Veterans' Health Care Improved Through Data Center Consolidation

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In This Executive Summary

This summary is an excerpt of a research document published by Government Insights, “Improving the Consistency of Healthcare for Veterans Through Datacenter Consolidation,” February 2009, # GI216831. This Case Study analyzes the current Veterans Administration (VA) datacenter consolidation and reviews the impact of the IT deployment on return on investment (ROI), risk, transformation, and innovation. This Case Study is based on an interview and communications with Charles J. De Sanno, Jr., executive director, VA Enterprise Technology and Infrastructure Engineering, as well as independent Government Insights research.

Government Insights Viewpoint

Access to vast amounts of data is required to run our government, and to enable better service to citizens, this data must be accessible, available, and as comprehensive as possible to enable good decision making, yet also be secure to protect citizens' rights and privacy. Data center consolidation can not only reduce complexity and operational inconsistency, but can also effectively leverage infrastructure capacity, standardize IT platforms and IT management processes, consolidate procurements, increase security and service-level availability, and provide government the means to vastly improve their citizen service and meet agency and regulatory requirements.

Market Overview

One of the most comprehensive IT architectural redesigns that government agencies can undertake is datacenter consolidation. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) clinicians and hospital staff need access to massive amounts of data to provide effective healthcare to veterans, including analysis of test results, proper diagnostics, prescription authorizations and refills, lab analysis, and scheduling and rescheduling of clinic and doctor visits. Any weakness in the architecture or the management of the datacenters can lead to a breach, causing unavailability of IT systems, lack of critical medical information, or even loss of patient privacy and identity.

VA has a history of highly distributed and independent IT efforts to support the myriad of healthcare facilities across the United States. Over time, Inconsistent staffing, skills, IT products, and applications produced inconsistent service levels. Rising and inefficient costs in this distributed model were not sustainable, and existing computer rooms would require significant investment to maintain viability and meet mandated requirements such as security lockdown.

By building on the information that this Case Study provides, government agencies have the opportunity to produce vastly improved service delivery while meeting agency and regulatory requirements. Highlights include:
VA embarked on a strategic initiative to improve the reliability of healthcare systems available to serve our growing population of approximately 24 million veterans by integrating a formerly fragmented data processing architecture that supports over 1,500 points of care, including 153 medical centers.

Organizational realignment and the integration of a more rigorous service delivery process framework enabled VA to improve the manner in which systems management was performed, provide more consistent resource provisioning, and improve operational practices to all VA lines of business. VA's reorganization of the IT department to create a centrally managed, service-based organization was built upon IT best practices. Centralization was accomplished to increase efficiency, standardization, compliance, and fiscal responsibility; reduce duplication and inconsistency; and enable a veteran-centric model to optimize service to veterans.

Through standardization of systems, infrastructure, and operations, VA can now effectively test and complete release management with a high degree of outcome predictability, increase IT's overall agility, allow essential "repeatable processes" that lead to superior IT service, and increase system availability from 98% to 99.98%.

**In Summary**

Successfully consolidating datacenters requires strategic vision, mission alignment, comprehensive communications, robust migration plans, the right architecture, and flexible deployment to support mission objectives. Other federal agency datacenter consolidations may be as complex as VA’s, but it is unlikely that more than a few agencies have consolidated while simultaneously reorganizing their IT departments. Top-down decisions based upon external events caused VA to do both, and the completion of its datacenter consolidation, and ultimate success in delivering a consistently reliable healthcare system to serve veterans, depends on continued alignment around a veteran-centric organization.

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