



Case Study

Ameritas Insurance Holding Company



One of the largest insurance holding companies in the country.

Headquarters: Lincoln, NE

Serves: 4.9 million customers nationwide

The Challenge

Always on the lookout to improve its technology solutions, Ameritas was looking to upgrade its long-time job scheduling software solution. Although the software adequately served the insurance provider's needs, service standards had begun to decline in recent years, and Ameritas' executives decided it was time for a change.

Ameritas sought a holistic workload automation solution that could be rapidly and seamlessly migrated from their prior job scheduling software, without any hiccups.

In addition, Ameritas needed improved flexibility and visibility into their operations, through superior, faster workload automation. Most importantly, given their complexity of operations and continuously evolving business lines, it was essential that Ameritas would have the support of a world-class, client-first service team.

Once Ameritas decided the time was right to move on from their long-time job scheduling vendor, it conducted robust due diligence into several of the biggest players in the workload automation market. Although Ameritas was very impressed with SMA's product and demos, it faced a complex migration project and had recently spent 18 months on a failed conversion. Naturally, executives were cautious and initially chose a larger, better-known firm that had experience in conducting migration projects off Ameritas' current scheduling software.



I am not exaggerating when I say this migration was the most positive I have been involved with in forty years."

Ed Watson, Systems Programmer, Ameritas

“SMA originally lost the bid,” says Ed Watson, Systems Programmer at Ameritas. “But when the other solution provider proved difficult to work with, we decided to come back to OpCon. With 20/20 hindsight, it was the best decision.”

“We had two projects going on at the same time,” says Deb Brugman, Manager of the Operations Team at Ameritas. “Including migrating our database from a Windows to a Linux environment. If we hadn’t converted to SMA, the financial impact would have been significant because we would have had to purchase additional licenses from the scheduler.

The move to OpCon was very timely and enabled our team’s success.” SMA promised to complete the migration project within six months. At first, having recently experienced an 18-month migration project that ultimately failed, Ameritas executives were skeptical. But SMA delivered on their promise.

“In six months, we were done, which was impressive,” Watson says. “Looking back, we were a little cautious, but it turned out great.”

Post-migration, Ameritas staff immediately noticed the differences between OpCon and their prior solution. “Within two months, we were realizing the advantages that we had with OpCon over our old product,” Watson says. “We like that OpCon is server based, given that jobs are moving off the mainframe,” says Tony Reilman, Enterprise Solution Manager at Ameritas. “We also like the fact that OpCon can run as a web app. But the biggest factor has been the people – the SMA team are very easy to work with.”



The Results

Ameritas' deployment of the OpCon workload automation solution has translated into the following beneficial and measurable results:

Increased productivity

Across the organization as a whole, OpCon has boosted productivity by roughly 15-20% and saved developers 20 hours per month. “[OpCon] has also saved time for our IT team, particularly for our programmers who use the interface to monitor their systems and their jobs,” Watson says. “They have found it easier and more reliable than what they were used to in the past.”

Productivity Increase

15%–20%

Time Saved

20 hrs/mo

Enhanced visibility

OpCon helped Ameritas expose long-standing inefficiencies, thereby eliminating unnecessary processes and streamlining operations. “When it comes to streamlining operations, with the flowcharting we can now visually see the flow of jobs going through our system and that has exposed some complexity that was unneeded,” Watson says. “For example, we discovered processes that have been around for years and people realized that we didn’t need to run those anymore. It helped us to improve our through put by exposing inefficiencies.”

Better reporting

Since it is built on a powerful SQL database, OpCon offers a virtually unlimited range of customized reporting to meet any organization’s unique needs. “The fact that OpCon is a SQL database opens up a world of possibilities for us,” Watson says. “Reporting will be a lot easier in the long run than it was with [our prior scheduler], which only offered a few canned reports but little customization.”

 With OpCon, we have the capability to schedule across all environments: in the cloud, on servers, and on the mainframe. Now, we’ve got the software in place, and we’re ready to start scheduling. We’re ready to start moving forward.”

Deb Brugman, Manager of the Operations Team at Ameritas

Centralized control

SMA's enterprise workload automation and orchestration solution enables organizations of any size to manage highly complex environments from a single, central source of truth. "Without licensing restrictions, we are empowered to put OpCon agents anywhere," Reilman says. "We've added more agents with OpCon than we did over the previous 10 years that I've worked here. It's exciting to see how we can control more of our operations from a central location – OpCon."

Greater simplicity

OpCon delivers fast, easy automation without exhaustive training or specialized coding skills. SMA's Self Service Interface was designed specifically for business users to help reduce the load on the IT department. "OpCon's schedule build feature is incredibly simple to use," says Kenneth Bush. "It's just a matter of holding one cycle and adding a schedule build, and we're off and running. Even our programmers praise OpCon's 'wizardry'."

Less downtime

OpCon is designed to run on dedicated servers, so your jobs can run even when the mainframe is down or undergoing routine maintenance. "With [our prior scheduling solution], if we had to take the mainframe down, all our agents stopped running," Brugman says. "With OpCon, if we need to conduct routine maintenance, our agents continue to run on their own, because they work independently from the mainframe."

Licensing flexibility

With OpCon, there are no hidden costs. "One of the big differences we see between our former vendor and OpCon is that if we wanted to add an agent previously, that was an extra cost," Brugman says. "So, we tended to shy away from adding agents. Now, if we need another server, we have processes set up to add one, and the sky's the limit with what we can accomplish!"

"Given what it's doing for us, versus the price that we're paying for OpCon, we feel that it's extremely beneficial to us in terms of the total cost of ownership," Watson says.

Direct monitoring of jobs

With their prior solution, Ameritas couldn't manage file arrival jobs, such as the creation of a file within a Windows folder. Now, with OpCon they can, allowing them to cut out the middleman and reduce staff resources devoted to such activities.

Conclusion

With OpCon from SMA Technologies, Ameritas is enjoying the flexibility and scalability of an enterprise-level workload orchestration platform, without the complexity. Just as importantly, Ameritas gets ongoing, caring support from a team of experts.



With so many businesses now, you don't receive the personal touch. SMA was more insistent on being onsite for the cut over date than we were. Now, we continue to meet monthly with the same people who helped us with the conversion and who really know our system."

Deb Brugman, Manager of the Operations Team at Ameritas

