



Creating a real-time data environment to help enhance customer service and competitiveness

FAST FACTS

CUSTOMER

Virgin Media plc

CHALLENGE

Create a real-time, integrated information environment that enables key personnel and teams within the business to gain instant details on customers and service information.

INFORMATICA SOLUTION

Informatica PowerCenter

BENEFITS

- Single entry point to multiple customer management systems for call centre agents, improving customer service capabilities.
- Standardised approach to data integration across the business, leading to significant
- productivity gains for the IT team and the ability to deliver strategic business projects faster.
- Scope to extend the value of the investment in the future, with real-time data providing support for customer marketing activities to drive business growth.

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Virgin Media is one of the UK’s leading communications and entertainment companies with a sizeable challenge – addressing a customer market that includes the majority of UK consumers with a new proposition. When the company launched in February 2007, following the merger between ntl, Telewest and Virgin Mobile, it became the first UK provider to offer quad-play services – mobile telephony, fixed telephony, broadband and television.

With nearly 10 million customers across the country and services being utilised continuously every day, Virgin Media creates enormous volumes of data. Moreover, the current business resulted from the mergers of ntl, Telewest and Virgin Mobile, and the two cable operators evolved from multiple local franchises, meaning customer data exists in multiple customer management systems.

The merger of ntl and Telewest in particular, in March 2006, was the catalyst for a project to enhance the integration of data that impacted customer service. The two companies grew rapidly through the cable telecoms boom of the 1990s, largely through the integration of many local cable franchises across the UK. While there had been many projects undertaken to provide greater visibility of customer information across the business and enhance the provision of information to contact centre agents, the merger created a requirement to accelerate that process. Moreover, when the decision was taken to adopt the Virgin Media brand, an internal initiative began to ensure that customer service standards could be met across the entire business, regardless of which former franchise area the customer was located in.

NUTS AND BOLTS

- Data Integration: Informatica
- Sources:
 - Various customer management systems from former cable franchise areas across the UK
 - Billing systems: predominantly ICOMS for consumer services and IRB for the business division
 - Various flat files from multiple sources
- Target: Oracle-based datawarehouse plus
- Netezza datawarehouse appliance for analytics
- Platform: Mixture of Sun Solaris and IBM AIX, plus some Microsoft Windows Advanced Server

As the UK's only quad-play provider, the company now faces intensive competition from the many large companies that it competes with: subscription-based television companies, telecom operators and mobile providers. While the services they provide all differ, one clear factor has emerged in the market – customer service is absolutely paramount. For Virgin Media, the root of excellent customer service was determined to be accurate and comprehensive information.

The Challenge

The front line for customer service for ntl and Telewest had long been the contact centre agents who manage customer enquiries. These requests can be as simple as a change of service package or a domestic relocation, as detailed as an intricate billing question or as complex as a technical fault with the network that requires detailed ongoing communication with the customer until resolution.

When the companies came together, a central information management team was created to address the requirement to provide accurate, quality business information. In the drive to enhance customer service, the ability to provide real-time information was seen as critical. Any customer service agent aiming to deal promptly and effectively with a customer enquiry ran the risk of being unable to do so or of taking incorrect action unless every piece of information that affected the customer's services was completely up to date and instantly accessible.

“We needed to find a way to overcome the fact that our customer management systems were architecturally tied to the legacy of cable franchises that had been acquired around the UK. Our data needed to be integrated through a single point in order to ensure high levels of customer service regardless of where in the country a customer was located,” said Paul Froggatt, Information Management Manager for Virgin Media.

“We identified the need for an information ‘hub’ through which all customer and service data flowed. No matter what customer management system our contact centre agents were interfacing with, we needed to ensure that they gained real-time and therefore wholly accurate information. It was that requirement that caused us to develop an integration competency centre approach to managing all of that data through a single hub,” he said.

Given the wide range of data involved, efforts to enhance customer service would also have the benefit of providing more accurate information to marketing teams and other departments involved in the drive to upsell and cross-sell more services to existing customers. As virtually everything that is actioned on a customer's behalf creates what is known as a “work order” to ensure that all requests are completed successfully, identifying what data needed to be brought into a real-time integration environment was not the main challenge. The bigger test was being able to integrate such a large volume of data from such a number of data sources, created by a business serving the needs of almost 10 million customers every second of every day. With an average of 95,000 new work orders being created across the business daily through contact centre enquiries, order placements and transactions, the volume of customer data continues to grow every day.

