

Web-based EASE system speeds resolution of unemployment claims

Solving the Pennsylvania Department of Labor's business challenges with ideas that work



Findings

Hundreds of Claims Examiners now consistently apply complex federal unemployment law to adjudicate unemployment compensation claims
EASE system assesses Claims Examiners' findings against legal criteria to produce foolproof eligibility determinations



Situation

Under federal law, States must administer programs for providing unemployment compensation to employees who lose jobs through no fault of their own. A complex set of rules and eligibility criteria govern the award of unemployment payments. Federal law also requires an adjudication process when an employee disagrees with an employer's decision to deny the employee these benefits.

Challenge

For years, when an employer and employee disagreed on the employee's eligibility, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania claims examiners conducted a lengthy and subjective legal research process to resolve the eligibility question. Since individual examiners conducted their own research, different methods sometimes led to inconsistencies in the adjudication process. Further, the determination letters issued to claimants often varied in their language and level of detail.

Response

To standardize the claims adjudication process, Pennsylvania sought a statewide system to assist examiners in fact-finding, decision-making, and issuance of determinations. EDS proposed the use of an expert system driven by decision-tree technology that stores and maintains legal eligibility criteria in its database. In addition, the system would be Web-based to help ensure consistency in forms delivery to claimants and employers.

The result, the Expert Assistance System for Examiners (EASE), guides claims examiners through a series of system-prompted questions, with the system automatically applying relevant laws and regulations. Since the system can recognize inconsistencies in answers, it continues to query until all inconsistencies are resolved. The expert system technology then arrives at a determination of eligibility consistent with applicable law. Once the determination is finalized by a Claims Examiner, the system automatically generates the appropriate standardized forms and letters from the central server. The system also has access to employer wage filing information, which resides on a legacy system. Subsets of this information are warehoused to a distributed database to facilitate data entry.

While the new multi-logic expert system significantly reduces the time spent processing claims, its real value lies in standardizing the way unemployment law is applied, making Department decisions fairer and more consistent. That means they're less likely now to be challenged by the claimant or the employer, which saves everyone time and money.

And as complex as the EASE implementation was, the entire project—from process flow analysis to design, development, implementation, and training—took only nine months.

Technology

- Windows NT Server 4.0
- Microsoft Internet Explorer 4.0 or greater
- IIS 4.0
- SQL 7.0
- Visual Basic 6.0
- Exsys Knowledge Base
- Exsys Web Runtime
- Seagate Crystal Reports 7.0
- Seagate Backup Exec
- Adobe PDFWriter

Getting results

Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry's Deputy Secretary for UC Programs Alan R. Williamson considers EASE a resounding success. "A key feature of the EASE system is the direct connection between Department staff to the information-based business process that they oversee. This allows staff to be self-sufficient in monitoring, troubleshooting, and expanding EASE. We are very proud of the EASE system and plan to showcase it to other state agencies to demonstrate how the new Web-based technology can revolutionize our business processes."

The technology behind the EASE system is also readily applicable to any entitlement determination process in any department or industry where the application of complex legal criteria is required.

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