CASE STUDY

Leading Health Care Provider Steps Up Efficiency by Automating Release Management With Plutora

Bussiness Objective

Strengthen release management for business-critical EHR application.

Challenges

Coordinating enterprise releases required manual status checks which was eating up time and causing test environment collisions.

Benefits

Increased release velocity, coordinated application delivery, reduced risk, and optimized utilization of time and personnel.
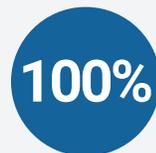
Results

66% Reduction in incidents of environment contention.

85% Less time spent coordinating releases.

100% Live visibility into release status.

Customer
A leading health care provider in the US with one of the largest electronic health record (EHR) systems in the world.

Region
United States

Industry
Health care

Products
Plutora Release
Plutora Environments
Plutora Deploy

Diagnosis: IT Vital Signs at Risk

Before implementing Plutora, the health care provider's national application teams used spreadsheets, SharePoint sites, email, and meetings to manage day-to-day release activities. This required intense manual effort in addition to being error-prone and complex. Rapid growth, numerous healthcare regulations, and the concurrent rollout of national programs introduced further complexity.

When upgrades to the EHR system were planned, they had to be coordinated to allow all regions to prepare in advance and have access to servers at the right time. Nine release management teams across the US would participate in regular meetings to share their release schedules and figure out overlaps. These meetings were "like bartering sessions that lasted all day long" according to the Principal Consultant to the company. Naturally, this coordination was zapping time and productivity.

"Before Plutora, the electronic health record system team was struggling to streamline its release function," recounts the Principal Consultant. "Hospitals were dependent on systems that were being managed with inconsistent and error-prone processes. Only with a huge amount of effort were we able to ensure predictable and reliable releases. Change was badly needed."

"Plutora met our objectives to reduce disruption and rework, improve our release management processes, and reduce the risk of release failure due to environment and upgrade interruptions."

Vice President of the health care provider's EHR system

Finding the Right Treatment

In 2014, the Vice President of the healthcare provider's EHR system tasked the Principal Consultant with strengthening the release process. For the next few months, he and his team interviewed people and found out that there was little common understanding of release management terminology or processes. The team then kicked off a search for release management solutions and found Plutora. After rigorous evaluation against competing tools, Plutora came out clearly superior along the criteria deemed important by the company:

Key Highlights

People

10,000+ employees in IT distributed across 20 states in eight regions.

Processes

The EHR system's release management activities had been manual and labor-intensive. Regional release teams attended regular meetings to share schedules and resolve conflicts.

After implementing Plutora as the real-time, central repository for all release information, these coordination meetings were no longer needed.

In 2014, the health care provider implemented over 4,100 changes in the EHR system across more than 500 environments. This included approximately 385 major software releases, all managed through Plutora.

Technology

Past – Excel, SharePoint, PowerPoint, email, and Remedy.

Present – Plutora and Remedy. Six other major applications have come onto Plutora since 2015, giving the health care provider a truly enterprise-wide view of releases.

- Seamless coordination of release activities, deliverables, and milestones in a single repository.
- Automated production of release and environment schedules.
- Senior management reporting.
- Ability to view impact of releases on different systems and critical test environment confguration information.
- Automated impact analysis of project delays to environment resources.

Leadership was also concerned about the safety of patient health information. But once they understood that Plutora only handled release and environment dates and status -- and health records remain untouched -- they gave the Principal Consultant's team the green light.

Improved IT Health Revs Up Business Outcomes

The health care provider engaged Plutora to streamline release management across all national programs. Plutora formed a collaborative partnership with the company to ensure a smooth transition and successful user adoption.

"Each of the implementations that followed the EHR system has been successful. As a result of this string of wins, we have established a release management capability and quality culture that didn't exist before," said the Principal Consultant.

The VP of the EHR system added, "Plutora has helped us address our complex IT environment through a common process, language, and implementation. We achieved a number of measurable benefits."

"Plutora is now our single system of record. Before, release data was scattered across the enterprise."

Principal Consultant to the healthcare provider's EHR system

From All-Day Meetings to Occasional Sync-ups

One hundred percent live visibility helps the health care provider manage the end-to-end release process. All information flowing into Plutora opens the door for interdependent teams to get real-time information quickly and easily through self-service.

Visibility allows for collaboration which leads to efficient and predictable software delivery. This results in competitive advantage for the health care provider, which relies on software and applications in critical aspects of its business.

Improved Release Scheduling and Reduced Environment Collisions

Plutora integrated with the health care provider's on-premises and homegrown applications out of the box. Change requests registered in Remedy automatically propagate to Plutora, while environment requests made from Plutora are automatically passed to Remedy, eliminating the need for dual entry. "Plutora is now our single system of record," says the Principal Consultant. "Before we had several."

Plutora has given the health care provider greater release visibility and control of test environment configuration. This ensures that the right environments are available for testing, and that tests are executed in the intended configuration. Having the right environments available means that test teams are not waiting around to do their work. And just as important, that tests are executed in the right configuration - so that there are no surprises in production.

Cross-Organization Coordination

When other application areas at the health care company saw the massive success of managing the EHR system's releases on Plutora, they went ahead with rolling it out to other teams. According to the Principal Consultant and the VP, as more teams get on Plutora, the benefits multiply. A single source of truth stamps out scheduling complications around dependencies.

"Our application release world revolves around the EHR system's schedule," explains the Principal Consultant. "If we could better coordinate its numerous and complex releases using Plutora, we'd create the foundation needed to coordinate releases for the rest of our national applications. Success in that first, very visible Plutora deployment led to subsequent implementations."

In 2015, Plutora was deployed across four additional nationwide applications: pharmacy, laboratory, reporting, and call center. The health care provider's member-facing application was brought onto the tool in 2016. And work is now underway to implement Plutora for the company's national billing system.

What's next?

"In terms of scope, we have brought all the major national apps on Plutora," says the Principal Consultant. "Next, we would want to get regional apps on the platform so they can pull up the schedule for their region that shows everything."

The health care provider is also in the process of planning the integration of EHR release management in Plutora for another 674,000 members through an upcoming acquisition.