TENCon 2013

PRESENTED BY: ASCnet & Applied Systems

PREPARING YOURSELF AND YOUR AGENCY FOR EPIC

SESSION HANDOUT

Prepared for Applied Systems Client Network and Applied Systems

Applied Systems Client Network (ASCnet)
2340 South River Road
Des Plaines, IL 60018
Phone: 800-605-1045
Fax: 224.220.1443

Applied Systems, Inc.
200 Applied Parkway
University Park, IL 60484
Phone: 708-534-5575
Fax: 708-534-8016

Copyright © 2013 by Applied Systems Client Network, Inc. (ASCnet), 2340 S. River Road #311, Des Plaines, IL 60018. Protection claimed in all forms and matters of copyrightable material and information now allowed by law or hereafter granted including both electronic and conventional distribution of herein products. Reproduction or transmission unless authorized by ASCnet in writing. All rights reserved. Specific product information regarding Applied Systems' The Agency Manager®, Vision®, Epic® and related products and services, including any related manuals, documentation, and/or materials prepared by Applied Systems for purposes of TENCon 2013 or otherwise are the exclusive property of Applied Systems, Inc. Applied Systems retains all right, title, and interest therein, including copyright interests and other intellectual property rights. Information relating to products and services owned or licensed by third parties (ex: Microsoft, Excel, etc.) and all interests therein are the property of the respective owners, and no endorsement or ownership of third party products or services should be implied by their mention and use. All workflows are suggested and common workflows. Users of this material agree that neither ASCnet nor Applied Systems can be held liable for any omissions or errors within the guide.

Original Author:

Jason Hoeppner, B. H. Burke & Co., Inc., Westbrook, CT August 2013

Target Audience:

	Accountant/Bookkeeper		Producer
	CSR		Trainer
	Carrier		Vendor
	IT Manager/Systems Coordinator		ALL
X	Operations		Other: (describe)
X	Principal/Owner		

Table of Contents

Seminar Type:

Leadership
Management
Servicing & Workflows
Training & Staff Development

Seminar Level:

Basic: An introductory level course is basic in nature and addresses fundamental concepts. We expect attendees to have a basic level of insurance knowledge, have been oriented to an agency's processes. For functional courses, it is *not* necessary for the attendee or participant to have previous knowledge of the agency management system or software program

Class Description:

The conversion to Epic can be daunting. Agencies that underestimate the importance of a deliberate conversion, and the effort involved in one, or that do not have a solid conversion plan and the team necessary to carry it out often struggle with day-to-day operations once they are live. We will review some best practices of agencies that have had successful conversions as well as the areas that made other agencies stumble – and have caused too much clean-up work going forward.

Learning Outcomes:

- Understand the importance of the preparation and tasks needed to successfully convert to Epic.
- Understand some of the potential pitfalls and areas that could cause more work for your staff post conversion.
- Know what a best-practice agency implementation team should look like and what they should be doing during the conversion.

Assumptions: This seminar is based on the following
Applied Epic Version 7.X
Microsoft ® Word Version 2007

How to Prepare for Epic

The Importance of Preparing

How well you prepare your agency for its conversion to Epic is almost as important as what you do once you are live. I would actually say that your preparation and effort is absolutely critical to how well your agency operates once you do go live. It could mean the difference between being productive and effective in your daily operations as soon as you are live or to the other extreme, languishing in the system – whose configuration doesn't fit the way you need to do business – for up to a year or more.

We are going to talk about key areas that you must pay attention to and put the appropriate amount of resources towards during the conversion process.

Make no mistake; this is probably one of the biggest and most comprehensive projects your agency will undertake in decades. And if you don't approach it as such you will not have optimal results. Instead of being able to focus on the insurance aspect of their job and your clients, your staff could be stuck cleaning up data, thinking about how they actually need to accomplish their work and spending additional time manually entering information or redoing work that should be automated and streamlined to begin with.

Focus Areas

Here are the areas we need to focus on:

- Your data – before and after
- Your workflows and how you really want to do business moving forward
- Reports
- Correspondence – form letters and proposals
- And of course, your implementation team

In addition to the above, this is really a time to self-reflect and understand how you do business. What makes you successful, what are your strengths and weaknesses, and where do you really want to take your agency operations forward?
I will just mention it here but this is an optimal time to implement other changes to your agency and the way you operate that you may have been considering such as: going paperless/efiling, integrating your accounting into your agency management system, or more likely, revamping your workflows.

