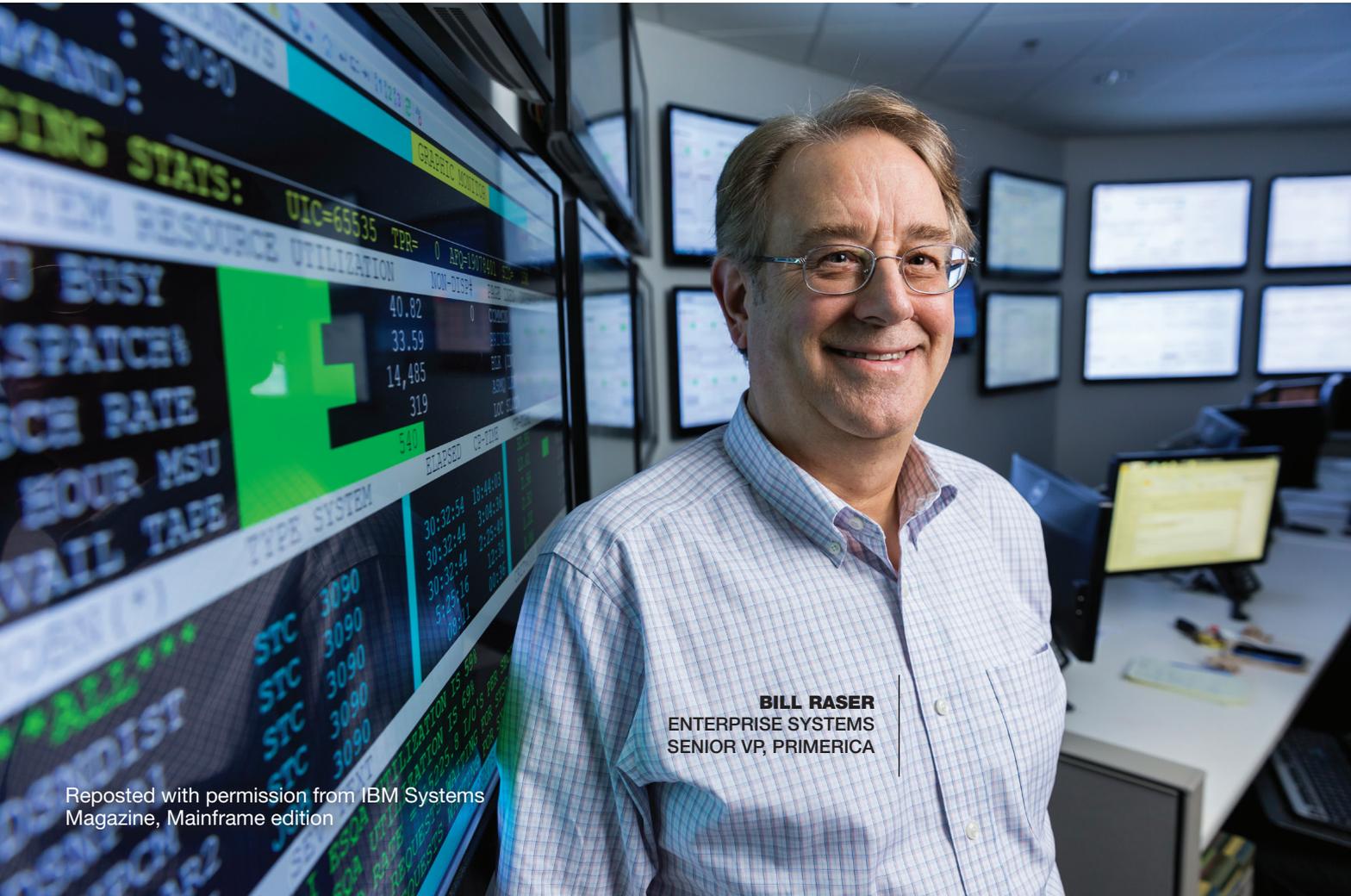




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INVESTING IN A DIFFERENCE

Primerica Life Insurance Co. improves processing and performance

By Jim Utsler ► Photography by Scott Areman

No mainframe environments are perfect, despite best intentions. Monitoring system, database, CPU, storage and response times, for example, is essential to meeting service-level agreements. Job scheduling is equally important and can get mucked up if jobs or their variations are missed during batch cycles, no matter which platform they're on. And if the reports generated by these jobs aren't easily archived or viewable, internal users may have a hard time finding and making sense of them.

Primerica Life Insurance Co. was experiencing these issues and decided to tackle them head on, deploying a host of solutions from ASG Technologies (ASG). "We've been using ASG-Zeke, a job-scheduling product, since probably 1989. It continues to be a great solution to manage our back-end processing," says Bill Raser, enterprise systems senior vice president, Primerica.

At the same time it deployed ASG-Zeke, Primerica also implemented ASG-Zebb, an automated restart system that



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monitors jobs on the mainframe, and ASG-Zara, an online media-management system. The newest ASG implementations, including ASG-ViewDirect and ASG-DocumDirect, took place a few years ago.

