Enterprise Scheduling ROI

By Pat Cameron

When I started in the IT business as an Operations Manager at a hospital 25 years ago, I was positive that the interfaces between ancillary systems such as lab, pharmacy, surgery, patient billing and registration were too unique and complex to be automated. We ran all day-to-day operations manually. Eventually, data entry was replaced by online interactive systems, but we still ran nightly billing and census processes manually.

One story I love to share is about the operator who thought she'd get her work done a little early in the Fall when Daylight Saving Time (DST) ended and it was time on the mainframe to "fall back." She "fell back" from 0100 to 2300 and when the system passed midnight it was another new day. (Talk about time flying!) When we realized the error in the morning, we had to bring down the online system, restore the data, and run another nightly batch—during business hours. How many errors do you think were made while manual processes were in place during that downtime? How much do you think those errors cost the hospital?

It's a good thing that I learned about workload automation early in my career. Those errors never happened again. Automated job schedules always run the correct task in the correct order on the correct day. And, automation software works every day of the year, and never calls in sick or takes a holiday.

When you calculate the return on your investment (ROI) from workload automation, there are several things you need to consider.

Real Costs

There are costs associated with the purchase of new software, new hardware, and implementing an enterprise scheduling system:

- **Determine your business needs** to make sure that you get a product that meets them. Research what's available in the market—some job schedulers are part of a bigger package that may not be necessary for your business.
- **Look at the implementation process:** Will it cost more than the software? How long does a typical implementation take and what type of support is available? Some implementations become so complicated they are never completed.
- **Focus on automation and don't get sidetracked.** Start small. Break your automation project into smaller pieces to keep it manageable.

Productivity

Implementing an automation process includes researching who is doing what within your IT department, as well as who is interfacing with the applications from outside the department. For example, finding out how many accountants are running daily reports as soon as they get to their desks in the morning. Automating these tasks provides an increase in productivity. In many IT departments, there are

so many distinct areas of responsibility based on application, hardware, or operating system, that it's difficult to figure out what is being done and by whom. (This research is a good idea even if you aren't planning an automation project.)

How can you know the true cost of running your department or managing an application if you can't articulate who is doing what? (It may seem like a waste of time if things seem to be running smoothly, but you'll be surprised at what is really going on behind the scenes.)

When I was a consultant, I always opted for on-site consultations if possible so that I could sit next to the network administrators or the computer operators to actually see their day-to-day tasks. Sometimes those manual processes became so ingrained in their daily work, they didn't realize how much of what they were doing could be automated.

I spoke with a system administrator who logs into their system every night to make sure that the nightly processes are running and on time. He just accepted that as part of his job. Computers can do that and monitor for errors or delays, why don't we use them? If there's a problem, the computer lets me know—manage those systems by exceptions. What are the costs of not automating your systems? Those can be the most difficult to define, but are very real business costs.

Consolidation

Every business runs multiple hardware and software applications. Even during my time at the hospital, each ancillary department chose the "best of breed" application for their specific needs. The pharmacy had a high number of transactions and allergy checking; the laboratory had high reporting needs; outpatient surgery had complex scheduling needs. They all have compliance and security needs, and needs specific to their piece of the business. Each application might come with its own scheduler, and no one was looking at the big picture. All of the applications, no matter what hardware they were running on, had to interface with the registration and billing system.

Consolidating the scheduling and monitoring of those systems makes life easier in the IT department and reduces error. Consolidating scheduling across multiple applications into a production control area increases productivity and helps the bottom line. Automating all of the processes and monitoring them by exception consolidates staff. When one enterprise scheduler is used, both training needs and the number of staff needed to maintain it are reduced. By creating an automation project across all applications, you can leverage the knowledge of the staff in one area to use in another. Your schedulers have a view of the big picture and can maintain an efficient, smooth-running schedule with fewer conflicts and less downtime.

Return on Investment

So the questions you need to ask to determine the ROI for your automation software are:

- What is the business need?
- How much does downtime—for one system, for one application, for one department—cost the business?
- How often have you had to rerun a process because of errors?
- Are you paying overtime for weekend and holiday Operators/System Administrators to run and/or monitor processes?

- What is the cost of the enterprise scheduling software?
- Is additional hardware needed?
- What is the cost of the implementation and training? How long will it take?
- How can the automation project be broken into manageable pieces?
- Which departments besides IT will improve productivity because of automation?
- If you consolidate the schedule across the enterprise, how do you consolidate staff while you improve their productivity and quality of life (fewer on-call nights and weekends)?
- How can you leverage your staff's knowledge across multiple applications and platforms?

The Best ROI

Once you've taken the time to consider cost, productivity, and consolidation, take a look at the enterprise scheduler that provides the best ROI for your business—Skybot Scheduler.

Skybot Scheduler is the new face of enterprise scheduling. It simplifies the tasks of scheduling jobs and monitoring processes across multiple Windows, UNIX, and Linux servers. With Skybot Scheduler you can build an event-driven schedule, quickly and easily, across all your systems for coordinated batch processing, cross-system monitoring, and true enterprise automation.

Visit **www.skybotsoftware.com** or call **1.877.506.4786** for more information or a FREE 30-day trial.

952.746.4786
info@skybotsoftware.com
www.skybotsoftware.com

M081SSR1