

Customer Profile

Information Builders enables agile information solutions with the WebFOCUS business intelligence (BI) platform and integration technologies from iWay Software.

Guardian Group of Funds

Snapshot

Organization

Guardian Group of Funds (ggof.com), a mutual fund manager that sells through financial intermediaries throughout Canada.

The Challenge

Make CRM and financial information available to users in their choice of formats to maximize the ROI of a major software implementation.

The Strategy

Create a data warehouse, ad hoc reporting environment, KPI dashboard, and Web portal to streamline access to customer and sales information.

The Results

Enterprise intelligence, a BI initiative that empowers users to gather their own information, increases the effectiveness and efficiency of decision-making activities, and decreases requests for custom reports.

Information Builders Solution

WebFOCUS, iWay Software, Consulting.



Shaun Allan, enterprise business analyst; Julie Hodge, assistant vice president of information services; and Stuart Freeman, senior vice president of operations, GGOF.

Web-Based Portal Empowers Sales Force at GGOF

BI Initiative Helps Mutual Funds Wholesaler Outmaneuver Its Competitors

In today's highly competitive financial services industry, resourceful companies often use business intelligence technology to identify and exploit unique opportunities. For GGOF (Guardian Group of Funds), part of Bank of Montreal's BMO Financial Group, Information Builders' products and services are essential components in a strategy that enables the investment firm to compete in a marketplace dominated by much larger competitors. Using WebFOCUS and iWay Software, GGOF has completed multiple phases of its enterprise intelligence (EI) initiative, which seeks to deliver greater insight into business processes, distribution channels, and customer relationships.

"Enterprise intelligence is a comprehensive business initiative that centers on the intelligent use of information, relieving manual intervention and strengthening core competencies," explains Julie Hodge, assistant vice president of information services

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at GGOF. “We are taking a collaborative and integrated approach to managing data and processes while ensuring flexibility, accuracy, and ease of use to business users.”

“We have assets rapidly approaching \$4 billion, while our competitors deal with more than \$15 billion in assets,” adds Shaun Allan, enterprise business analyst at GGOF. “EI is an essential tool at GGOF that we use to outmaneuver the competition by providing the best possible service.”

Picking a Winning Strategy

GGOF specializes in the management, marketing, and wholesale distribution of mutual funds. The company provides investors with a full product line of 31 mutual funds diversified by asset class, geographic region, and investment style. GGOF has offices across Canada and offers its funds exclusively through financial intermediaries.

In an industry where products are very similar, being able to thoroughly understand each client’s needs is what sets GGOF apart. In order to adopt a more customer-centric business strategy, the company implemented a customer relationship management (CRM) system at the end of 2001. This helps sales, service, and support personnel to better track and respond to the needs of customers, but it also acted as a catalyst for information requests and created a pressing need for data integration. GGOF has made significant investments in operational systems for each business unit to track and store data from many different computer platforms, business applications, and data formats.

“We were pleased with the potential of our CRM initiatives, but our users needed an easier way to access consolidated data,” Allan recalls. “They were requesting information from multiple systems in various formats, and we needed to supply both financial and nonfinancial information to different lines of business. Our analysts were inundated with requests for custom reports.”

Allan and other business leaders decided that combining all of their data into a cohesive data warehouse would be the most effective way to meet the reporting needs of these users. They spent two years researching various solutions and devising the architecture for a Web-accessible data warehouse. When they discovered Information Builders’ WebFOCUS, all of their theoretical plans began to gel.

“Information Builders had the entire business intelligence package: the extract, transform, and load (ETL) software for middleware procedures; the front-end for executive reporting; and the consulting and development services for building the data warehouse,” Allan explains. “We looked closely at many other software vendors, but Information Builders clearly had the best technology and the most experienced consulting organization for the best price.”

GGOF was particularly attracted to WebFOCUS for its cost-effective, thin-client software architecture. “Because WebFOCUS is 100 percent server-based, we didn’t have to purchase licenses for most of our users,” Allan continues. “The browser-based client architecture simplifies maintenance and reduces costs. Our strategy has been to get away from desktop applications and the support issues that come with them. WebFOCUS supports this strategy.”

“Information Builders’ Consulting supported us during all the crucial stages of the project and helped us achieve our technology and business objectives.”