Leveraging Existing Skills

Established in 1977 and headquartered in Duluth, Georgia, Primerica began what many consider a revolutionary crusade to transform the life insurance industry, in large part to its

UP CLOSE

CUSTOMER: Primerica Life Insurance Co.

CO-HEADQUARTERS: Duluth, Georgia

BUSINESS: Independent financial services marketing organization

CHALLENGE: Monitoring system, database, CPU, storage and response times on both IBM z Systems and distributed systems; improving job scheduling across platforms; and making reports more easily archivable and searchable

SOLUTION: Staying up to date on performance management; improving workload automation; meeting system-availability requirements; and improving reporting by deploying a large number of ASG products

HARDWARE: An IBM z Systems z13

SOFTWARE: IBM DB2 for z/OS, ASG-Zeke, ASG-Zebb, ASG-Zara, ASG-Zena, ASG-DocumDirect, ASG-ViewDirect, ASG-TMON for z/OS, ASG-TMON for CICS TS for z/OS and ASG-TMON for DB2

sales force, which comprised over 114,000 independent representatives at the end of August 2016.

As the largest independent financial services marketing organization in North America,

Primerica established a “Buy Term and Invest the Difference” philosophy that encourages families to purchase affordable term life insurance so they can get the protection they need at a price they can afford. As of

Dec. 31, 2015, the company insured about 5 million lives and has over 2 million client investment accounts.

The information related to this business runs through an IBM z Systems* z13*—which hosts eight LPARs—and is captured in IBM DB2* for z/OS*. This reliance on the mainframe and the data it processes is what makes ASG tools so helpful.

In Primerica’s case, because distributed applications weren’t monitored at night or on weekends, delays were caused in system availability that, in turn, affected users’ ability to accomplish their jobs efficiently. In response, Primerica decided to use not only ASG-Zeke for mainframe job scheduling—across all eight LPARs—but also ASG-Zeke Agents to extend scheduling to include distributed systems.

This makes ASG-Zeke a centralized resource for scheduling jobs across platforms, including Wintel and IBM Power Systems* servers, and throughout the enterprise. The capability to monitor distributed applications during nonbusiness hours has cut system downtime during work hours when users are present.

“If you have a distributed application that’s dependent on a mainframe job, or vice versa, you can tie the two events together using ASG-Zeke Agents,” Raser notes. “The great thing about this is that you can do this from a single console.”

Clear Consistency

Considering the complexity and number of jobs of Primerica’s scheduling, this is no trivial matter. For example, the company runs over 3,000 variable jobs in different batch cycles, such as Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays, and month-end, quarter-end and year-end cycles.

As Abel Melchiore, data center senior vice president, Primerica, explains, “We have variations in the jobs we run every night. So, we load up our scheduling system with those daily variations for each night’s cycle, which starts at 6 p.m. and ends at 6 a.m. It’s very important that we run those 3,000 jobs and not miss any of them or their variations, no matter which platform they’re on.”

Running all of these jobs would be a fruitless exercise if they didn’t result in reports Primerica employees need to make important decisions. In fact, company users were having difficulties finding and viewing archived reports.



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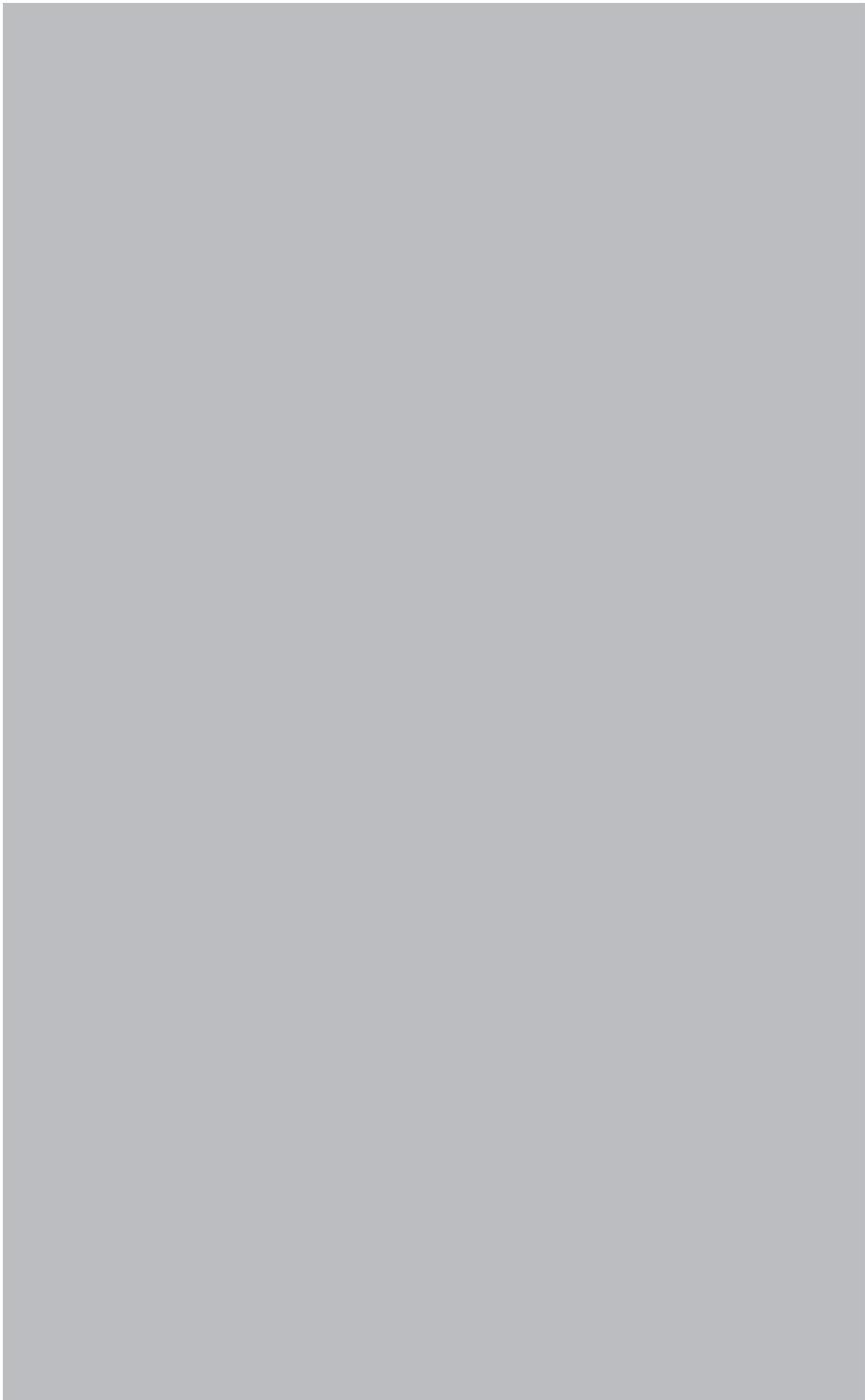


