MODERN WOODMEN OF AMERICA SUCCESS-FULLY CONCLUDES MAINFRAME MIGRATION

"It's early days for us but already we have benefited from the immediate availability of all our data. The project has proven to be more successful than our teams thought was possible. We are now able to more easily and effectively achieve our next objectives."
– W. Kenny Massey, Modern Woodmen of America President and CEO

Over a weekend in February 2018 Modern Woodmen went live, successfully migrating their OS2200 mainframe applications to a distributed server environment using Asysco Migration Technology. Modern Woodmen of America is one of the largest fraternal benefit societies in the United States, with more than 750,000 members. Total assets reached $16.17 billion in 2017.
The organization has helped provide financial security to families since 1883 and exists to improve quality of life for its members and the communities where they live, work and play.

NEED FOR CHANGE
The organization had been running its OS2200 mainframe for over 50 years. Its employees have developed their own COBOL applications and built custom-made solutions for their business, which enabled them to automate many processes and deliver some insurance products without human intervention. However, with the lack of new COBOL resources entering the market, Modern Woodmen recognized the risk of staying locked-into their current environment and development language. The legacy platform was restrictive. They found that they were doing 'reactive development,' meaning the focus was on fixing problems rather than on planning for the future. Something needed to be changed. That's when they started the STAR project, which stands for System Transformation and Reengineering.

A STARTING POINT FOR FUTURE MODERNIZATION
Major goal of the STAR project was to find a solution that would reduce the risk of losing valuable business knowledge while increasing innovation power and reducing cost at the same time. Different options were reviewed. Both migration and re-writing from scratch were considered. Actually, a concurrent project for re-writing a subset of the application was started shortly before the STAR project. However, the challenges and complexity encountered early on in the re-write process led Modern Woodmen to focus solely on Asysco's Migration Technology. When Modern Woodmen of America's staff started talking about migration, they wanted to make sure they would migrate to a more mainstream technology stack. They also wanted to position Modern Woodmen for future modernization. This migration is seen a starting point for innovation of the business processes and not as an end point. Considering all of the options, the risk, the cost and the required timeframe, the like-for-like, automated migration option that Asysco proposed seemed the best possible solution - specifically because Asysco offered Modern Woodmen a path where they could migrate their code but continue to work in COBOL.

RETAINING VALUABLE BUSINESS KNOWLEDGE
As they went into this project, Modern Woodmen of America's team had a couple of requirements. First and foremost, they wanted to retain their COBOL developers and administrators. These highly COBOL developers possess extensive business knowledge which will be beneficial to future modernization efforts.
Another requirement was preserving the end-user experience. Modern Woodmen wanted the new environment to be familiar and easy to learn. This is one of the keys upon which Asysco's like-for-like migration approach is built. People are usually reluctant to change, but the similarity of the user interface to a mainframe screen made a positive impact in user acceptance.

A HUGE CHALLENGE
The project started in January 2016. The migration encompassed an OS2200 COBOL application of over 5 million lines of code, 3,000 ECL scripts and over 170 integrating applications to an AMT COBOL solution - a huge undertaking by any measure. The vastly increased scale and requirements of Modern Woodmen required a relatively new platform to evolve into one that can support over 20 developers, 400,000 daily transactions, automated program executions throughout the day, and a daily batch of over 700 programs. This was a big challenge,

especially since Modern Woodmen, as a financial services organization, has to comply with strict regulatory requirements. This project was all about testing, testing and more testing.

FOCUS ON THE SOLUTION, NOT ON THE PROBLEM

In a big project like this one, you are bound to run into problems, or rather challenges. That's when a partnership is truly tested. It was Modern Woodmen's first project working with partners in different time-zones. Through flexibility on both sides this challenge was turned into an advantage with minimal compromises. Asysco turned out to be a true partner instead of just a vendor. The partnership proved to be a solid one. *"Whenever a challenge arose both teams worked as one to rapidly come up with a solution, no matter what the problem was. Even if it was an issue beyond Asysco's field of expertise, they demonstrated the ability to research and learn in order to overcome the issues,"* says Nathan Bignall, Project Manager, Modern Woodmen of America.

GOING LIVE OVER THE WEEKEND

After months and months of hard work, the hour of truth had arrived. In just one weekend the final cut over, from the old system to the new, took place. Given the complexity of the project a significant Asysco presence was there. To afford the project team the most time Modern Woodmen closed the business at noon on Friday. The afternoon was spent shutting off access to the mainframe and unloading data and files. By 21.30 everything had been loaded to AMT and some basic health checks had been completed.

Saturday was predominantly the execution of the daily batch. This ran like clockwork and finished within a few minutes of schedule. A handful of business users came in to do a first check. There was no sign of any troubling issues.

On Sunday morning nearly 100 business users came in to run through a series of scripted tests, inquiry only at first but moving on to some updating later in the day. Here, a first serious issue was encountered. A team was quickly assembled to work through what was happening. Within a few hours the problem was isolated and a fix in progress. Once ready and deployed, Modern Woodmen continued testing and everything passed with flying Colors*! *"It was a pleasant surprise that we encountered only one serious issue during this go-live weekend,"* Bignall says. *"To have it resolved in such a short period of time is amazing*

Project overview

System used
Unisys OS 2200

Migrate to
AMT COBOL

Solution used
5 Million, 3.000 ECL scripts, 170 integrating applications that were switched to interface with the new AMT system

Results
- 50% reduction of annual operational cost
- Massive increase in data accessibility

---

and really gives us the confidence that no matter the problem we can work together effectively to get it solved quickly." The first day of running the new AMT system, it was business as usual. Only a handful of AMT related problems were identified, as was to be expected. But nothing has stopped the processing of a normal day's work. There was a near-to-zero impact on business users during and after the cut-over from the mainframe to the new environment.

PROMISING RESULTS

Although at the time of the writing of this case study the migration had only just been concluded, the first results are very promising. An immediate reduction of 50% in annual operational cost has been achieved. In addition, there's a massive increase in the availability of data. As a bi-product of this migration all security practises have been reviewed and updated.

"This has been an incredible project," Bignall says. *"With every challenge a solution was found, which proved the dedication, talent and hard work of the entire team, Modern Woodmen and Asysco. It was not an easy journey, but we made it happen, together!"*

Asysco offers proven, turnkey technology solutions and expertise for delivering high quality transformation and modernization without failure. This transformation enables organizations to reduce cost while increasing flexibility, facilitating streamlined business process integration and innovation. Asysco was founded in 1979 and has offices in Coevorden the Netherlands and Atlanta, Georgia, USA. Our motto: 'Unlocking Your Legacy Value' expresses our confidence that legacy transformation projects make a lot of sense, the risks can be well managed, and the resulting value is simply outstanding.

asysco