According to Stuart Freeman, GGOF’s senior vice president of operations, GGOF’s strategic decision to partner with Information Builders allows the firm to leverage technology to improve productivity. “WebFOCUS is a critical tool that empowers users to make fundamental business decisions,” he says. “It enables us to promote cost-effective enterprise solutions in a seamlessly integrated environment.”

Investing in a New Reporting Infrastructure

A critical element of GGOF’s enterprise intelligence initiative is a new data warehouse, which resides on a Microsoft Windows NT server and was constructed using the Microsoft SQL Server 2000 database. Information Builders’ Consulting helped design the warehouse, deploying iWay adapters from iWay Software to pull in data from three critical systems: CRM data from Microsoft SQL Server, fund accounting data from Sybase, and record-keeping information from DB2 (the DB2 database is managed off-site by an application service provider). iWay includes powerful solutions for all types of data management, along with highly effective governing and resource management tools. The foundation for this capability is its wide range of 250-plus codeless adapters, which can work together to provide universal connectivity.

As part of GGOF’s EI initiative, Information Builders installed WebFOCUS and created a user-friendly environment for ad hoc reporting – including a Web portal that provides secure, personalized access for authorized users. “Phase one is a critical step in evolving the firm towards a Web-centric environment that will provide a single view of GGOF’s data,” Allan says. “Information Builders’ Consulting supported us during all the crucial stages of the project and helped us achieve our technology and business objectives. For example, it was a technical and strategic win for us to put an iWay adapter at the ASP location and bring down data to our data warehouse,” Allan adds.

Ultimately, the enterprise intelligence initiative will encompass all customer-facing business units as well as all back-office operations. “We have established a robust infrastructure that meets our immediate needs and is flexible enough to accommodate subsequent phases and requirements,” says Allan. “Information Builders Consulting delivered what we requested in just four months – on time and within budget.”

Enjoying High Yields From Current Information

In addition to housing an ad hoc reporting facility and a business intelligence dashboard for monitoring key performance indicators (KPIs), the new Web portal has become the gateway to a variety of Web-based and legacy applications. “The portal is the first thing users hit in the morning,” Allan says. “They log in to get all their reports, access all their applications, and also monitor the KPI Dashboard.”

The KPI Dashboard provides personalized access to in-depth analytics, allowing users to drill down into parameterized reports of sales and assets data.

“The ad hoc reporting facility is the most sought after piece of the whole solution,” says Jenny Greidanus, supervisor of business reporting and development at GGOF. “It is a flexible reporting system that users can tailor to their individual needs.”

Find Out More

To find out how our solutions can help your company succeed, talk to an Information Builders representative today.

Contact your local Information Builders office, visit us at

informationbuilders.com,

or in the U.S. and Canada,

call **(800) 969-4636.**

Initially, GGOF deployed the enterprise intelligence system to about 50 internal users in the sales department. These sales professionals use the new information system to more effectively sell funds to thousands of investment advisors through-out Canada. "Our users love it," says Edward Ku, supervisor of internal sales at GGOF. "It gives them the ability to quickly generate historical reports to target and qualify specific advisors. For example, when putting together a call campaign to generate interest in a specific fund, we can quickly run reports to target the largest asset holders."

These users require virtually no training. "The interface was developed by Information Builders and GGOF personnel, and it is extremely easy to use," confirms Greidanus. "Sales professionals can easily access the information they need, manipulate the output, choose how they want their reports displayed, and select the optimum format. It's a one-stop shop for consolidated data."

Recently, GGOF has expanded its deployment and now provides additional functionality to core business groups across the organization, including Fund Accounting, Compliance, Finance, and Support Services.

GGOF also uses WebFOCUS ReportCaster to send scheduled reports through the portal or via e-mail. Thanks to its comprehensive capabilities and immense flexibility, the WebFOCUS system has taken immense pressure off GGOF's analysts and developers. "Being able to give users a self-service application has cut our report requests 40-fold," Allan says. "We used to spend a day or two responding to each request. Now sales personnel can help themselves to information instantly through the ad hoc reporting system."

Enterprise intelligence represents an important milestone in GGOF's quest to leverage technology to compete in a marketplace dominated by much larger companies – increasing operational efficiency, boosting revenue, and decreasing costs. It also provides the flexibility necessary for future expansion. "Information Builders brought in a strong and comprehensive development team that quickly grasped our business needs and developed a system that was beyond our expectations," Allan concludes. "We are currently working with Information Builders and will continue to work with them as we evolve our enterprise intelligence solution."

