

PITTSBURGH PIRATES KNOCK IT OUT OF THE PARK WITH AUTOMATED FORMS PROCESSING

At A Glance

P PITTSBURGH PIRATES

Industry

Sports/Major League Baseball

Challenge

With thousands of fans attending each home game, the Pirates' promotional team was missing out on up-to-date fan data provided by its Enter-to-Win forms. Previously processed by an external mail house, the forms contain 23 fields of data and were costing 25 cents per form for data entry, and a lengthy turnaround of 6-8 weeks.

Solution

The Pirates implemented OCR for AnyDoc to automate the processing of the Enter-to-Win forms in-house. The software automatically lifts the data from the form, making it readily available for use in their business process systems.

Results

Now the Pirates receive data on their fans much sooner, and have shaved more than 50% off their processing costs and reduced turnaround time from 6-8 weeks down to mere days. In coming seasons, the Pirates will be able to utilize fan demographics during their current season to evaluate and tweak their promotions.

Originally named the Pittsburgh Alleghenies in 1887, today's National League (NL) Major League Baseball (MLB) team, the Pittsburgh Pirates, boasts three MLB records. They have the most runs in two consecutive innings with 21, the most hits in a doubleheader with 46, and the most triples in a game (since 1900) with 8. Playing in the Central Division, the Pirates played in the very first World Series and have been World Series Champions five times in their history. A cutting-edge ball club, the Pirates are breaking grounds as "firsts" in other areas too.

Challenge

Beginning with their 2010 season, the Pittsburgh Pirates were the first to utilize automated forms processing technology, giving them the home field advantage at PNC Park over a lengthy, outsourced data entry procedure. Prior to 2010, the Pirates were manually processing their fans' "Pirates Enter-to-Win" forms, a slip of paper about the size of an index card to collect information for use in ticket sales promotions and marketing research. The handwritten forms requested information including name, address, phone, and email address. At each home game, visitors are able to complete one of these forms and spin a prize wheel for the opportunity to win anything from ticket upgrades to hats, T-shirts, and other promotional items. Approximately 100,000 forms were collected during the season of 80 plus home games. Pirates' personnel were outsourcing the data entry of these forms to a third-party mail house, at a cost of approximately \$0.25 per form (a total seasonal cost of \$29,000) and a lengthy turnaround time averaging 6-8 weeks.

"It was the quick turnaround and sophisticated technology that made automating with OCR for AnyDoc an easy decision..."

With thousands in attendance at each home game, the fan data collection forms quickly add up. In the past, with manual processing, it would take months for the Pirates to see the demographic statistics of their attendees, let alone use the relevant data to initiate or update promotional programs. For this reason, the Pirates had to compile their full season stats, and utilize them to develop customer programs for the following season, rather than utilizing up-to-the-minute data figures for the current season.

Solution

Before opening day of the 2010 baseball season, which runs from early April through October, the Pirates were introduced to automated forms processing technology by local integrator Ossafac Solutions, Inc. A Pirates season ticketholder, Don Cafasso, Vice President of Ossafac Solutions, took the Enter-to-Win form, scanned it, and processed the data utilizing OCR for AnyDoc® from Tampa, FL-based developer AnyDoc Software. The quick processing capabilities and ease-of-use clearly impressed the Pirates. They soon implemented the solution, along with a Fujitsu fi-6240 scanner to eliminate the need to continue outsourcing their Enter-to-Win forms processing.

OCR for AnyDoc automates data capture processes by quickly and efficiently translating scanned document images into useable data. The software offers numerous checks and balances for verifying data accuracy and clarity of images prior to moving the data downstream into specific business process systems. Pirates' personnel can now use this extensive quality assurance to increase productivity and ensure accurate data is delivered into their systems in a fraction of the time.

With 23 data fields to collect visitor information, the Enter-to-Win form is completely handwritten. Using OCR for AnyDoc's Intelligent Character Recognition (ICR) capability, the software recognizes the handwritten characters within the restraint boxes—boxes intended for the author to place one character in each box, typical of many applications such as for a credit card. The background text of the form, i.e. the actual boxes and data field designators (first name, last name, address, etc.), are printed in red and automatically “drop out” when the software reads the hand-printed text. A process known as character regeneration automatically regenerates part of the letter (or number) if it happens to overlap the form line and be deleted during the data extraction phase, allowing the software to correctly identify the letter or number in the restraint box.

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To further increase accuracy, the software can utilize an edit mask—a format designation for the alpha-numeric makeup of a piece of data to ensure accuracy of that field of data. For example, the phone number field can be tagged as numeric-only. If the software picks up a l, it will identify it as the number one rather than the letter elle. Or, the format for a date, where only 01-12 or 01-31 would be valid, can use an edit mask to standardize and/or auto-correct all dates to be in the same format, especially handy when compiling large amounts of data.

Results

The Pirates now process their Enter-to-Win forms in-house at a cost of only \$0.12 per form—less than 50 percent of the original cost, or a total seasonal savings of \$15,080. “Right now our turnaround time has been reduced to about two weeks, down from a couple of months for the Enter-to-Win forms. But we expect the data to be available next-day in the coming seasons when we’ll have a designated employee for this task. For 2010 it was a rotating intern position,” said Mark Rudolph, Manager of CRM & Fans Database for the Pittsburgh Pirates. “We see a great potential in continuing to cut costs and being able to use our fan data sooner in seasons to come. It is likely that the adoption of forms processing will continue to expand within our ball club.”



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– **Mark Rudolph, Manager of CRM & Fans Database for the Pittsburgh Pirates**

Based on the proven ease-of-use and time savings, another Pirates department quickly saw the advantages of leveraging OCR for AnyDoc. An additional 20,000 Enter-to-Win forms were collected in 2010 through a separate ticket package program which was promoted through a magazine. The promotion advertised one game ticket and a hat or occasional T-shirt, and utilized the same Enter-to-Win form. Fans were required to turn in the completed form to redeem their Pirates swag at the game. The program data was then automatically processed and will allow for future enhancements to promotional ticket packages, in addition to the Pirates' other existing promotional programs.

"We see a great potential in continuing to cut costs..."

In total, Pirates' staff was able to leverage the automated solution for the Enter-to-Win forms to reach a wider fan audience and gather more data for the team. Expanding use beyond the initial prize wheel giveaway allows the team to further learn who is attending their games while eliminating the need for an outside company to process their data—and with much quicker results.

Overall, the cost avoidance and time reduction made the decision to automate an easy one. "It was the quick turnaround and sophisticated technology that made automating with OCR for AnyDoc an easy decision," Rudolph added. Cutting costs and speeding turnaround time are a grand slam for the Pirates.

Partner Profile

Ossafac Solutions

Since 2003, Ossafac Solutions, Inc. has provided innovative end-to-end IT solutions for business process inefficiencies. Ossafac offers a full range of services to provide cost effective business solutions agile enough to respond to the challenges facing businesses today and into the future. With over 70 years' combined experience in business and IT, their expertise spans a wide range of industries from Utilities and Construction to a Fortune 10 company.

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