

Robot/REPORTS “Makes The News”

by Bob Balderson

Today, the Lansing State Journal is a mid-size regional newspaper based in Lansing, Michigan, with a daily circulation of about 65,000. Started in 1885, the paper was purchased in 1971 by the largest newspaper publisher in the United States, Gannett Company, Inc., and became the Lansing State Journal in 1980.

In 1993, Sidney Fung started with the Journal as a system analyst. Today, he is the regional IT Director for the Gannett Michigan Group, a group responsible for printing and distributing the Journal, the Port Huron Times Herald, the Battle Creek Enquirer, and other publications. To handle their print and distribution needs, they use an IBM® System i® and the Robot products. In 1996, when Gannett decided to regionalize their papers, they started looking at the Robot products. Sidney recommended them because, “At Gannett, to get a project approved, you have to see a return on investment (ROI) within five years.”

Nowadays, the Michigan Group relies on their team of Robot products, including Robot/REPORTS®, to ‘make the news’. As Sidney describes, “We use the products daily and are totally dependent on them. In 2001, we did everything manually—now, it’s all automated.”

Minimum Paper, Maximum Green

Currently, the Michigan Group is consolidating into a partitioned LPAR setup, with separate partitions for each newspaper. They use Robot/REPORTS to run their newspaper reports, to archive the reports online, and to distribute them. When they moved to Robot/REPORTS and online viewing, they saved a lot of



green—both paper and money. As Sidney explains, “Between paper and toner combined, we save over \$10,000 a year. We also save money because we got rid of the fee we used to pay for report storage. Now, our reports are archived automatically and we have cut our print volume dramatically—about 30%.”

Rick Skidmore, their Systems Manager, resident Robot expert, and Robot/REPORTS guru, offers his own insights. “Robot/REPORTS is ‘the greatest thing since sliced bread’—I honestly think it’s the best piece of software I’ve ever worked with.” Rick learned Robot/REPORTS by reading the manuals, playing with OPAL® (OPerator Assistance Language®), and ‘just getting creative’. “You can use OPAL to perform actions based on the information in reports. Wherever possible, we use an automated decision-making process and OPAL code. For example, we must address any service-related issue immediately, so Robot/REPORTS reviews service report information directly and can send a warning to the appropriate people to take immediate action. Or, if a balance in a report seems wrong, Robot/REPORTS can ‘read’ it and e-mail our finance department to ‘check the numbers’.”

Robot/REPORTS handles everything the operators used to do manually, including form changes, print view changes, and basic spooled file maintenance. And, as Rick explains, “Robot/REPORTS

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Big Benefits And A Big ROI

For Sidney, the biggest benefits of Robot/REPORTS are the paper, time, and money—more than \$10,000 a year—they’ve saved by eliminating the cost of report storage and reducing their print volume. For Rick, it’s the hours of tedious manual labor they’ve eliminated with automation. And, as things have escalated in their business over the years, he likes the fact that they’ve been able to keep their workflow at a normal 40-hour week. Rick sums it up, “Robot/REPORTS saves paper, monitors report processing, and distributes reports, so we don’t need to manage that. That translates to a lot of time, labor, and money we’ve saved.”

