

# New Era Life Insurance Companies (New Era Life)

Visual COBOL ushers in new age of modern application development.

## Overview

New Era Life provides affordable insurance solutions that help customers take control of their financial and healthcare future. Quality products are backed by a commitment to keeping insurance premiums stable and as low as possible. New Era Life is devoted to superior customer service.

## Challenge

New Era Life's claim processing solution was acquired in 2005 from Central States Health and Life of Omaha (CSO). CSO's application was developed and deployed in a mainframe environment in the mid-1980s. The difficulty in finding and retaining developers trained in

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Senior Systems Analyst  
New Era Life

the proprietary CA-IDEAL language and CA-Datcom database was a key reason for moving the solution to a Windows environment with Micro Focus Net Express, leveraging Micro Focus COBOL. CSO already maintained many other COBOL applications and had in-house development skills it wanted to use.

Today, the claims processing solution manages three to four million claims each year, amounting to over \$300 million. Doug Nelson, Senior Systems Analyst at New Era Life, comments on the evolution of the system: "The solution is constantly under revision and we add new functionality all the time. Some of our programs have grown extremely large; up to 50,000 LOC (Lines of Code) and we've enhanced the system to take full advantage of the many features Micro Focus COBOL has to offer. Although we were very happy with Net Express, we are conscious that we need to future-proof a business-critical solution such as this, and align to current platforms and technologies. Micro Focus Visual COBOL looked like it might give us some additional advantages, and we were happy to support the move from Net Express to Visual COBOL."

New Era also hoped to resolve a restriction in the number of fields per screen. In the mainframe environment this was very limiting, causing staff to switch between many screens to



## At a Glance

- **Industry**  
Insurance
- **Location**  
Texas, USA
- **Challenge**  
Increasing application functionality requirements and the need to simplify complex policy processing screens
- **Products and Services**  
Visual COBOL for Visual Studio  
COBOL Server
- **Success Highlights**
  - + More than four times larger screens deliver increased user productivity
  - + Simplified development accelerates new feature delivery
  - + Up to 5x faster batch processing—tens of thousands of claims processed in less than an hour
  - + Faster program compilation using industry standard development tools

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process a claim which was time-consuming and unproductive. Although this was vastly improved with Net Express, user requirements were becoming more sophisticated, and Nelson and his team looked to Visual COBOL to provide further enhancements in this area.

### Solution

New Era Life worked closely with Micro Focus through the Enhancement Request Qualification Form process. This is designed to take on-board specific customer requirements, assess the engineering effort involved, and review this with Product Management. Factors such as development cost and strategic fit determine the next steps. New Era Life were then involved in beta-testing the Visual COBOL version that included their enhancement. Nelson comments: “We were delighted that there are no field limits at all with Visual COBOL, a total game changer for us. A single screen can be more than four times larger than in our mainframe environment. Our users really like having so much information on a single screen. It’s easier for them to navigate through a claim and allows them to do their work so much quicker.”

Having fewer screens also simplifies the development effort so New Era Life can deliver key enhancements faster, without having to rearrange fields or shorten them to make room for additional fields. Nelson and the team enjoy the object-oriented Visual COBOL features to invoke external programs such as Word and Excel, creating documents and workbooks seamlessly within the claims processing solution.

New Era Life developers like the developer interface, as Nelson explains: “We had not

appreciated the difference in user interface, but our developers love the new environment. Code debugging and editing is so much easier for them. In fact, a recent hire in our development team came from a traditional mainframe environment. When I showed him the Visual Studio interface he could immediately see that maintaining and developing programs was going to be a lot easier. Even our very large programs are compiled in seconds.”

New Era Life also saw significant performance improvements. Though Visual COBOL plays a role in this, the fact that New Era Life upgraded their entire technology stack makes it hard to attribute better performance to any one action. Rather than analyzing the root-cause, Nelson enjoys the effects: “Some of our processes run up to five times faster than before and we have batch programs that now load tens of thousands of claims in less than an hour.”

### Results

Nelson has been happy to collaborate with Micro Focus: “I’ve worked with many vendors and can honestly say that nobody even comes close to the support given by Micro Focus. Support engineers go the extra mile to recreate the exact situation we’re seeing, and then work with their development colleagues to get a fix installed. Our support contacts are all responsive and extremely knowledgeable.”

He concludes: “With Visual COBOL, we have given our 30-year old solution a new lease of life. The mixed language support means that we can integrate with other key applications, according to our roadmap.”