Robot/NETWORK®
Helps Bright Stars Connect

By Bob Balderson

Antares, the brightest star in the constellation Scorpius, symbolizes the scorpion's beating heart. For centuries, its ruddy hue has been a critical navigation guide for mariners. In 1997, a new Antares was born—Antares Management Solutions, another guiding star to help companies expand their information technology (IT) resources and capacity by steering them through the maze of IT functions and services.

Antares Management Solutions is an IT and business process outsourcing firm based in Westlake, Ohio. As a wholly owned subsidiary of Medical Mutual of Ohio, Antares can capitalize on the resources, powerful IT infrastructure, and expertise of the oldest and largest Ohio-based health insurance company. As a result, Antares offers business process outsourcing services to the insurance industry and technology outsourcing services to various organizations throughout the United States.

In a relatively few years, Antares Management Solutions has enjoyed remarkable growth, currently employing about 700 employees at four service locations, with annual revenues of nearly $80 million. It now provides IT services to every type of business, and business processing services to every facet of the insurance industry. Antares Management Solutions manages, schedules, administers, and handles change management for data and programs on all major computer platforms, including IBM—mainframe and partitioned (LPAR) iSeries—UNIX, Windows, and SQL with Oracle databases.

Help/Systems, the brightest star in the constellation of automation products for IBM® System i™ (iSeries™ or System i5™) servers has been with Antares Management Solutions from the beginning. Currently, Antares uses a healthy mix of Help/Systems products—Robot/ALERT®, Robot/CLIENT®, Robot/AUTOTUNE®, Robot/CONSOLE®, Robot/NETWORK, Robot/REPORTS®, and

Robot/SCHEDULE®—to run the day-to-day, hands-on processes of its iSeries environment, unattended. Manuel Aguiar, a Senior System Programmer, describes the company's setup. "We have a 24/7 Operations staff monitoring the iSeries and all the other systems we cover. We can never be totally lights-out because of all the other systems we must coordinate—we will always have operators watching the shop. But, we wanted to automate the iSeries portion as much as possible, which is why we chose the Robot products. We have one administrator for Robot/REPORTS; another for Robot/SCHEDULE. The rest of our team handles the other Robot products, which is easy because we've found that once you set things up, you're pretty much good to go."

One of the key pieces in this iSeries automation is Robot/NETWORK, the single-point network control package. Manuel explains, "Robot/NETWORK is an awesome product. I've used the Robot products for 14 years, and Robot/NETWORK is one of those things I used to take for granted. We are currently in the second phase of developing our Robot/NETWORK Status Center and once I started the project, I became aware of how powerful Robot/NETWORK really is.

"We use Robot/NETWORK and Robot/CONSOLE to monitor iSeries messages centrally. We send statuses from our Robot products to Robot/NETWORK, which sends statuses to our main partition. We put Robot/CONSOLE master sets in the Robot/CONSOLE Product Master and are using Robot/NETWORK to send them to our partitions. We also use Robot/NETWORK to move jobs from one partition to another. We use the Product Master feature in Robot/NETWORK to set up new jobs. First, we create a job on one partition, then we test it and move it to another."

Doug Powell, an Advisory Systems Programmer, fills in some details. "In the beginning we used the Robot products in

rudimentary form. Recently, we fine-tuned our automation. When we started, we set up many jobs in Robot/SCHEDULE on the fly. Now, we set up jobs using the Robot/NETWORK Product Masters. This way, if something goes wrong, or a job becomes corrupted, we don't have to re-create the job or look at a report. We just re-send the job because we always have a master copy of the latest version. And, if we add new environments, we have a master set of major jobs that we can move and modify.

"Our Robot/NETWORK Status Center responds to events to help our operator staff. We use Robot/ALERT to notify our Tech Support group for specific messages. For other messages, we send e-mail to the Operations mailbox to notify them there may be a problem. Our console room looks like NORAD [North American Aerospace Defense Command] headquarters—screens all over the place and a dedicated monitor in the Status Center. The red and yellow flags alert someone when a system has a problem."

Doug and Manuel have also been taking advantage of Robot/NETWORK's ability to span partitions (or systems). Doug explains. "We use cross-system reactivity between Robot/NETWORK and Robot/SCHEDULE to vary on and off a tape drive that two of our partitions share for backups. When a backup finishes on the first partition, a reactive job starts and varies the drive off and on to begin a backup on the second partition. When the second backup finishes, another reactive job varies the tape drive off and on again. We also use cross-system reactivity after processing files on one partition to update files on other partitions. We can perform a save, a restoration, a file transfer, or whatever is necessary."

Manuel likes the simplicity of cross-system reactivity. "It's easy to set up. After you have set up the network process, you use the reactivity function in Robot/NETWORK to select the option to cross systems. Once everything is set up, it's straightforward—just press a key in Robot/SCHEDULE to display a list of jobs on another system."

Manuel also likes some of the powerful communication options Robot/NETWORK offers. "In the past, we've gotten burned when a Host went down and we didn't catch it—we found out firsthand what that does to system reactivity. Now, we use the Robot/NETWORK RBNPOLL command to make sure all network Nodes are communicating correctly. Since we started using RBNPOLL, this process has been trouble free."

Doug describes how Antares plans to perform Enterprise monitoring using Robot/NETWORK. "During this phase of developing our Robot/NETWORK Status Center, we plan to use Robot/NETWORK with Robot/CONSOLE and SMTP to send e-mails to our HP OpenView help desk software based on certain messages. These e-mails will automatically open Help Desk incidents."

Antares Management Solutions found that training for Robot/NETWORK and the other Robot products was easy. Manuel and Doug already had experience with the products, and their technical people took advantage of a variety of training methods. One learned simply by reading the manuals. Another took online classes (e-training), and a third went to training at Help/Systems headquarters. Manuel admits, "Some of the rest we learned from 'Oops, that isn't working right.' But, if that happens, you can call the Help/Systems tech support staff and walk through it."

Doug agrees completely. "I get great training from just talking to the Help/Systems support staff. Anybody I talk to tells me that the Help/Systems support staff are the best people they have ever worked with. They are up on their game, they are fun to talk to, and when you need help—it's there!"

So there you have it—Antares Management Solutions, Robot/NETWORK, and Help/Systems—a great synergy of processes, products, and support, and a great example of what can happen when bright stars connect!