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Neither Rain nor Sleet nor Snow

By Judy Ward

[Bank Systems & Technology](#)

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Despite the popularity of e-mail, most banks still rely heavily on traditional mail for correspondence with their customers. Old National Bancorp sends nearly 500,000 pieces of mail to its customers every month. The Evansville, Ind.-based bank - which has 120 branches in five states - had relied on an outside mail pre-sort company to secure postage discounts.

But, as part of a cost-cutting campaign, Old National (\$9 billion in assets) decided to bring the work in-house, according to Dan Sauls, the bank's vice president, item processing. Moving the process in-house also would enable quality improvements, including the addition of optical mark recognition (OMR) marks to notices to prevent mailing mix-ups, such as sending a customer's monthly checking statement to the wrong person, Sauls adds.

The bank began searching for a solution in 2002 and narrowed the list of contenders to three finalists - Pitney Bowes (Stamford, Conn.), Group 1 Software (since acquired by Pitney Bowes) and Jonesboro, Ark.-based SynTel. After reviewing proposals from the vendors, Old National conducted site visits to some of the suppliers' banking clients.

On-site Insight

The site visits were "extremely helpful," Sauls says, adding that he gained insight into implementation issues and the vendors' customer support. "Usually, bankers are pretty honest about what works and what does not work. It is well worth it, if you can do it. A lot of times, you get an inside view."

Initially, Old National hesitated to sign with SynTel, since the bank would have been the vendor's largest customer. "We were a little hesitant about that," Sauls recalls. But then SynTel became a business partner of Advanced Financial Solutions (AFS; Oklahoma City, Okla.), which provides the bank's imaging software for processing checks. As a result, Sauls says, "We knew that we would not have any integration problems."

In 2003, Old National decided to forge ahead with SynTel's AutoMail PRO software, which sorts mailings by ZIP code and applies the postal

Is your

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bar code, and the vendor's DocuPLUS software, which enables the bank to merge multiple documents into a new mailing. The software was installed on two IBM (Armonk, N.Y.) xSeries 346 servers, which were purchased to support the process. The bank also bought tray tag printers that help prepare the mailings for the post office.

Implementation began in September 2004, and the bank went live with the system for checking and savings statements by the end of that year. For other notices, such as overdraft notifications, Old National first needed to revise some internal programming; the bank began that phase of the rollout in June. Now, it uses the technology for all customer mailings of 500 pieces or more that are generated from computerized files. According to Sauls, the new setup saves the bank \$156,000 annually in mail-house charges and allows it to produce detailed tracking reports.

In the future, Old National plans to charge back postage fees to the branch level, so SynTel is creating a report that allocates postage costs to each branch. In the meantime, Old National already has seen benefits from the new system beyond cost savings. More automation has reduced the potential for human error, Sauls notes, and the bank can update customer addresses more frequently. Additionally, the solution is user-friendly. It clearly was developed with the end user in mind, Sauls relates. "It was not written on a programmer level," he says.

Snapshot

- Institution: Old National Bancorp (Evansville, Ind.).
- Assets: \$9 billion.
- Business Challenge: Automate customer mailings and cut costs.
- Solution: SynTel's (Jonesboro, Ark.) AutoMail PRO and DocuPLUS mail-automation software.

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