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“It was clear that the data hub could satisfy many other downstream information requirements beyond the demands of our contact centres,” said Mr Froggatt. “In doing so, we needed to take a methodical approach to the integration of customer management system data around the UK. That meant our data integration strategy was fundamental to the team achieving its objectives.”

The Solution

Having used various Informatica solutions in the past for integrating Telewest data, Virgin Media selected Informatica PowerCenter for the creation of its data hub, and consequently for the core of its integration competency centre strategy. Given the number of data sources that PowerCenter is able to interface with, the project team felt that the solution was best placed to meet the technical criteria identified. It was also determined to have the capacity to handle such a high throughput of data.

In the summer of 2006, the project team began creating an information hub using PowerCenter, integrating data from each of the customer management systems in turn. This involved integrating customer and service data from each of the former franchise areas through PowerCenter, and ensuring that it then interfaced with the contact centre systems.

In assessing the best migration path for the project, the team first had to decide whether to standardise the data architecture around the integration of the former Telewest or the former ntl customer management systems. Given that a strategic decision had been made to standardise on the former Telewest customer management systems, focus was given to integrating those systems, which consisted of Convergys' ICOMS, used primarily for consumer customers but also for fixed line telephony business customers, and Convergys IRB, used for non-fixed line telephony

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business customers. The former ntl customer management systems, consisting of an ICMS system from CSG, an SMS system from Bytel, a Geneva system from Convergys and a bespoke developed SABS system, would be migrated to ICOMS/IRB over time.

PowerCenter was used to develop the new real-time data integration hub in tandem with the migration of data from the former ntl customer management systems into ICOMS and IRB. This approach – of introducing data feeds to PowerCenter as part of their migration to single customer management systems – was deemed to offer lower risk than undertaking the exercise as a separate project. All data from the former Telewest customer management systems was then brought into the data integration environment at the next stage of the project.

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we are able to identify more opportunities to upsell and cross-sell services to our existing customers. This is the main root of customer and revenue growth for our business,” said Mr Froggatt.

The team faced a slightly different set of integration challenges with each of the systems that needed to be brought into the real-time environment because of the franchise legacy. What has been created by overcoming this challenge is an integration competency centre that enables the team to be more productive at information management projects across the business.

The Results

The obvious result of the project is that customer service has benefited from the provision of real-time data to assist in answering customer enquiries and managing the way services are delivered across the UK. Having created the real-time data environment, the broader benefits to the business are also being realised through the integration of data with downstream solutions to support analysis and operational requirements, such as ‘guiding’ call records to appropriate rating/billing systems, to support the authorisation of interactive TV (Video On Demand) events and to support telephony number porting.

There have also been significant benefits for the information management team in that the standardised approach to how data is managed has helped to reduce the time taken to complete business information projects. These gains have made it possible for the team to be more productive by handling far more integration projects than were previously possible. Informatica DataAnalyzer was also utilised to provide ‘dashboard’ applications to customers of ntl:Telewest Business, the

company’s business division, enabling them to gain real-time information on how they are using communications services.

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With the integration of all of the customer management systems nearing completion, the next steps are to add further franchisebased information to the environment to create business benefits that extend beyond customer service. One of the next projects is to provide real-time information to network technicians and installation contractors in the field, on their workload and tasks to be completed. Since working with Informatica, Virgin Media has been able to extend its data integration projects to new horizons. Whereas

“By taking our data into a real-time environment, we are able to respond to the needs of our customers and stakeholders in real-time. Without Informatica my team wasn’t able to extract data from our iSeries-based systems, as we didn’t have those skills. With Informatica we have been able to perform this function across many platforms, including iSeries DB2, Oracle, SQL Server and Netezza. The benefits of that for a fast-moving business in a highly competitive market are numerous.”

— Paul Froggatt, Information Management Manager, Virgin Media

INFORMATICA[®]
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