



SMS *manages customer platforms with its Global Enterprise Management System (GEMS) and the Virtual Command Center from Global MainTech*

BUSINESS

Systems Management Specialists (SMS) Corporation, a privately held company founded in 1981, offers a full complement of IS products and services from contract systems and applications programming to full outsourcing, including complete platform management services. SMS is committed to providing customer satisfaction by delivering reliable and consistent computing services through good people, efficient processes, and proven technologies.

ISSUES

- Provide the best service at the lowest cost to meet or exceed high customer expectations
- Gain the flexibility to handle many more types of platforms
- Manage more platforms to higher service levels with fewer people than the competition
- Eliminate pockets of specialized expertise
- Streamline operations through console consolidation and automation

SOLUTION

Use Global MainTech's Virtual Command Center (VCC) as the cornerstone of the SMS Global Enterprise Management System (GEMS) for console consolidation, monitoring, and automated operations

BENEFITS

- Manage many types of platforms through a single, alert-driven interface
- Fully leverage the skills of a small group of highly competent, highly trained people
- Build customer trust

Anticipating your needs, being excited about your business, doing more than you expect—these are the hallmarks of a world-class service organization like Systems Management Specialists. Listening and responding to customers in a timely, efficient, and professional manner is at the very heart of what SMS is all about. According to Bill Glasner, vice president for corporate technology, "We work hard to meet high expectations. SMS provides service levels that are clearly above the marketplace, the same kind of feeling you get when you go into a Nordstrom's store."

The business goal of SMS is to be nothing less than the premier platform management provider. To meet this goal, SMS has assembled a select group of IS professionals with advanced technical skills who are also committed to providing quality service. The work of these professionals is highly leveraged by substantial investments in IT infrastructure, so that SMS can manage many types of platforms, from OS/390 mainframes to UNIX, RISC, AS 400, Novell, DEC Alpha, Windows NT, and even desktop systems. As a result, SMS customers are not required to do anything different from what they were doing before. "The role of SMS is to be an enabler, not a gatekeeper," says Mike Winder, founder and corporate executive officer of SMS.

Higher service levels at less cost

SMS will take whatever platforms the customer has and manage those platforms to higher service levels at less cost. To do this, SMS has developed a product offering called the Global Enterprise Management System (GEMS). According to Glasner, "The basis of GEMS is really pretty simple. We're alert-driven, so that a system raises its hand either when something goes wrong, is about to go wrong, or it feels like it is getting sick." The benefit of this exception management approach is that SMS can react quickly to keep systems up-and-running, without the need to maintain a large staff sitting around watching consoles.

Continues Glasner, "We are also platform-independent, so that these alerts work for the whole spectrum of platforms that we manage. The GEMS product doesn't care what kind of box is being managed. It's just a platform that we defined to it that sits out there as part of a network."

The role of the Virtual Command Center

The Virtual Command Center (VCC), from Global MainTech, is the cornerstone of the GEMS product. The VCC is a master console that provides simultaneous control, operation, and monitoring for a wide variety of mainframe and midrange UNIX platforms "under one glass." In fact, says Glasner, "Global MainTech is one of the cornerstones of our platform management philosophy." The VCC lets SMS manage platforms—whether they are at a customer site or one of the four SMS data centers—as though the platform were sitting out on the floor. All function keys are active, so anything that can be done from a local console can be done remotely via the VCC.

Outsourcing as a strategic business initiative

The SMS GEMS product, with the Global MainTech VCC as a key element, helps SMS respond to an emerging customer need. The distribution and migration of mission-critical applications has made it increasingly difficult to manage reliability, availability, and security. As a result, more and more businesses see outsourcing as a legitimate business strategy.

This is clearly a change in the marketplace. According to Glasner, "The technologies to manage distributed infrastructures are different than the old mainframe world. And that's what gives us the opportunity and the edge, because we're doing that."

Cost-effective operations through consolidation and automation

SMS went through a long process of acquiring the VCC technology from Global MainTech, with a specific return-on-investment (ROI) in mind. And "we achieved that ROI," says Glasner.

The first step was console consolidation. SMS had four data centers that needed to be run from one place, and four VCCs (with four mirrored, for a total of eight) solved the problem. Achieving consolidation went smoothly and relatively quickly.

Next came automation. "What you see today when you walk our operations center," says Glasner, "is operators looking at alert consoles. So they get to see when a job abends, or alerts showing tape mount pending on a platform for more than 5 minutes—and they know that someone had better go look at it. Or an alert will come up showing a node just went down, so someone had better go look at it. Those things are very important, because many times we can fix the problem before the customer even knows it's there."

The VCC automatically applies a predefined filter so that only the required messages come across. This capability allows SMS to define the

filtering for each individual customer. Says Glasner, "we look at the unique environment of each customer—everyone's workloads are different—and if something's not right for that customer, an alert is triggered and somebody goes to look at what's happening. That's really important stuff for us, because it has a significant impact on our customer service levels."

The VCC also front-ends an automatic paging system. When alerts come in, trouble tickets are opened automatically and, during off-hours, the SMS GEMS sends out a page. The page identifies the trouble ticket number and the customer name, so a call to the SMS Help Desk results in immediate, accurate status on the customer's problem.

"Global MainTech does what they say they're going to . . . That box runs!"

— **Bill Glasner, vice president for corporate technology**

Fewer people to manage more platforms

Before Global MainTech and the VCC, many different consoles were required to manage the diverse platforms in the SMS data center. Those consoles tended to be pockets of expertise. According to Glasner, "You had UNIX guys managing UNIX boxes, but they didn't know much about MVS, or VM, or NT. The MVS guys didn't know much about UNIX. There was no cross-over; the look and feel was entirely different."

The VCC introduced a common look and feel, eliminating these pockets of expertise. So instead of many different experts, SMS now has a few highly competent people who are expert in supporting many different platforms.

Customer trust

The speed with which problems are identified and resolved means—in many cases—that there is absolutely no impact to SMS customers. In essence, there is less for them to worry about. The result is a greater feeling of well being, as customers come to trust that SMS is handling their problems, without the need to make every potential problem visible. Customers enjoy high service levels without the headaches.

The right investments in IT infrastructure

Making the right investments in IT infrastructure, such as the Global MainTech VCC, is key to SMS' continuing success. Says Glasner, "We believe that if we continue to invest in the platform management tools that we have developed to date, and continue to be very careful in the management of our cost infrastructure, gaining leverage wherever we can, we will continue to be very competitive in the marketplace from both a service and a cost perspective. You've got to have both. You need to provide the best service at lowest cost."

Reliable, leading-edge technology

The Global MainTech VCC, with its reliable, leading-edge technology, has definitely been the right investment for SMS. "That box runs," says Glasner. "It's good stuff."

It's also a strategic investment for SMS because of the major role it plays in the SMS GEMS.

Concludes Glasner, "As long as Global MainTech continues to have cost effective solutions for our needs in platform management areas, we'll continue with them."

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