BC FERRIES

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—JAY PRILL, DIRECTOR OF INFORMATION SERVICES, BC FERRIES

BC Ferries, owned and operated by the provincial government of British Columbia, began operations in 1960 with two ships, two terminals and 200 employees. Today, BC ferries' staff of 4,500 operates 40 vessels, providing year-round service on 25 routes to 46 destinations throughout coastal British Columbia.

CHALLENGES FACED

- Antiquated, batch-oriented legacy financial systems

- Number of 'silo' data stores

- Inability to create cohesive financial picture

Ferrying 21 million passengers each year and keeping track of the corporation's vessels and employees was impossible with the legacy systems that were in place. Eventually the corporation was faced with a financial crisis that had to be solved.

"We had lots of printed reports, but no information," explains Jay Prill, Director of Information Services, BC Ferries. "For example, until recently, there was no report summarizing the financial status of our corporation."

In parallel with the replacement of the legacy financial system, Mr. Prill realized that he needed a corporate reporting strategy that could bridge the information from all the existing systems to create a cohesive, coherent financial picture. That reporting strategy is based on Cognos PowerPlay® and Cognos Impromptu®. PowerPlay, the analysis tool, helps BC Ferries perform sophisticated analysis on financial information in a way that is relevant to each individual manager. Impromptu, a reporting tool, has deliberately been put into the hands of the end-users, and is used for both ad hoc and drill-through detail reporting.

With the help of PriceWaterhouseCoopers and Cognos, Mr. Prill was also able to build a data warehouse from the BC Ferries Oracle financials database using DecisionStream™ from Cognos.

"When I first showed the power of PowerPlay to my vice-president, he literally jumped out of his chair and ran down the hall to get his boss," remembers Mr. Prill with a smile. "It was the first time that he ever had access to information, and the potential and power of the products were immediately apparent to him."

BENEFITS REALIZED

- Tighter control and reporting of financial data

- Ability to quickly identify errors for correction

- Reporting time cut from weeks to minutes

Two hundred employees with budgetary authority are using Cognos daily to examine and control costs and every senior executive within the organization is trained and using business intelligence to track financial data. With information about operational costs, budgets, and overall financial performance now at the fingertips of decision-makers, everyone with budgetary authority is accountable for every expenditure.

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And the impact has been immediate. For example, one of the biggest single budget line items is labor. So, as part of the legacy replacement project, Mr. Prill's team created a labor cube in PowerPlay. When Mr. Prill studied his portion of the cube the first time, he learned three things he would not have known with the old system: the IS overtime was high and climbing; the illness trend was well above average, and there was a $5,000 charge to his cost center that should not have been there. Using Cognos PowerPlay drill-through features, Mr. Prill listed the details behind the overtime for further review, and he discovered that the illness had actually been a coding error and was really an authorized long-term leave of absence by a single employee. The extra charge was also a coding error that was subsequently reversed to the correct cost center.

"Looking back, we simply couldn't get at that information with the old reporting system—at least not easily. With PowerPlay you can slice and dice, and see what is happening around allocations," said Mr. Prill. "It used to take three to four weeks of work to provide financial reports coming out of the legacy system with the associated huge costs. Imagine the time drain on the programmers, and more importantly, on our internal customers. Now with Cognos, it's 'let's have a look right now.'"

The 'vision' for the project to replace the legacy system was "To provide the tools to hold managers financially accountable." With Cognos, that vision has been realized and exceeded.

WHY COGNOS?

Only Cognos delivers a complete range of integrated, scalable software for corporate performance management. Cognos products let organizations drive performance with enterprise planning and budgeting, monitor it with scorecarding, and understand it with business intelligence reporting and analysis. Founded in 1969, Cognos now serves more than 22,000 customers in over 135 countries.

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