Let's talk about your data

Fix It Before…

When you think about how your data is in your current agency management system (and from this point on I am going to say TAM instead of "agency management system"), would you say that it is clean? Are fields used for what they were intended and is your data complete?

If you answer yes to this first I must question whether or not you're telling truth, but if so great! This is going to make your conversion much cleaner. Agencies that can say this typically have had consistent processes in place for several years.

If, on the other hand you know that your data integrity is lacking, you do have some work to do. **On a positive note though this is the perfect time to clean stuff up.** This can be done through a combination of pre-conversion work and data mapping via the Old/New spreadsheet (we will talk about this more later) or planned post-live cleanup work either through the renewal cycle or on an as-touched basis.

If there are areas that you know far enough ahead of time that need work it may make sense to start doing it as soon as you can, up to a year before going live. For instance if you have not traditionally entered contacts into TAM, throughout the previous year prior to going live you may want to start making a comprehensive effort to enter important contacts during the renewal process. This is something that could also be done post-conversion but it always makes good sense to gather as much information as you can in general about your accounts as soon as you can and as soon as you identify the issue.

Another example might be closing out claims that have never been closed - even though they are closed claims. You can identify the open claims through reports and put together a list of items that need to be touched. If there is a way to just slowly clean these up over an extended period of time, you will be better off in the long run.

Oh and by the way, these pre-conversion tasks reinforce data entry standards as you do go through the conversion.

Or Fix It During…

The second opportunity to clean up your data it is through the data conversion itself.
As your database is converted the first time you will be given a spreadsheet that shows the old codes and new codes for things like companies, policy types, employees, brokers, and several other areas.
This spreadsheet is critical! It shows you what you have, gives you an opportunity to start to consolidate or cleanup unused duplicate codes. For instance, if you had previously used two different names or slightly different names for a single company and they show up on this list here is where you would designate the new (single) code that would "combine" these entries.

This is also the place where, if you had used several producer codes in order to pay different commission structures, you would consolidate and merge these codes into just one for the employee. What you do in Epic is set up different commission agreements to cover the different commission splits or contract levels you have with each producer. And we can talk a little bit more about this functionality at this point if you would like.

This Old/New spreadsheet is really the cornerstone of a successful conversion. If you do not consolidate or set up for inactivation a good portion of your lists, you are adding more work to your plate after conversion.

It is very difficult to contemplate, not knowing all the ins and outs of Epic, how much streamlining this list will affect other areas in Epic(notably accounting), and how clean these areas end up being. For instance, when you Go Live and go through the activation steps for Epic, one of the things you will do is automatically create subaccounts for things such as company payables and producer expense/commission expense. Epic will take the list of companies and employees and those that are indicated as billing (premium payable) companies and as producers will automatically have subaccounts created for them under the proper general ledger account. Although you can inactivate accounts as needed it is much, much easier and cleaner to have this set and to correctly and automatically create subaccounts in order to minimize the amount of post-conversion cleanup work.

As experienced as the implementation leads may be, they may take for granted the fact that the decisions you make on this spreadsheet will affect the different areas as you implement and Go Live. And from the agency perspective – with no experience in Epic – they may not understand what their ultimate decisions may drive. So make sure you ask (several times) if you are not sure whether or not you should consolidate some codes, inactivate a code or do something completely different to make sure you make the best informed decision as possible.

But Review, Review, Review

The other area concerning your data is the depth and effort of your review of the converted data. Agency owners and senior management must understand the importance of this and ensure everyone participates. They need to make it mandatory for all staff – service and support as well as producers – to go into each data sample as it is completed and review the results in depth for several of their top accounts. I would recommend a minimum of five large accounts, up to ten, per person to do a complete review. This will ensure that any inconsistencies in data mapping are found, any agency unique data issues are identified, and more importantly, it will force people to start to become familiar with where the data is in Epic.

This last reason deserves extra discussion. In addition to the online and onsite training you'll get, the comfort level your staff with where the information resides in Epic will significantly drive how productive people are as soon as possible once you are live. The fear of change and uncertainty has the potential to greatly complicate your Epic conversion. That is why it's extremely important to eliminate as much uncertainty in a non-threatening environment as you can prior to going live.

Once you are live, what matters most is the quality of the work that people are doing and how Epic is supporting your people, As comfortable as you can make staff with where information is, and as much as you can provide them with the support that they need to do their day-to-day jobs the better the conversion will be and the more productive people will be from the get-go.

Forcing people to get in and review the data they are already familiar with will also serve a training purpose. People will naturally have questions or think information is missing and when those questions are raised they will discover or learn the answers that will help them be more effective users.

