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Short Timeline Doesn't Daunt LTC Partners

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When the US Office of Personnel Management, sponsors of the Federal Long Term Care Insurance Program, selected Boston-based John Hancock Financial Services (\$121.2 billion in assets) and New York-based MetLife (\$290.1 billion in assets) as the insurers for the program on December 18, 2001, the two insurance companies formed Long Term Care Partners LLC (Portsmouth, NH), a jointly owned company exclusively dedicated to serving the long-term care insurance needs for roughly 20 million federal employees.

However, as a start-up, LTC Partners faced a formidable challenge-it had to build everything from the ground up in a compressed timeframe, according to Sharon Wall, chief technology officer for LTC Partners. "We had a very short timeframe," she says. "The contract was due to be awarded in October 2001, but it was delayed because of 9/11 and it wasn't awarded until December of 2001. We had to be partially operational by May 1, 2002."

Scalable & Secure Architecture

In addition to the compressed timeline, Wall says LTC Partners was also under strict expense guidelines from the federal government. "We began our journey by looking at the best practices of each [parent] company," John Hancock and MetLife, Wall says. "We needed a technology architecture that was scalable, fault-tolerant and secure."

LTC Partners quickly issued an RFP for companies that could handle its IT planning and implementation needs. After reviewing the responses, Wall and her team selected Westwood, MA-based StrategIT, a consulting and end-to-end IT infrastructure solutions provider. "StrategIT provided consulting and helped determine our needs for a secure and scalable infrastructure," Wall says. StrategIT helped LTC Partners select all of the components of the infrastructure, including LANs, servers, VPNs, security, data backup, storage and virus protection. "It ran the gamut for all types of infrastructure services," Wall adds. The development of the administration system was handled jointly by John Hancock and MetLife, Wall explains.

Kamil Alachi, vice president at StrategIT, notes that LTC Partners was a unique challenge. "First, there was no room for failure," he says. "By the time we were engaged in the development, we had three months" to develop the architecture. "Also, LTC

Partners was a completely new company. You don't see that very often. We were building everything from scratch."

An important aspect of the development, Alachi and Wall note, is that the LTC Partners' infrastructure was designed to meet business objectives. "It is critical to start development of the infrastructure from a business level," Wall says. "Only when you know your business requirements can you design the business technology [infrastructure]." StrategIT helped LTC Partners outline its objectives and operational needs before it began to develop the infrastructure.

Passing The First Test

Once StrategIT joined the development team, Wall and StrategIT quickly worked to meet the first deadline of March 25, 2002. "We deployed an early enrollment Web site on-time, where members of the federal [LTC] program could enroll," according to Wall. During the first few days that the site was live, it handled 127,000 visitors without any problems.

Another reason LTC Partners chose StrategIT was the vendor's documentation process. "StrategIT differentiated themselves by the documentation that they delivered," Wall says. "Now we have a library of the architecture of the solution and the schematics on how the technology is deployed. The transfer of knowledge during the entire process from StrategIT to our IT team," which consists of five employees, "exceeded our expectations."

CASE STUDY CLOSEUP

COMPANY: Long Term Care Partners, LLC, Portsmouth, NH, a joint venture of John Hancock and MetLife.

LINES OF BUSINESS: Long-term care insurance for federal employees.

VENDOR/TECHNOLOGY: StrategIT (Westwood, MA) consulting and infrastructure planning services.

THE CHALLENGE: Build infrastructure in three months to handle 20 million members.

