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AmeriHealth Mercy Expands Access for Patients and Providers with Avaya™ Interactive Response

Deploying Self-Service and Cutting Costs Quickly and Easily

As the nation's largest Medicaid managed care organization, AmeriHealth Mercy has the awesome responsibility of serving more than one million members in four states. Critical to meeting the healthcare needs of patients is the ability for AmeriHealth Mercy's 1,500 employees to provide accurate, up-to-date member eligibility and coverage information as quickly as possible and at any hour of the day or night—and to do it cost effectively.

Since 1996, AmeriHealth Mercy has relied on Avaya Interactive Voice Response (IVR) technology to help handle eligibility inquiries from patients as well as the physicians and facilities that serve them. So when AmeriHealth Mercy decided to expand its self-service capabilities in order to reduce costs and improve access to information for patients and healthcare providers, the company turned to Avaya and the advanced capabilities of the **Avaya™ Interactive Response** system.

AmeriHealth Mercy's business challenge

Based in Philadelphia, PA, AmeriHealth Mercy's basic mission is to provide quality, accessible healthcare to people who rely on the state for their healthcare needs. The company's Medicaid support services touch every aspect of healthcare from primary care physician visits, dental plans, vision care, and prescription coverage to disease/case management, community partnerships, and education and outreach programs.

"AmeriHealth Mercy embraces technology as a critical component of its service to customers and has long understood the value of self-service solutions to its business," said Drew Waldron, director of technology for Expanets, Avaya's largest U.S. distributor and a company that works closely with AmeriHealth Mercy to meet its communications needs.

AmeriHealth Mercy offers self-service capabilities via the Web; however, since many patients don't have Internet access, support via the telephone is crucial. In addition, providers need phone access for those times when Internet access may not be convenient or available (such as when traveling).

The key component of AmeriHealth Mercy's services is its three call centers and 325 agents, fielding an average of 20,000 calls every week with 30 to 40 calls in queue at any one time. To offset demand on call center agents—in turn, to lower costs—AmeriHealth Mercy allows patients and providers to access eligibility information by
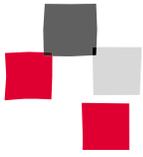
dialing a toll-free number and interacting with a self-service application.

But according to Jim Turley, Telecommunications System Analyst for AmeriHealth Mercy, the company was not utilizing the full value of its automated system. "Our IVR system was under the radar," said Turley. "We weren't doing much with it except handling eligibility calls, and found that 50 percent of callers were transferring out of the system to talk to an agent."

Together Avaya, Expanets, and AmeriHealth Mercy formulated a plan for upgrading to Avaya Interactive Response to expand the self-service options available to callers and utilize IVR capabilities to maximum advantage.

Key capabilities of Avaya Interactive Response

Part of Avaya's Self-Service Solutions, Avaya Interactive Response is a turnkey platform that delivers a wide range of capabilities:

- Deployment on industry standards-based hardware consisting of the Sun Microsystems Sun Blade 150 with optional NMS telephony interface cards—making the entire system easier to operate, manage, and maintain

- Advanced speech recognition technologies such as Natural Language Speech Recognition and Text-to-Speech—supporting speech as well as touch-tone access to information, and making the system readily adaptable to callers' language requirements

- VoiceXML standards support—enabling broader development of more complex integrated speech and Web self-service applications

- "Out of the box" integration of predictive dialing, computer telephony, and Java Database Connectivity (JDBC) with onboard Apache Web servers—expanding the breadth, depth, and speed of services supported, including multiple databases and HTML, XHTML, and XML interfaces

- Seamless transition of existing Avaya IVR self-service applications using Avaya™ Interactive Voice Response (IVR) Designer—featuring a graphical interface that makes for fast, simple application transfer and deployment

- Web-based administration tools—allowing managers to manage the system from a desktop PC or secure virtual private network (VPN), using a standard Web browser interface to set alarms, schedule backups, start and stop the system, check interfaces and run reports

- IP (Internet Protocol) telephony readiness—providing the flexibility to cost-effectively deploy and scale self-service applications across multiple locations

Seamless transition to a new system

Using Avaya IVR Designer, the transition to Avaya Interactive Response was accomplished quickly and smoothly. "The operation of the new system is simple," said Turley, "And we required minimal programming time to bring existing applications into the Avaya system." In the testing stages,

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>
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AmeriHealth Mercy's new system performed perfectly. "We flooded the system by sending 1,300 calls to 48 ports in just 90 minutes and didn't have a single hiccup," he continued.

By streamlining the connection between the applications and AmeriHealth Mercy's database, Avaya Interactive Response has greatly improved the company's response times. According to Turley, "We've clocked the interval from the time that a caller selects an option to the time that he or she is connected as less than a second"—twice as fast as the previous system's capability.

In addition to providing callers with fast access to information, the more direct, Java-based database connectivity also means easier management behind the scenes. "Our previous socket-based C program and proprietary architecture made it difficult to isolate and resolve problems," said Turley, "But with the open standards-based system and simplified connection, we have had virtually zero downtime."

Utilizing the emerging VoiceXML standard for programming rather than proprietary scripts also allows AmeriHealth Mercy to deploy new applications more quickly and easily than before. The company anticipates being able to do programming in-house as employees learn VoiceXML—for potentially significant savings on outside development costs.

Benefits for AmeriHealth Mercy and its callers

Avaya Interactive Response allows AmeriHealth Mercy to expand the use of self-service beyond eligibility inquiries—making claims inquiries, generic benefit information, the ability to order ID cards, and other options accessible via the speech platform.

Jim Turley believes that the Avaya Interactive Response system will change the way AmeriHealth Mercy does business moving forward. "We'll be able to integrate ever more complex applications while maintaining fast response to patient and provider needs," he said.

"With the new applications in place, we anticipate a drop in the number of callers who transfer to an agent, he continued. "We won't have to keep as many agents on site or connected to the system to meet our members' needs — and that means improved economies of scale and savings for the business."

Learn more

To learn more about how Avaya Interactive Response and other Avaya Self-Service Solutions can help your organization, contact your Avaya Client Executive or Authorized Avaya BusinessPartner, or visit our Web site: www1.avaya.com/enterprise/solutions/crm/solution2.html

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About AmeriHealth Mercy

AmeriHealth Mercy and its affiliates comprise the largest family of Medicaid managed care plans in the United States, touching the lives of more than one million members in four states, which makes it the nation's expert and industry leader in Medicaid and State Children's Health Insurance Programs. AmeriHealth Mercy programs offer improved health outcomes for its members and have saved taxpayers millions of dollars.

About Avaya

Avaya enables businesses to achieve superior results by designing, building and managing their communications networks. More than one million businesses worldwide, including 90 percent of the FORTUNE 500®, rely on Avaya solutions and services to enhance value, improve productivity and gain competitive advantage.

Focused on enterprises large to small, Avaya is a world leader in secure and reliable IP telephony systems, communications software applications and full life-cycle services. Driving the convergence of voice and data communications with business applications – and distinguished by comprehensive worldwide services – Avaya helps customers leverage existing and new networks to unlock value and enhance business performance.

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