized print and mail applications requiring multiple paper stocks and marketing integration, while IBM printers are used for high-volume repetitive applications that require less customization of materials.

Despite Allison's size and depth of experience, the narrow start-up window was still a challenge, in part because it necessitated a significant expansion of print operations in Indianapolis. "We were awarded the contract on December 13, 2000 and began with bare walls," relates Brad Turner, Vice President of Technical Services. "We thought we had 90 days, which would have made things interesting, but very do-able. Then on December 27 we were notified we had to be live by February 9. So we got to work and beat the deadline, converting a warehouse into a state-of-the-art



production print and mail facility by February 1- just 45 days."

### **Outstanding Support**

A key part of the implementation and now the day-to-day operation is FlexServer. It was especially helpful in getting the new system up and running in the limited time available. "It was a true partnership working to ensure that our live date did not slip," relates Turner. "Although the timeframe seemed impossible - even the FlexServer team were sceptical - we received excellent support and cooperation at all times. After we were live, the support continued. Fast-start programs like this one often have problems with the various systems not performing quite the way we needed. The FlexServer team made sure there were both IBM and FlexServer support people on-site until the problems were identified and resolved."

It's very important, Turner notes, for hardware and software vendors to have a partnership mentality. "We understand what we need and what it takes to do it. We expect our partners to tell us what will and will not work and help us get to where we need to be. That's what we experienced with FlexServer."

### **Automated Processes**

FlexServer sits between the customer's computer system and the array of printers at Allison.

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One of the key components is a JES Stripper that resides on the customer's MVS mainframe and automatically sends data to Allison's FlexServer. The Stripper simply looks like another printer to JES (Job Entry System), the spooling system on an MVS mainframe. It takes jobs destined for a particular printer and sends them to FlexServer which routes them to the printer where IBM's Infoprint Manager converts AFP to IPDS. "We receive hundreds of jobs to print every day," says Turner. "We also send work from our own network to the FlexServer for printing. The GUI lets us monitor all production equipment, incoming work, and queued work across our WAN." As the files come in, Allison's printer operators use FlexServer to route them to the appropriate printer based on priority, application requirements, printer resources, and machine availability. When needed, job priority can be quickly changed using FlexServer's drag-and-drop interface. More importantly, the intuitive GUI overcomes the key operational problem of using JES to control printing: the need that printer operators have an extensive JES knowledge to manage and run jobs. FlexServer's GUI requires very little training and does not require knowing the cryptic command structure of JES-based implementations. This simplifies operator training and broadens the pool of potential operators that can be hired. "The learning curve was excellent," recalls Turner. "Experienced mainframe operators adapted to FlexServer within days, as compared to weeks of training on other platforms."

### Easy Connectivity

Ease of connectivity was a key part of linking to the customer's mainframe, explains Turner. "With FlexServer we were able to install four IBM 3900s, two Xerox DP180s, and attach them to our network over a single T1 line using TCP/IP connections. Some solutions would have required channel extenders or a local mainframe to drive the printers and to talk to the mainframe on the other end. FlexServer is a much more elegant solution."

### Billing and Accounting Capability

The data passing through FlexServer is also tracked for billing purposes, adding speed and accuracy to Allison's billing process. Accounting records are extracted from FlexServer where business rules are applied to create virtually all billing information. This enables Allison to provide highly detailed billing statements that are fully automated from receipt of data to billing including generation of our work orders, production specifications, and tracking of work. By comparison, Allison found IBM's Infoprint Manager could not efficiently receive data over a T1 line and distribute, monitor and prioritize the workload across four Infoprint Manager servers. It also lacked the account tracking needed to produce production and billing information.

### New Capabilities

Allison also linked FlexServer to Bell & Howell's Transformer product, enabling electronic merging and matching of previously incompatible check and EOB print streams. The entire process, from the customer's mainframe through printing and mailing enables Allison to receive a data input format they previously could not accept, match unlike documents and place each recipient's checks and EOBs into a single envelope, providing customers with substantial postal savings. "The value-added service this provides helps ensure customer loyalty because we helped them improve a service that had previously been viewed as impossible to achieve," says Turner.

### Improved Operational Efficiency

While the workflow and operational efficiencies deliver ongoing benefits, the most important aspect of making FlexServer the core of the Medicare solution was that it was accomplished ahead of schedule in an extremely limited timeframe, attesting to FlexServer's ease of use and the focus efforts of the FlexServer team. "Without the level of commitment that was made by them, this project would not have happened on time or even been possible," says Turner.

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