As a data review is conducted any issues or questions that staff have must be entered into a spreadsheet (the Change Request Form). This will allow the Applied team to dig into any issues and as needed to make corrections to the mapping and conversion so that items are coming over properly. It's also the chance for them to identify areas they just need to address during training or during data conversion cleanup so that the end result is the best that it can be.

That is to say through the identification of issues folks will also be learning about Epic, where information resides, how the screens look so that they are more comfortable when they go live. The successful resolution of the items on change request form spreadsheet is a critical component of the final decision to go live.

Or Spend Time Cleaning It Up Later…

After reviewing your data and identifying where areas or issues may arise during the conversion, you must make a decision about how to fix these issues – is it something that data mapping and conversion can adequately address or is it something that needs to be cleaned up in TAM? Ideally you are getting this information and making a decision with enough lead time to properly fix it. The last resort if the data issue cannot be addressed using either of the two ways (cleaned up in TAM or fixed by the data mapping process), would be to correct it post implementation either the first time employees touch the account or as a part of the renewal process for the next 12 months.

Now what that we've talked about your data I think the next most important thing to think about laying out all your workflows.

Workflows in Epic

As with any new system, and even more so with Epic, you cannot and should not think that how you do things now is exactly how you want to do things moving forward.

So instead of asking how can we do what we're doing now in Epic, you should be asking, “How do we want to do business?” Then the next question is, “How will Epic support us doing things this way?" It is whole other topic, but the development of your workflows from this perspective really needs to take place at this point.

Here's a warning: You will fail miserably if you take Epic as-is "out-of-the-box" so to speak. Yes, the system will work, but it will not work correctly for your agency. Gone are the days of doing business based on the constraints or limitations of your management system. If you want to accomplish a specific goal or obtain a certain result in any of your workflows, there is almost always a way to make that happen in Epic, you just need to determine the way to configure it to do it that way.

How do Workflows Work in Epic?

Based on what you want to do, the configuration of Epic's system events, activities, and other support functions will follow. Sometimes the overwhelming ability to configure Epic to fit your agency's specific needs can overshadow Epic's real powerful capabilities.

So you need to think about what you need for activities, which events should drive the activities, and what reports you will be running based on your activities and from the other information available in Epic. No longer should staff be thinking about the manually-created activity they need to select for each workflow they perform. This decision happens before and Epic is set up to provide the appropriate activity to staff as the work is being done. This keeps everyone in the right lane…

We will take a look at some of the events and also the activity codes that come in the Epic demo database and run through a few examples of setting up the activities to the system events. In general, you will be able to configure Epic to do the following with regard to activities:

1. Set an event to create a single, mandatory activity.
2. Set an event to create a mandatory activity which can be chosen from a limited list of activity codes.
3. Set an event to create a non-mandatory activity with either a single or multiple activity code options (you can "x" out or cancel the activity).
4. Set an event to NOT create an activity.
5. For each of the above, default the given activity to open or closed (successful or unsuccessful).

In addition to the activities you can set up tasks underneath the activities. One way to think about this is to consider the way you may be handling your renewal workflow now. Do you have separate activities to conduct an account review, and then one to gather updated information for the renewal? If so, you can create a single activity in Epic with underlying tasks for some of these "sub-steps" that you may not need a full activity for, but do want something in the system as a reminder. The functionality of tasks is limited in some ways, but they should be considered when configuring Epic to support your workflows.

Keep It Simple

As staff gets trained up and more comfortable in Epic there will surely be many good ideas on how you can do your work better. The main points I think it's important to stick with are:

- You should minimize activity codes. They should correspond to the phases (at a high level) of your standardized workflow so you can get an accurate picture where you are in the workflow. The notes in each activity are what would give you additional detail.
- You should not need to manually create many activities in your daily operations. Most should be aligned with system events. You cannot fully eliminate manual activities, but gone are the days where people have to remember which activity code to use and then select that one from a long list so that they can complete their given tasks.
- If you cannot tie an activity to:
    - The need for a follow-up reminder
    - E&O documentation
    - A data point for a report

  It should be inactivated in Epic.

I look at Agency management systems as an electronic brain. Anywhere I can I remove unnecessary work from staff, especially if it is repetitive and administrative in manner, you should do so - make Epic do it for us!

Formletters and Proposals

There are plenty of sessions on how to set up, create, or convert the formletters and proposals you have into Epic. For our purposes here, I will just mention that you need to review what you currently have, determine where they can be improved or updated, and then assign someone (see the team structure below) to import or copy them into Epic and update all the codes and functionality.

