



AutoMate Integrates Critical Applications for a Major Medical Center

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Background

The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center has the challenge of staffing and managing thousands of nurses busy delivering top-notch patient care. To manage this complexity, MD Anderson relies on three critical applications – a Human Resource system by PeopleSoft, a Time and Attendance system by Kronos, and a Staffing system by Per-Se's ANSOS One-Staff. These three applications (with their various inputs, outputs, and interfaces) must be kept up-to-date and in-synch at all times in order for the Cancer Center to staff at appropriate levels, operate efficiently, and provide quality patient care.

Over 2,700 nurses and administrative staff rely on AutoMate to ensure optimal staffing levels and patient care. At any one time, the Cancer Center has 150 concurrent users interacting with the solution. The applications involved are a crucial component of our world-class and renowned patient care system.

The Challenge

Previously, the Cancer Center attempted to use two technologies, AutoIT and LaunchPad, to orchestrate the PeopleSoft, Kronos, and ANSOS One-Staff applications. However, these technologies failed miserably because they did not support secure logon capability or job failure/success notifications. In short, IT personnel were unable to guarantee the appropriate level of security with these tools, and they could not effectively monitor their performance or the performance of the overall solution.

Once Juan Garcia, a Systems Analyst at the Cancer Center, and his team members realized what they needed, they turned to AutoMate by Network Automation, Inc for the solution.

Juan says, "For us, AutoMate combines two very important functionalities: job scheduling/triggering and automation. In our initial effort when we attempted to use Launchpad and AutoIT, we were trying to combine Launchpad's job scheduling functionality with AutoIT's automation capabilities. This was a mistake. What we really needed was one powerful tool that had both the triggering and automation capabilities."

The Solution

Juan says, "In our solution, AutoMate is central to application integration – it orchestrates three critical applications used extensively at MD Anderson Cancer Center, and coordinates thousands of file and data transfers."



In essence, AutoMate acts as a “traffic cop” between PeopleSoft, Kronos, and ANSOS One-Staff. The traffic cop’s main duty is to automate the thousands of file and data transfers that occur among these applications. The solution operates on a Windows server with secure access to servers running the other applications, as well as access to backend databases and files.

AutoMate gave the Cancer Center the application security it needed; not only did AutoMate allow secure logon and access, but it also provided enhanced security features such as password and task encryption. Moreover, AutoMate enabled the Cancer Center to send emails and text messages to IT personnel regarding the failure or success of automated tasks. For task failures, the messages would be very granular, identifying exactly when and where the error occurred. This provided IT personnel with the timely and relevant information they needed to rectify the error in near real time. It also enabled the IT staff to spend less time babysitting the application, often at nights and on weekends, as they had with the previous tools.

Another benefit of AutoMate the Cancer Center discovered was its flexibility and versatility. AutoMate has really allowed the Cancer Center to set up a more dynamic system architecture. Now, when a group of automated tasks has to be modified, for example, IT personnel can change a single variable instead of pouring through and editing thousand of lines of code. Making additions and changes to existing automation tasks is a snap with AutoMate.

Juan also adds, “Another extremely powerful aspect of AutoMate is its development interface. Users can easily drag-and-drop their way to creating extremely complex automation tasks, even when they don’t know a lick of code. AutoMate offers the ability to “script” any kind of solution, even when you don’t know anything about scripting. But AutoMate is powerful, too. If you do pride your scripting prowess, you can really take your talents to the next level with AutoMate. There’s really nothing you can do with scripting that you can’t do better with AutoMate.”

The Benefit

Since 2002, the MD Anderson Cancer Center has developed and deployed over 80 automation tasks with AutoMate. These tasks keep files and data between critical applications in-synch, as well as backing up critical applications for disaster recovery purposes, interacting with backend databases, and automating report generation.

From the financial perspective, Juan calculates a hard-cost savings of approximately .8 of an FTE a year, equivalent to a savings of \$150,000 with an ROI of 650% due to implementation of AutoMate tasks, not to mention all the soft costs saved with optimal nurse staffing, fewer administrative hassles, and improved ability to deliver better patient care.