To help address this issue, Primerica deployed ASG-ViewDirect, which allows for easy archiving of the output produced during the company’s batch cycles, including both on the mainframe and distributed systems. This makes it much simpler for company employees to find, review and act upon generated reports.

This tool also allows administrators to establish security levels on a report-by-report basis,

giving Primerica the capability to determine who sees what information. It additionally supports versioning, so people can access different versions of the same report, depending on their individual requirements.

Supporting this is ASG-DocumentDirect for the Internet, a web-based UI for ASG-ViewDirect that provides Primerica users the capability to view, download and link content across repositories and platforms



from anywhere at any time. This is in stark contrast to green-screen report presentation, as had been the case at Primerica previously.

As Raser notes, people get used to doing a process a certain way, and when you introduce something new, it takes them time to come around. However, “In the long run, everybody here is much happier with the web-based reports,” he says.

Melchiore agrees, remarking, “It makes life much easier for everyone across the enterprise involved with our life insurance business, whether in our accounting, policy, underwriting or purchasing departments, to review and respond to reports.”

There if Needed

Managing mainframe and distributed computing environments is no small task. This is especially true if a single interface isn’t available to effectively administer all of the components involved, as had been the case with Primerica. The company’s CIO, David Wade, wanted to keep an eye out for any alerts or outstanding issues across the eight LPARs in the z13 in a single screen.

As Raser puts it, “We needed a way to look at everything in one shot to keep on top of systems management.”

To help solve this issue, Primerica deployed four ASG-TMON products, including ASG-TMON for z/OS, ASG-TMON for CICS* TS for z/OS, and ASG-TMON for DB2.

System administrators can monitor every area of the z/OS system across every partition in an enterprise with ASG-TMON for z/OS. With it, the company can, among other functions, display indicators of both overall system and individual job performance; logical processor dispatch



Primerica stays up to date by monitoring everything in one screen, a request of CIO David Wade (center) and supported by Bill Raser and Abel Melchiore.



statistics to determine if physical processing resources are properly allocated in a PR/SM* environment; and a breakdown of delay activity by job.

Primerica uses ASG-TMON for CICS TS for z/OS to monitor and manage transactions that bypass resource limits such as CPU, storage, response time and file I/O; monitor active CICS regions; and monitor and tune CICS resource levels. It uses ASG-TMON for DB2 to evaluate different environments and sort different parameters to discover outlying transactions; evaluate the response times for individual transactions and break response times into different

categories so it can focus on problem areas; and view transactions in conflict with resources and see the resource name.

The Green Zone

Primerica’s computing environment is becoming increasingly complex—and that’s not likely to stop. But with the proper tools in place, it can be more easily managed, meeting the demands of Primerica’s busy processing requirements and the need to store and display reports in modern formats, and to keep on top of and quickly respond to any system issues that may arise.

According to Raser, Primerica’s data center is now addressing many of the issues that may have occurred in the past. “We have what we call a green zone for changes from 5 to 7 a.m., when we have very little representative and client activity, but other than that, we have a service-level commitment to be up 22 hours a day, 7 days a week. And we’ve achieved that.” **Z**

Jim Utsler is a senior writer for *IBM Systems Magazine* and has been covering technology for more than 20 years.