

Web-Enabled Appointment System and Promotions Program **Defers Cost** of New Facility

ADVANTA SOLUTIONS' WEB-ENABLED APPOINTMENT SYSTEM HELPED BIOLIFE IMPROVE CUSTOMER SERVICE AND STREAMLINE BUSINESS PROCESSES, WHILE SOLVING A MARKETING PROBLEM BY OBTAINING MORE DONATIONS AND INCREASING RETENTION RATES AT ITS BLOOD DONOR CENTERS.

By creating a technology solution for BioLife, a Deerfield, Ill.-based subsidiary of Baxter Healthcare Corp., Advanta helped bring 23 of BioLife's 100 plasma donation centers online. The system not only improves customer service and streamlines business processes, but also solves a marketing problem by obtaining more donations and increasing retention rates.

The goals of this technology solution were to increase business, improve customer satisfaction, and lower internal costs. While using the Web to improve customer satisfaction and increase business is not exactly a new idea, a computer system that actually does what it promises is certainly refreshing.

"We thought we'd improve internal processes and customer service with the implementation of a Web-based appointment system and affinity program, but now we expect the increased plasma yield to equal a new \$2 million donation center," says André Büchner, manager of marketing and corporate communications at BioLife Plasma Services.

Most of the 45,000 donors at BioLife's 23 plasma centers are regulars who receive monetary compensation for their commitment to the Web-based program.

Donors can choose to have their money cashed out in the short term, saved, cashed out at a later date, or donated to a charity. Each donation yields about 816 milliliters of plasma, the pale yellow liquid portion of the blood that helps in the circulation of red and white blood cells and platelets.



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André Büchner
Manager, marketing and
corporate communications,
BioLife Plasma Services

EFFICIENCY GENERATES THROUGHPUT

Advanta's system was first implemented in October 2001, and since then, BioLife has handled more than 1.2 million appointments online — 50% from donors. Mr. Büchner expects the total to increase by 80,000 to 90,000 each month.

"We reached our millionth online appointment in June of last year," Mr. Büchner says. "That's a lot of time our employees didn't spend writing and rescheduling appointments manually. The new system allows us to be more efficient in our operations.

We've reduced the number of phone calls received because our donors are scheduling their appointments themselves. We are using this extra time to improve our customer service within the center."

ATTRACTING AND KEEPING DONORS

As in any business, it is often more valuable to focus on keeping existing customers than to spend huge marketing dollars acquiring new ones.

Therefore, increasing throughput per donor is an important goal

"In technology and in marketing, we always try to be on the cutting edge," Mr. Büchner says. "Our competition for donors isn't other plasma companies, it's everything else donors can do in their free time."

Like smart retailers, BioLife is working to enhance the experience for

donors. At this point, about 18,000 donors have signed up for a rewards program BioLife has set up with MyPoints.com.

The program rewards frequent and long-term donors with bonus points for the number of dona-

tions made over one-month and four-month periods. Donors can then redeem these points for gift certificates at popular stores.

In addition to encouraging donations, BioLife uses the rewards system to level service crunches and slow periods by increasing points for off-peak hours.

The resulting streamlined service speeds up the donation process and encourages more visits because donors can rely on being in and out faster. Without fully automated, Web-enabled donor management, such a rewards program would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to administer.

The online scheduling system and rewards programs are both examples of how technological and market forces are moving the back office and the Web ever closer.

Without the resources to set up a program such as this himself, Mr. Büchner views the partnership with MyPoints as a great way to offer donors a broad range of reward opportunities.

In addition, the MyPoints network of partners may provide Mr. Büchner with some opportunities for cross-marketing.

WORKLOAD BALANCING

The new systems also help to reallocate the workload and avoid service crunches and droughts.

"The hours around lunch are traditionally slower," Mr. Büchner says. "The new system helps to optimize the flow of donors throughout the day by using points to promote slow hours."

The online system also allowed the company to track demographic statistics, which according to BioLife executives were somewhat surprising.

"We expected our Ames, Iowa center, in a Web-conscious college town, to lead in online bookings," Mr. Büchner says. "But North Dakota leads with 60% of bookings done online and Ames is rather low."

INCREASING SYSTEM ROI

Since the marketing cost to acquire a new donor is between \$30 and \$60, increasing throughput per donor and donor satisfaction makes for good business. That's why BioLife, like any smart retailer, is enhancing the customer experience.

In addition to scheduling appointments from home computers, donors can access the system from scheduling kiosks in donor centers.

Further, the system enables them to schedule childcare during their donation visits; most centers include childcare facilities.

According to Mr. Büchner, BioLife was able to maximize its return on investment because the online donor management system has expanded the company's vision while staying within its budget.

"The senior project manager found a dozen ways to make the technology give back more efficiency and convenience for the dollar," he says. "They made our first entry into e-



business surprisingly successful. Internet latency gave rise to one early problem that they soon cleaned up."

ARCHITECTURE AND IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

The Advanta system and interfaces were built using ColdFusion 4.5 and were optimized for Netscape and Microsoft Internet Explorer. Microsoft SQL Server is the database. It runs on two Compaq servers with dual 700-MHz Pentium processors and one gigabyte of memory.

Technically, the hardest part was defining and building an online two-way interface with MyPoints.

Like smart retailers, BioLife is working to enhance the experience of donors. About 18,000 donors have signed up for a rewards program BioLife has set up with MyPoints.com.

Leon Chalnick
President
Advanta Solutions

HEALTHY GROWTH

In 2000, the company that was known as Community Bio-Resources, (which merged with SerenTec-Biologicals to form BioLife in December 2001) owned about 22 plasma centers. Of those, only two were booking online throughout 2001.

The remaining centers were brought online in a very short timeframe at the end of 2001, in groups of about five.

BioLife now operates more than 100 plasma centers throughout the United States, with 24 centers currently participating in the online scheduling and rewards program.

And about 50% of donations at these "online centers" are scheduled by donors over the Web, which gives them control and frees staff of mundane scheduling tasks.

Leon Chalnick is president of Advanta Solutions Inc located in Long Beach, Calif. Founded in 1989, Advanta Solutions develops Web-enabled solutions. For more information, visit www.advantasolutions.com.

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