Most of what was able to be done with TAM formletter and proposals can similarly be done in Epic. The tricky part is getting used to the layout (folders) for the Epic data. IFs, ASK statements, and the Replicate command are all there for you in Epic too.

If you are not using these items in TAM, then you are missing out on a great timesaver that also lends itself to branding inconsistency for your Agency, not to mention a certain level of professionalism. You should implement these ASAP within Epic!

Your Conversion Team

The strength of your team, and its ability to manage the project of a conversion are just as important, if not more important, than the data, workflows and other areas on the conversion process. You should have a strong internal implementation lead, with skills that lend to effective project management and additional team members with strengths in the areas we have discussed.

If these skills are not readily available, or if you do not have staff that can dedicate a large portion of their time to a conversion, you will really need to think about how you should proceed. If you do not do this correctly and put the right amount of time and effort into it, you can kill your agency's productivity.

Who is on the Team?

You will likely use many people on your staff for various tasks during the conversion (such as data review), but the core of your team should consist of:

1. Agency Implementation Lead
2. IT Support Expert
3. Operations/Workflow Lead
4. Accounting Lead
5. Reports Expert
6. Formletter and Proposal Lead

Some of these may be the same person, but each area should be covered.

What are They Doing?

For the most part, the team is getting the work done. When they see that someone else is needed to assist, they get them involved. They are also coordinating with the Applied Implementation Lead, the Accounting Support person, and the Download Configuration Lead and support staff to make the conversion flow smoothly. The team will also be managing the various datasheets and worksheets involved in the implementation and should ensure that any decisions that need to be made during the project are made at the appropriate level.

Things such as setting up the workflows, and testing them, in your data samples and finally in your live (or production) database and converting or creating formletter and proposal templates in Epic will take time. So, the leads in these areas should plan accordingly, and do not hesitate to pull the Implementation Lead from Applied into the discussion or testing if appropriate.

What's the Risk?

I am sure there are plenty of stories out there…I have a few, but the one main thing I have observed is that agencies who pay attention and put in the appropriate amount of time and effort into the conversion to Epic are much more productive, much more quickly.

It can be the difference between not having a system to work in at all for almost a month or inadvertently setting your staff years behind in their levels of productivity. The whole point of going to a newer system is to become more productive and to focus on what's important – relationships with your clients and the insurance aspects of the service you provide them.

Conclusion

Agencies that underestimate the importance of the project of converting to Epic or who do not spend enough time or resources on it absolutely will not have optimal results. Those that do spend time, and ensure that staff spends the appropriate time to prepare are much better off. There is no substitute for hard work (or diligence), and the better prepared you and your agency are, the more productive, more quickly, you will be. As prepared and comfortable all staff are with Epic, will drive your staff's initial demeanor and morale and level of productivity with your new system!

APPENDIX

Sample Agency Conversion Actions Checklist

Area of Concern	Action	Who/When
Data	Evaluate current data in TAM, identify improper usage of fields, make adjustments over the course of a renewal cycle (12 months)	All Staff 15 months before conversion and through final data sample.
Workflows	Determine how you want to conduct your business (NOT "this is how we do it in TAM"). Work with your Applied Implementation Lead and Trainer to configure Epic to support (and enhance) your desired workflows	Agency Operations/Managers 6-8 months prior and continual through activation
Codes – Activity, policy, employee, company…	Review current lists of active/used codes in TAM, identify ones that can be deleted/purged in TAM, and those that will be mapped (combined) or inactivated in Epic.	Implementation lead and team 4-6 months prior to conversion
Document Management	Understand how you currently do it and if you will do it the same (or make changes) once in Epic – scanning, eFiling, barcodes…?	Implementation lead and team 2-4 months prior to conversion
Formletters	Review, update, and identify letters not to be used in Epic. Once a good data sample is available, start to convert field codes.	Implementation team – form letter lead 2-4 months prior to conversion
Proposals	Review and update proposal templates. Once a good data sample is available, start to convert field codes and other functionality.	Implementation team – proposal lead 2-4 prior to conversion
Reports	List the management reports being used. Determine criteria and understand how to build and distribute them in Epic. When production is available, build the reports	Implementation team – reports lead 2-4 months prior, and pre-entry/Go Live

Note: There are more detailed areas that you will need to work through during the conversion, such as accounting, in addition to the above noted areas. This table is a guide to make sure the implementation team is focusing on the correct areas to start.