

Equifax and IBM team to boost online business via WebSphere.

Overview

■ Challenge

Improve the efficiency and reduce the cost of providing consumer credit information to businesses

■ Solution

Equifax ePORT™, a B2B Web interface for Equifax's credit information products

■ Why IBM?

IBM WebSphere® Application Server demonstrated better performance and scalability than previous application server; IBM DB2® is a corporate standard for data management

■ Key Business Benefits

Full payback in 2 years; 30-40% reduction in client maintenance costs; up to 95% reduction in time to connect customers to the service; up to 88% faster report processing for customers; increased rate of new customer acquisition; easier and less costly up-selling and cross-selling



Founded in 1899 as Retail Credit Company, Equifax has grown to be a global information services leader with 5,200 employees in 13 countries.

Based in Atlanta, Georgia, Equifax is a worldwide leader in commerce-enabling services. With revenues of \$1.1 billion, the company draws its largest source of income from the provision of consumer credit information to businesses. Tens of thousands of banks, retail establishments and other credit grantors take advantage of hundreds of credit information products from Equifax to assess the credit-worthiness and credit risk of their customers.

“We and our customers were spending more than \$3 million a year on hardware and connectivity fees alone. And getting new customers on board could be a lengthy process.”

—Owen Flynn, Chief Technology Officer, Equifax Inc.

e-business—accelerating the pace of business and the pace of change

Key Components

Software

- IBM WebSphere Application Server, Advanced Edition, Version 3.5
- IBM DB2 Universal Database™ for AIX®

Servers

- IBM RS/6000® SP2®
- IBM RS/6000 S80
- IBM @server zSeries™ (formerly S/390 Parallel Enterprise Server)

Previously, these business customers accessed Equifax's credit information through direct access terminals (DATs) over X.25 network connections. But the setup was prohibitively expensive. "We and our customers were spending more than \$3 million a year on hardware and connectivity fees alone," says Owen Flynn, Equifax's Chief Technology Officer. "And getting new customers on board could be a lengthy process." To eliminate these costs and provide more sophisticated reporting than the DATs could accommodate, Equifax turned to the Internet.

Taking B2C success to the B2B market

No stranger to e-business, Equifax had already launched an online information service for consumers, called Equifax eConsumer. The overwhelming success of Equifax eConsumer led to the development of Equifax ePORT, a B2B Web transaction interface for a select group of the company's credit information products.

Developed in 14 weeks, Equifax ePORT uses WebSphere Application Server, Advanced Edition, Version 3.5 in conjunction with DB2 Universal Database to route credit information requests to Equifax's legacy consumer credit information applications. eConsumer, on the other hand, had originally been deployed on another application server. With the success of WebSphere software on Equifax ePORT, however, the company realized it could benefit by running Equifax eConsumer on the IBM product as well. "We ran into serious scalability issues with our previous application server," says Joe Chappell, CIO, Equifax Inc., North America. "So we decided to migrate to IBM WebSphere Application Server. Not only did the WebSphere platform offer improved performance and scalability, it worked natively with IBM DB2 Universal Database, which is a corporate standard at Equifax."

According to Flynn, more than 250,000 users representing 36,000 Equifax customers are getting their information services over the Internet. Equifax estimates that all its DAT users will migrate to Equifax ePORT within four years. One retail business that migrated from DATs to Equifax ePORT reduced its average report processing time from the 3-to-5-minute range to roughly 35 seconds.

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With projected savings of 30 to 40 percent in client hardware and software maintenance costs—compared to DAT-based access—and a 2.2 percent increase in the rate of new customer acquisition, Equifax expects to achieve payback on the Equifax ePORT project in 2 years.

By eliminating the DATs, Equifax has also been able to reduce the time it takes to connect a customer to its service from as long as four weeks to under one day—a savings of 95 percent. Notes Flynn, “The shorter time to service enables us to realize revenue from these customers much sooner.”

High-volume, secure transaction environment relies on WebSphere software

From among its hundreds of credit information products, Equifax selected a handful that represent the most substantial portion of the company’s revenue. It then gave Equifax ePORT users access to these products in a highly secure environment. To both protect Equifax’s information assets and ensure user privacy, the site uses 128-bit encryption and a 7-step authentication and authorization process. All this security, however, does not come at the expense of ease of use, which, Flynn emphasizes, is the most important benefit for Equifax’s customers. “They don’t need to install special software or learn how to use the interface since it is browser-based,” he says.

Each user accesses the site through a personalized Web page, which is driven by a unique user profile stored on the server in DB2. The profile determines which products each user can access and also helps Equifax propose to the users other relevant credit information products that they may not be aware of. “The initial exposure to the new products on the Web site makes subsequent cross-selling and up-selling much easier and less costly for us,” Flynn says.

On a typical day, the ePORT Web site completes 80,000 credit information transactions, a volume that is growing at an estimated 14 percent month over month. It also handles millions of impressions, recently peaking at seven million impressions in one day. To handle the numerous concurrent requests for information, Equifax deployed a battery of six servers, all running WebSphere Application Server. Enterprise JavaBeans (EJB) components contained within WebSphere Application Server translate the HTTP request into an IBM CICS® transaction that Equifax’s legacy consumer information system can use.

“With its built-in support for J2EE technology and Enterprise JavaBeans, WebSphere Application Server allows for maximum code reuse and rapid addition of Web-based services.”

—Joe Chappell



Equifax ePORT provides a wealth of information, creating historical records through online report storage.

An early adopter of Java™ 2 Platform, Enterprise Edition (J2EE) technology, Equifax appreciates the standards-based design of WebSphere software. “With its built-in support for J2EE technology and Enterprise JavaBeans, WebSphere Application Server allows for maximum code reuse and rapid addition of Web-based services,” Chappell says.

IBM infrastructure boosts performance in multitier system

To buffer its legacy systems from the Web environment, Equifax implemented an information gateway on an IBM RS/6000 SP2 server, which passes the CICS transactions to the consumer information system, running on a cluster of IBM *@server* zSeries servers. In the future, Equifax plans to add IBM WebSphere MQ to the information gateway to tighten the integration and boost the integrity of the Web-to-legacy system communications.

DB2 Universal Database for AIX, residing on an IBM RS/6000 S80 cluster, stores user information and access rights, as well as a cache of frequently requested information for rapid retrieval. Equifax had the option

of using Oracle, which the company uses for a number of internal applications. “But when it comes to our Internet-facing applications,” Chappell says, “we prefer to use DB2 because IBM offers a much more reasonable database licensing structure.”

International and mobile services on the way

Ultimately, Equifax plans to deliver all its information and payment services products through Equifax ePORT, not only in the U.S. but also in its operations in Europe and Latin America. To this end, the company plans to translate the Equifax ePORT content into multiple languages. Equifax has also successfully piloted Wireless Equifax ePORT, a version of the service that runs on handheld devices. The wireless offering was developed in conjunction with IBM Business Partner Encore.

According to Mark Satterfield, Equifax’s senior vice president of planning and architecture, “Whether we’re delivering B2C or B2B—or even system-to-system—applications, WebSphere software will continue to be a cornerstone of our e-business architecture and infrastructure for years to come.”

For more information

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For more information about Equifax, visit:
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