STCS PROJECT PROFILE

Homes and Communities Agency
Business Objects XI3.1 Migration

Homes & Communities Agency

STCS

HOMES AND COMMUNITIES AGENCY

The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) is the national housing and regeneration agency for England, with an annual investment budget of more than £5bn. The HCA was formed on 1 December 2008 through the transfer of the functions and assets of English Partnerships; the investment functions of the Housing Corporation; a number of delivery programmes from Communities and Local Government and the transfer of the Academy for Sustainable Communities.

The Homes and Communities Agency is a non-departmental public body and their sponsor government department is Communities and Local Government (CLG).

The statutory objects of the HCA, as listed in the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 are to:

- improve the supply and quality of housing in England
- secure the regeneration or development of land or infrastructure in England
- support in other ways the creation, regeneration or development of communities in England or their continued well-being
- contribute to the achievement of sustainable development and good design in England, with a view to meeting the needs of people living in England.

"The BOXI upgrade project was a resounding success. It was delivered with almost no disruption to end users. This is testament to the excellent technical job done by STCS and HCA IT Service Development."

Head of IT Service Development
Homes and Communities Agency

PROJECT REQUIREMENT AND SCOPE

As part of the setup of the Agency, it inherited a number of disparate and outdated systems, including several Business Objects reporting environments:

- Business Objects v6.5 full client
- Business Objects v5 full client
- Business Objects v5 InfoView
- Oracle 8.1.6 database
- Windows Server 2000 and 2003

Keen to enhance the end-user experience, to update the IT infrastructure and provide cost-savings to the agency, STCS took the lead by analysing the current Business Objects environments and providing a way to upgrade and integrate into Business Objects XI release 3.1 (BOXIr3.1).

Our main tasks included:

- Document the current environments and provide a plan for upgrading and integrating them.
- Patching of v6.5 environment to ensure stability of the service prior to BOXIr3.1 migration.
- Installation of a Proof of Concept environment for Business Objects v6.5 InfoView, to show that there was the option of merging the v5 environment into the v6.5

environment, as a stepping stone to a subsequent BOXIr3.1 migration.

- Installation of a Proof of Concept environment for BOXIr3.1, to prove that a stable environment could be built and that the v6.5 environment could be imported into it. This also helped identify additional functionality that the end-user, developers and administrators may wish to use.
- Training needs analysis for STCS and the agency's IT support staff. Procurement of a set of training courses specific to STCS's and the agency's needs.
- Production of macros to confirm that the 30,000+ migrated reports can be used in the migrated environment.
- Migration and integration of the various environments directly to BOXI r3.1 development/test and live environments, including installation and configuration of Oracle Database Server 11gR2, BOXI r3.1 server, InfoView and Desktop Intelligence.
- Assistance with auditing and migrating licences without extra cost to agency, even though in previous discussions, a SAP partner had said there would be additional licensing costs. This included rationalisation of user accounts to ensure that the agency complied with the licensing terms, and other changes to free up approximately 45 user licences.
- Implementation of improvements including Active Directory integration, and single sign-on.
- Documentation of the migration process, for use during the go-live and to assist with on-going support of the systems.

Benefits of the new BOXI environments were:

Enhanced Functionality
Enhanced functionality within the upgraded systems for end-users, developers and administrators.

Integration and simplification
A merged environment that allows users to report information from the multiple systems within a single business objects environment. This also allows for more cross-system reports to be produced without the need to merging report output in Excel. Reducing time and therefore cost to produce reports, and enabling automation of the reports.

Reduced total cost of ownership
The use of BOXIr3.1 has allowed HCA to standardise on a single toolset – lowering costs by reducing maintenance, hardware, end user training and support costs. Further changes are being planned, in areas such as report scheduling which should reduce the number of user licences required, and potentially the associated costs with these licences.

Compliance and future-proofing

The existing environments were no longer supported by SAP. The new environment is supported and allows the agency to take advantage of new technology and upgrades, for Business Objects, Operating System, hardware and supporting IT infrastructure. Previous Microsoft Windows patching of the BO v5 environment had introduced a major instability problem. That type of issue is less likely with the supported versions of software. Subsequent migrations to newer versions of Business Objects will be easier due to the use of up-to-date version of Business Objects and there being less environments to migrate.

TECHNICAL APPROACH

STCS worked closely with Agency to understand the requirements and work out a plan that would limit the disruption to the users, whilst providing the new server as quickly and efficiently as possible.

A BOXIr3.1 proof of concept was developed in a new virtual server environment to act as both proof of technology, and a basis for information gathering and definition of requirements. This included importing some information from both the v5 and v6.5 environments.

Once the basic requirements and a plan had been agreed a development/test environment was built, including a full configuration and migration of the older environments. This was then fully tested by the Agency. This process was fully documented and revised to include changes agreed with the agency during testing.

The development/test environment was then rebuilt to prove that the final documented installation process was correct and fully tested.

Due to the huge number of reports to be migrated, these were copied and automatically tested via scripts prior to go live over a period of two weeks. The new live environment was also built and configured in advance of the final implementation.

A full weekend of system downtime had been agreed with the Agency to allow for go-live. On the Friday evening of the go-live weekend the v5 and v6.5 environments were fully migrated, including any new or updated user reports. This was then made available to a select number of key-users over the weekend to perform confidence testing, prior to making the system available to all users.

A wide range of technical skills were required to deliver the BOXI upgrade. The fact that the upgrades were delivered together (rather than as 2 separate phases originally considered by the agency) and that there were only 3 relatively minor BOXI related calls made to the HCA IT service desk in the 3 days after go live is testament to the excellent all-round technical job.

KEY TECHNOLOGIES USED

The system has been built using the following technologies:

- Business objects XI R3.1
- Oracle Database 11g R2
- Windows Server 2008 R2
- Windows Citrix Servers
- Apache Tomcat 5.5