

# Keeping the Healthcare Infrastructure Healthy

## Success Story

You never know when it will happen. Call it serendipity, fate, or pure coincidence; sometimes you're just in the right place at the right time. And all the proper planning, research and execution is no match for just choosing the right seat at lunch.

The sound of shuffling papers is a common background noise in offices all over the world. Some who hear this call it the sound of productivity and progress. Cheryl Thomas, Operations Manager of Payment Processing for Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama (BCBSAL), recognized the sound as one of inefficiency.

BCBSAL has a straightforward goal: to provide its 3.6 million individual subscribers and businesses the best health care programs possible. And while the spotlight, rightfully, shines on the front-end caregivers who treat BCBSAL's clients, it is the back office processing that rarely, if ever, gets noticed, but is critical to BCBSAL's success.

Thomas's group is responsible for processing incoming healthcare payments from companies and individual subscribers in an accurate and timely manner. Even with the availability of electronic payment options, a vast majority of payments still arrive as paper checks via U.S. mail. Time and accuracy are always the biggest factors. Delays or errors in processing mean delays in customer service and possible delays in crucial medical care.

BCBSAL purchased an OPEX System 150 high speed mail extractor to automatically open envelopes and process contents. While the extractor eliminated the need to open all the incoming mail by hand, there was still a large amount of manual work that needed to take place. Exception payments requiring research needed far more time and manpower. In addition, there was no way to track daily volume on a real-time basis or tell how long each payment took from beginning to end. Nor was there a way to track the efficiency of individual operators. Were there high-performers who could be better utilized? How were delays in Payment Processing affecting others at BCBSAL who relied on this information to do their job?

The BCBSAL Management Team constantly works to find ways to improve efficiency in all departments. Thomas knew the key was automation, but it had to be the right kind of automation that was specific to payments

and increased overall efficiency while increasing quality for internal users and external customers.

Thomas did some research and found the TAWPI organization. TAWPI provides education and networking opportunities for practitioners, technology and service providers in payments automation, distributed capture, and imaging and forms processing. TAWPI strives to put the vendors and poten-



tial users of technology together. Thomas and her manager, Mary Smith, knew this was the place to search for a solution so they attended TAWPI's annual Forum & Expo. The task was not an easy one to undertake. For four days Thomas and Smith sifted through hours of presentations and numerous vendors exhibiting their wares to find the right solution for BCBSAL.

And this is where perhaps Lady Luck stepped in to speed their search. Thomas attended a lunch meeting at the TAWPI event and by chance sat next to Bo Minogue, a partner in Mavro Imaging. Minogue states, "Cheryl was looking for solutions to specific challenges in her department, but really

didn't know what was available. She wasn't even sure there were vendors who made these types of payment industry specific products. She was hoping to find something that could at least solve a small portion of her wish list."

Thomas says, "Bo told me much about the company and the software, but then said he wanted to show me what he could do right there at the TAWPI show. He asked me to give him some samples of our payments and said he would demonstrate exactly what he was talking about and show me how he could automate the process. I had a package of payments shipped to him the next day and he did exactly what he said he could."

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Thomas went back with her newfound information and got the ball rolling to bring Mavro down to Birmingham, Alabama to see the BCBSAL daily payment process in action. Mavro went onsite to perform an assessment and produced a document with detailed recommendations to improve all mailroom processes. With a scope of work agreed upon, Mavro went to work, and in less than three months since she happened to sit next to Bo Minogue, Thomas's department had a new scanner and Mavro Software ready to roll. Thomas adds, "they delivered what they promised and did it all under budget."

"They worked with the entire staff to prepare, train and plan the install. Mavro took every suggestion very seriously and it was their careful review of our process that ensured a smooth installation and buy-in from everyone in payment processing. But more importantly, it was necessary to get buy-in from management and other departments. Mavro did a great job with this," says Thomas. "Oh, and it only took one day for Mavro to come and install the software and get everyone up and running. One day. They even made some adjustments during installation at the request of associates who wanted to see thumbnails of all the scanned documents on one page. They added that feature right here when they installed the software." Mavro also trained users and administrators to be the first lines of help for any technical support so BCBSAL could be self-reliant if any problems arose.

Using Mavro's MavBridge software and an OPEX AS3690i scanner, BCBSAL now automatically opens mail, preps and scans documents in one step, and extracts data without manual intervention. Thomas says, "As daily volumes fluctuate, management is now able to efficiently distribute work,

since associates no longer need to type information from paper documents." Paper never leaves the mailroom and doesn't stack up on desks anymore – it's all electronic. Mavro also gives BCBSAL management great reporting tools providing statistics and a dashboard that provides an instant overview of all the work processed by each associate. Thomas states, "We can immediately see the status of all work. We can see how many documents are being processed, how long it takes, which associates are being the most efficient, and if any work is stuck in a queue. We can reassign associates to different areas as the workload changes throughout the day. We can truly see our process like we never could before."

We want to ensure that all payments are processed on time. And with Mavro's reporting, we can see at a glance the age and location of every transaction in our system. We even have alerts set up for aging work so nothing gets past our deadlines," says Thomas. "We now consistently meet our most pressing goal of timely processing. All the other benefits are just icing on the cake."

"Mavro has also allowed us to take the next step in electronic deposits by enabling Check 21. With Mavro's software we will soon be able to use our scanned check images to automatically deposit funds without having to deliver the physical checks to the bank, which will result in further efficiencies and reduced bank fees," states Thomas.

Thomas concludes, "I knew they could make us more efficient and I thought it would be good, but I didn't think it would be this great. I enjoyed working with Mavro because they are honest, down-to-earth people. No fluff – they tell me something and then show they can deliver it."

If you are looking to extend your knowledge about the latest technology solutions, TAWPI offers a wealth of knowledge, education and networking. Attend a local meeting or plan a trip to their annual Forum and Expo. You never know who you'll meet.

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