



Creating a single view of customers to deliver improved operational efficiencies and enhanced customer service, enabled by seamless data migration from legacy systems.

FAST FACTS

CUSTOMER

Vertex (part of United Utilities)

CHALLENGE

Create an agile, customer-centric IT infrastructure that delivers improved customer service and increased operational efficiencies by undertaking a large-scale data migration from multiple legacy systems.

INFORMATICA SOLUTION

Informatica PowerCenter®

BENEFITS

- Seamless migration of legacy systems to new, customer-centric IT environment.
- Savings of £9 million per year stemming from Vertex's successful completion of the new IT environment.
- Enhanced customer service by gaining a single view of each customer across United Utilities' water supply business.
- Future-proofed system that is sufficiently flexible and agile to adapt to changing customer needs.

“The need to deliver the highest levels of customer service in a regulated market makes the utilities sector extremely challenging. To succeed we needed to create and migrate information to an agile, integrated IT infrastructure across our entire customer base.”

— David Homan, CBP Programme Director, Vertex

Vertex is an international business process outsourcer, with particular expertise in customer management. A subsidiary of the FTSE 100 company United Utilities, Vertex develops and implements a range of service solutions including transformational outsourcing, combining its skills in consulting, technology and outsourced service provision to stimulate and facilitate business change and flexibility.

Vertex's head office is in Manchester and it has 9,000 employees based in 69 locations across the UK. Internationally, Vertex has operations in Canada, India, Liechtenstein, Switzerland and the USA.

The Challenge

The UK utilities market has undergone unprecedented change in the last 10 years. The privatisation of existing water, gas and electricity suppliers, market consolidation and the opening of the market to new entrants has increased competition. In the water market, companies need to fund large capital investment programmes to meet their environmental, regulatory and customer priorities while still keeping costs in check. Creating a customer-focussed organisation that combines the highest levels of service with greater efficiencies, thereby achieving brand loyalty amongst customers, is crucial to business success.

To meet these demands, suppliers need an agile technology infrastructure that delivers the highest levels of customer service while driving efficiency across the business. Data integration is central to this as information in legacy systems must be either migrated or integrated with new customercentric systems to create a single view of the customer that is accessible across the business. The in-efficiencies created by multiple, disparate and siloed systems threatens both customer confidence and company profitability.

“Informatica PowerCenter has been at the heart of this project execution and we’ve seen quantifiable benefits already. By cutting the cost of servicing customers we are seeing savings of £9 million per year from the new alto billing system.”

— David Homan,
CBP Programme Director, Vertex

“Utilities are going through a major change programme as they adapt to a customer centric market,” said David Homan, CBP programme director for Vertex. “Following on from the challenge of deregulation, factors such as mergers and acquisitions, the advent of metering for water customers and the need to replace ageing technology means that change is the only constant in this sector.”

United Utilities is one of the UK’s largest utilities organisations. Its principal activities are managing and operating the regulated electricity distribution, water and wastewater networks in northwest England; a region with a population of around seven million people. It needed to support business change in its water supply unit to give a single view of customer by incorporating both metered and unmetered customers into a single system Vertex was therefore commissioned to migrate existing legacy applications for United Utilities to a new web-enabled, customer-centric system without impacting the business in any way.

The Solution

The goal of Vertex’s Customer Billing Programme (CBP) was to create a new, single billing system to cover all of United Utilities’ 5.3 million active customers and inactive water accounts. The project needed to ensure that consistent customer information would be available across the business, both to management and customer service agents and eventually directly to customers through the internet. Additionally, the new system would increase efficiency and lower the cost of servicing customers. Seamlessly migrating data from the two legacy billing applications and eight other data sources to the new Vertex-developed alto billing system was critical.

It was recognised that the data migration project would be intense and critical to the success of the wider programme. A robust transformation tool was required and, following an extensive review of the data management products on the market Vertex selected and deployed Informatica PowerCenter.

Vertex’s experienced Data Migration team made full use of the Informatica technology and delivered a high quality and flexible solution that delivered beyond any expectations. The solution successfully enabled all 3.3 million active and 2 million inactive customer accounts to be utilised via the new system. Informatica PowerCenter was a key contributor to that success.

The project began towards the end of 2002 and a phased approach saw the first customer bills produced on the new system in March 2004, with the project being completed at the end of August 2005.

“As well as providing a single view of the customer, the CBP project is making a major contribution to United Utilities’ bottom line,” said Mr. Homan. “Informatica PowerCenter has been at the heart of this project execution and we’ve seen quantifiable benefits already. By cutting the cost of servicing customers we are seeing savings of £9 million per year from the new alto billing system.”

Why Informatica?

Informatica was evaluated against other competing solutions but was selected due to its robust, fast, market-proven technology and Vertex's previous experience of using PowerCenter in successful data warehousing projects. This knowledge of Informatica's strengths and its ability to integrate with a wide range of data sources were crucial to its adoption.

Informatica PowerCenter was at the centre of the CBP data migration and was critical to the seamless and successful migration of customers by the integration of all existing data between the new and old systems.

"We needed to migrate data to our new alto system without disrupting customers or affecting the business in any way," said Mr. Homan. "Using the robust functionality within PowerCenter made the process relatively straightforward and we are very pleased with the results. Given this success and our growing experience with Informatica we are now adopting PowerCenter in other projects."

Several key capabilities of Informatica's PowerCenter solution were at the heart of Vertex's decision. Vertex knew that major data migration projects can often be expensive and risky. Migrating from legacy environments often requires a specialised skill set amongst staff; systems often lack up-to-date documentation; migrating multiple systems requires resolving redundancies and inconsistencies; and, iterative 'try and learn' design processes expose the unmanageability and delays associated with hand-coding.

Vertex believed that using PowerCenter would enable them to deliver this intensive data migration project both on time and on budget.

The solution impressed Vertex because of its non-invasive mechanisms for accessing legacy databases, through common graphical, SQL interfaces.

The built-in data profiling tool ensures smooth data transitioning, while the built-in data cleansing ensures data is reconciled and business rules are appropriately transferred. Utilising PowerCenter, Vertex's new alto billing system achieved its goal of customer-centric data while driving huge cost savings to the business.

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vCBP Programme Director, Vertex

The Results

The CBP project successfully went live in January 2004, with full rollout completed by late summer 2005. All 5.3 million active and inactive accounts were migrated without impact to either business or customers. As well as the annual savings in the cost of servicing customers the new alto system provides United Utilities with the operational agility to meet demanding customer needs. United Utilities' 450 contact centre agents can now access client records in real-time while customers are on the phone, ensuring a fast, accurate response. Information is always integrated and up to date, enhancing customer service and satisfaction while the scalability of the new system means it can deal with greater customer volumes.

Other customer-focussed features of the new system provide flexibility to organisations with multiple branches or a mix of metered and unmetered sites. Through a single view of the customer, group billing enables accounts to be tailored to customer needs and bills are delivered accordingly, further improving customer service. Being fully web-enabled means not only can the system be accessed by United Utilities staff working outside the office, but in the future self-service functionality can be rolled out to customers, saving both time and money.

"United Utilities needed a future-proofed system to ensure the highest level of service for its water customers," concluded Mr. Homan.

"The CBP project enabled this through a customer-centric solution that is delivering real operational efficiencies alongside enhanced customer service. Informatica was a critical part of the CBP project, handling our data transformation needs flexibly and seamlessly."

The success of the CBP project has raised awareness of the importance of data integration within United Utilities. Informatica PowerCenter has now been deployed on another major project within the organisation.

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