

DataMirror Hub solution delivers first-class results across The Post Office

Commentary by John Greenlees,
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INDUSTRY

POSTAL SERVICES

BUSINESS APPLICATION

ENTERPRISE APPLICATION INTEGRATION DATA WAREHOUSING

^{DataMirror®}
Constellar® Hub

The Post Office (www.postoffice.co.uk) is one of the United Kingdom's leading businesses employing approximately 200,000 people and generating annual revenues in excess of £7 billion. The Post Office connects every person, business and community in the United Kingdom and with the rest of the world in a way no other organization can. Through its Royal Mail Service Delivery division which handles 20 billion items a year, The Post Office touches the lives of every UK citizen. Post Office Network, the part of the business that looks after a network of some 19,000 post offices, is Europe's largest retail chain serving over 28 million customers a week. And Parcelforce Worldwide reliably delivers over 140 million parcels each year across 239 countries.

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The Problem

The overriding ambition of The Post Office is to become a complete distribution company with global reach.

As well as building on core services including mail, parcels and counter transactions, the Organization is currently expanding into markets such as logistics and contract distribution, electronic services and the provision of high street services for banks. It also has a growing international presence that has been strengthened through a number of overseas acquisitions.

As a result, The Post Office is committed to exploiting new technology to increase efficiency and improve the range and quality of service offered to customers. It was based on this commitment that the Organization decided to build a new corporate data infrastructure, the Enterprise Systems Program, to radically improve every element of The Post Office's operations.

In basic terms, the purpose of the new infrastructure was to get the right information to the right people at the right time. Central to the project, was the desire to treat data as a corporate asset while fostering flexibility and agility from the individual business units.

The Solution

The Post Office's core applications cover every part of the business including human resources, marketing, retail services and equipment management. These applications run

on a variety of operating platforms and generate huge volumes of data in a diversity of formats.

"We needed an architecture which would enable us to bring together this multitude of applications while reducing complexity and maximizing throughput," says John Greenlees, Data Exchange Service (DES) Manager for The Post Office. "There are thousands of interfaces – each one a potential bottleneck – so we had to be sure that the solution we chose would be robust, flexible and scalable."

After an intensive review of the market, The Post Office selected DataMirror Constellar Hub to provide a key element of the technical infrastructure to put its plan into action. DataMirror Constellar Hub is a leading Oracle-based enterprise application integration (EAI) solution that enables the movement, transformation and integration of data between heterogeneous environments from a central point of control.

"The Post Office has a wide range of business applications that increasingly need to communicate with each other," says Greenlees. "The DES joins these applications together as an integrated architecture, which enables the movement of data between them and transforms data from one structure and format to another."

"This centralized hub approach enables the optimization of data movement and provides the ability to transform data into a consistent format which can then be used in a variety of ways to support the organization's activities."

The Benefits

To date, the DES team has installed three data Hub environments for development, release and production respectively. In addition, the team was designed, built and tested the foundation framework software and delivered a proof-of-concept project to validate processes and standards.

"The first step was to get the foundations in place and tested," says Greenlees. "Now we are rolling out the first three client projects – SPICE (Securing The Post Office's Integrated Commercial Environment), POFS (Post Office Finance System) and POISE (Parcels Operational Integrated Systems Environment) – all of which have vital systems integration needs. We also expect DataMirror Constellar Hub to play a role in our European Monetary Union (EMU) program."

Users of the SPICE implementation are seeing the benefits of DataMirror Constellar Hub. The DataMirror solution has brought together data from three previously disparate applications: Royal Mail Finance, Parcelforce Worldwide Finance and Royal Mail Customer Service. Now, key account managers can access a central database from their laptops anywhere in the country at any time.

"At the moment, it is only the largest corporate customers who are benefiting from improved access to information that DataMirror Constellar Hub has delivered to account managers," says Greenlees. "But as our project unfolds, this new approach will positively impact every aspect of our business. DataMirror Constellar

Hub is also acting as a feeder system for our new enterprise data warehouse, which will revolutionize our understanding of customers' needs and preferences."

The sheer scale of the project means that a succession of benefits will be realized over a number of years. Nevertheless, Greenlees' team has already delivered significant efficiencies through centralized management and support.

"With DataMirror Constellar Hub providing a focal point for data and knowledge, we now have a single point of control which offers considerable economies of scale," says Greenlees. "For example, once a Hub interface has been created, we can reuse the components again and again, thus saving time and resources."

Conclusions

Newfound data access enabled by DataMirror Constellar Hub gives The Post Office confidence in its future usage of the DataMirror solution. With the first phase of the project completed and the rollout of client applications well underway, Greenlees is confident that the IT panacea first envisaged will soon become a reality.

"We have proved the concept of enterprise-wide data integration and already we are enjoying the rewards through improved data quality, universal access and operational efficiencies," he says. "We are committed to expanding the concept into other business areas and believe that the original goals, though ambitious, are now within sight."



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1-800-362-5955

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