Yorkshire Water achieves award-winning improvements with its integrated, customer-focussed IT infrastructure

Overview

■ **The Challenge**
To achieve the company's vision to be clearly the best water company in the UK by improving customer service and business efficiency.

■ **The Solution**
IBM WebSphere Data Integration Suite was used as an integration solution, enabling customer facing systems, work management systems and business systems to share data and provide comprehensive information where and when it is needed.

■ **The Benefits**
– *Improved customer service, efficiency and performance scores*
– *Operating costs reduced by £8.5 million per year*
– *Enhanced performance led to being voted Utility Company of the Year, aligning with vision "to be clearly the best water company in the UK".*

Ten years ago Yorkshire Water was at the bottom of the Office of Water Services (Ofwat) customer service league tables. Over recent years, however, the company has seen significant advancement, bringing it towards the top of the league. Last year the company set a vision "to be clearly the best water company in the UK" and a far reaching change programme began in order to achieve this aim. Critical to its success was an integrated, customer-focussed IT infrastructure and Yorkshire Water chose IBM WebSphere DataStage TX as its integration solution. Customer service and efficiency improvements led to Yorkshire Water being voted Utility Company of the year in the 2004 Utility Industry Achievement Awards ahead of all other water, electricity, gas and telecommunications companies.

Supplying around 1.24 billion litres of drinking water every day, Yorkshire Water is one of the ten largest water and sewage treatment companies in the world. As a regulated company, it is monitored by three Government watchdogs. Ofwat ensures that customers receive a good quality, efficient service at a fair price. If service levels drop, the price Yorkshire Water is allowed to charge for its services drops too. The Drinking Water Inspectorate makes sure the water supplied is safe to drink and meets the standards set in the Water Quality Regulations. The Environment Agency regulates how much water is taken from the environment and the quality of effluent put back into watercourses from Yorkshire Water's 600 sewage treatment works.

As well as having a tightly regulated and publicly measured reputation to uphold, Yorkshire Water has its shareholders plus a customer base of 1.7 million households and thousands of businesses to keep happy. Steve Giles, Middleware Architect at Yorkshire Water says: "To turn our business around we needed an enterprise wide programme of improvements backed up by a comprehensive, customer-focussed IT strategy. Only the implementation of major new systems would achieve the changes needed to establish and maintain Yorkshire Water as a world leading utilities provider."

Integration – the crucial ingredient

Yorkshire Water's change programme involved three major new areas of IT investment. Firstly, an integrated customer environment to improve customer contact tracking from initial contact to resolution. Secondly, work management systems for the planning, scheduling and allocation of all work carried out within Yorkshire Water's catchment area – this included integrated mobile computing devices to support efficient management of work in the field. And, last but not least, a system to support business processes including financial management and control, supply chain management and human resources management.

One of the major issues Yorkshire Water needed to address in order to progress with its change programme was the transformation and exchange of data between its existing systems and the new systems it planned to introduce. The company uses most major platforms including ICL, UNIX™, Windows™ 2000/2003 and Alpha. When choosing an integration solution, Yorkshire Water was looking for reliability, efficiency and speed plus the ability to integrate efficiently with BEA Systems' Tuxedo, SAP R/3, and databases including SQL Server and Oracle.

A straightforward solution

WebSphere DataStage TX was recommended to Yorkshire Water by the systems integrator that was helping with the implementation of the change programme. "WebSphere DataStage TX fulfilled all the requirements we had identified and beat strong competition to become our chosen integration solution," says Giles.

As its change programme progressed, Yorkshire Water implemented Amdocs Clarify for customer relationship management, SAP R/3 for enterprise resource planning and Advantex-Utility for mobile workforce management. "WebSphere DataStage TX is the crucial solution that integrates all these systems to provide us with information where and when it is needed. It radically reduces the amount of programming needed, providing an easy way to plug into important solutions like SAP," explains Giles. "Implementation of WebSphere DataStage TX was straightforward. We faced many challenges with our change programme but data integration wasn't one of them. From day one WebSphere DataStage TX worked efficiently and it currently processes about 120,000 messages a day."

Increased efficiency at the touch of a button

The new integrated IT infrastructure has transformed the way Yorkshire Water's business works. Staff who work in the field visiting householders who have reported a problem with issues such as water quality are now equipped with laptops that provide access to information that can help with diagnosing and

solving problems. Staff no longer have to visit the office to be allocated their jobs for the day - a work schedule is sent to their laptop and they can get straight out on their visits. Updates can be sent back to the office to show job progress or request further resources.

Customer service has also improved in Yorkshire Water's call centres. If a customer calls with a complaint about water pressure, for example, agents can do an onscreen enquiry into the work management system to see if anything is happening in the neighbourhood that could cause the problem. Better access to up to date information means 70% of customer calls are now closed on first contact.

Extracting cost from the business

The implementation of WebSphere DataStage TX has delivered a number of benefits to the IT department at Yorkshire Water. The development and maintenance of interfaces between many different systems previously took hours of manual coding whereas now they are created and maintained using drag and drop graphics and wizards. In many cases Yorkshire Water can reuse integration work done elsewhere in its infrastructure simply by changing job specific variables. This has saved, and continues to save, considerable staff time and budget. It also isolates applications from changes that take place elsewhere in the IT environment.

"WebSphere DataStage TX has been a great success and enables us to do things we couldn't do before," confirms Giles. " We are able to respond quickly and efficiently to changes the business requires and get amended versions of systems out to people incredibly quickly."

The new IT infrastructure at Yorkshire Water, in which WebSphere DataStage TX plays a hidden but very important part, has reduced operating costs by millions of pounds through enabling more efficient ways of working. The company estimates annual savings of £8.5 million in its water and waste business units.

Delivering grade A efficiency

Since implementing its comprehensive change programme, Yorkshire Water's performance has reached the highest levels. It was awarded a unique four A grades by Ofwat for operating and efficiency measures in drinking and waste water operations. On compliance measures, it obtained its best ever drinking water and waste water performance and achieved reductions in water leakage and pollution incidents. All these achievements contributed towards Yorkshire Water being named Utility Company of the Year at the Utility Industry Achievement Awards in 2004.

Yorkshire Water is not resting on its laurels however. "We are constantly being squeezed to reduce our costs while improving our service levels. Efficient and reliable IT solutions like WebSphere DataStage TX help us to achieve the improvements we are seeking. We see it as an important part of our long-term infrastructure," concludes Giles.

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