



Harvesting Data for Canada's Wheat Growers

Canadian Wheat Board Harnesses Data with Informatica to Integrate Applications and Drive Better Decision Making

FAST FACTS

BUSINESS INITIATIVES

- Deliver timely business intelligence to decision makers, farmers and industry partners
- Modernize the business with industry-standard supply chain systems
- Ensure rapid, cost-effective development of new business solutions

TECHNOLOGY STRATEGY

Implemented the Informatica Platform to meet the data integration needs of the Canadian Wheat Board's business intelligence initiatives, including an enterprise data warehouse, and to ensure the effective integration of the organization's new supply chain systems

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It is a critical part of our infrastructure that keeps our business applications communicating with each other."

— Darren Whyte, Chief Architect, I&T, Canadian Wheat Board

World's Largest Wheat and Barley Marketer

The Canadian Wheat Board (CWB) is the largest wheat and barley marketer in the world and one of Canada's biggest exporters. In a typical year, the CWB sells more than 20 million metric tonnes of grain to buyers in more than 70 countries, generating between \$4 billion and \$8 billion in revenue. Controlled by western Canadian farmers, the Winnipeg-based organization returns all sales revenue, less marketing costs, to farmers.

The CWB is a grain-marketing agency that coordinates the efforts of some 75,000 grain farmers and hundreds of grain companies, all working together to maximize the value of each year's harvest. It's a business that thrives on information—everything from grain prices and sales forecasts to shipment quantities and stockpile levels. "We're a data-driven enterprise," says Darren Whyte, chief architect with the CWB. "We have an enormously complex supply chain, and ensuring timely, accurate access to information is critical to our success."

For decades, the CWB relied on mainframe-based applications to handle most of its information-management needs. But as global markets and trading systems grew more complex, the CWB's systems were challenged to keep up. Increasingly, managers and sales teams needed access to better data and more sophisticated analyses—and they needed it faster than before.

BENEFITS

- Enabled seamless integration of business and supply chain applications
- Enabled accurate, efficient migration of data from mainframe to repositories and archives

NUTS AND BOLTS

- Solution: Data integration
- Products: Informatica PowerCenter® Advanced Edition
- Services: Informatica Professional Services
- Sources: Legacy mainframe applications, Oracle E-Business Suite and custom-developed supply chain application
- Target: Enterprise data warehouse and supply chain applications

Rising to the Challenge

The CWB rose to the challenge of delivering more reliable data at a quicker pace to decision makers. A few years ago, it developed a business intelligence strategy and backed it with a series of IT initiatives, starting with the creation of an enterprise data warehouse that began pulling together data from disparate applications and making it available for business analysis and reporting. That's when the CWB invested in the Informatica® Platform, automating its entire data integration process and ensuring accurate data flows and transformations throughout the organization. "Informatica is a key component of the technology that is executing our business intelligence strategy" said Whyte.

The primary purpose of the data warehouse was to provide the business with a means of quickly and accurately developing its monthly Pool Return Outlook (PRO). The PRO is a forecast of farmer returns for grain marketed through the pool accounts. It is essential to the CWB because it is the primary source of information on expected returns for farmers, and it also forms the foundation for all of the CWB payments to farmers. The PRO is also important to the farmers because it enables them to make informed marketing decisions for their business. "Creating the PRO was a completely manual process involving a lot of spreadsheets," says Genevieve Gifford, data analyst. "It used to take a couple weeks of effort to manually gather data each month." Today, developing the PRO results using the data warehouse each month takes about a day on average.

Building a Modern Supply Chain

In a more recent initiative, the CWB upgraded its supply chain platform by implementing Oracle E-Business Suite applications and building a custom application—the Farmer Payment and Procurement Services (FPPS)—that helps the organization communicate and do business with farmers. Among other tasks, the FPPS helps the CWB manage contracts with farmers, track grain deliveries and issue payments.

The supply chain transformation project marked a significant step forward for the CWB, helping the organization modernize and standardize its technology infrastructure on a new generation of financial, procurement and logistics applications. Making the new platform work, however, would require tight integration between the FPPS system and Oracle E-Business Suite. Even modules within Oracle E-Business Suite—including its transportation management applications—needed to be better integrated.

Informatica supplied the universal data integration capabilities necessary to tie together the applications and allow them to efficiently share information. Informatica's multimodal data provisioning capabilities gave the CWB the flexibility to deliver data using any protocol, format or latency requirement needed—all within a single, unified environment. "The Informatica Platform is the glue that holds together our applications," says Whyte. "It is a critical part of our infrastructure that keeps our business applications communicating with each other."

The Oracle and FPPS supply chain platform also furnished a rich new source of data with which to populate its data warehouse and business intelligence solutions. The CWB employed Informatica technology to simplify and automate moving the right data into the warehouse and transforming it into a format suitable for analysis. It also feeds the results of warehouse-based analytics back to applications, including FPPS, to complete key tasks such as determining the exact payments to farmers.

Driving Better Decisions

The CWB routinely shares information and analyses from its systems with Western Canada's farmers and its other industry partners. For farmers, these communications drive crucial decisions, such as when to deliver different types and grades of grain to the CWB. Consequently, the CWB strives to avoid breakdowns or delays in its systems. "We're trying to provide excellent service to the people we do business with, so our systems need to be running effectively and efficiently," says Whyte. "Having a reliable technology to integrate our applications helps us do that."

The comprehensive application integration made possible by the Informatica Platform means that the CWB can gather intelligence and disseminate it to decision makers faster and more reliably. And, as new business initiatives arise, Informatica technology helps IT cost-effectively scale to deliver new technology solutions on time. "Standardizing on Informatica for data integration helps IT become more proficient and productive, so we can turn around solutions for the business more quickly," says Ryan Penner, solution architect with the CWB.

Throughout its migration project, Informatica Professional ServicesSM experts worked side by side with the CWB's IT team to provide timely guidance and knowledge transfer. "They've all been top notch and an incredible resource," Whyte says.

The next steps in the CWB's modernization plan include completely retiring its legacy mainframe in favor of its new client-server-based supply chain platform. "Most of the applications on the mainframe are already obsolete," says Whyte. "But some are still active and we may need to port the data to another environment." Target repositories could include a data warehouse or data mart—especially if the business still needs access to the information—and Informatica could help with this migration. "It's a significant undertaking to get rid of a mainframe, and Informatica will be an important part of that process," he says.



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