

Customer Profile

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

NASA

Snapshot

Organization

NASA's Launch Vehicle Processing Directorate manages the preparation and refurbishment of space shuttles and future reusable launch vehicles.

The Challenge

Create business intelligence (BI) applications to manage employee travel, budgets, IT expenditures, HR, and other core business activities.

The Strategy

Automate reporting, information delivery, data entry, and workflow-approval processes with a cohesive set of tools for reporting, IT integration, BI, and extract, transform, and load (ETL).

The Results

A standard, repeatable set of reporting processes feature portable analytics, consistent data-entry procedures, and integration with the Microsoft SharePoint portal environment.

Information Builders Solution

WebFOCUS, Active Technology reports, BI dashboards, Open Portal Services, iWay Service Manager, and Professional Services.



NASA Uses WebFOCUS and iWay for Reporting, Analysis, and Integration

New Reporting Initiatives Complement Twelve Years of BI Investments for Vehicle Processing Directorate

NASA's information systems are constantly evolving – and that's one reason Information Builders has been such a reliable technology partner. For several years, the Launch Vehicle Processing Directorate at NASA's Kennedy Space Center has relied on Information Builders WebFOCUS business intelligence (BI) software to monitor contractor performance and prepare space shuttle orbiters for launch. Today, this NASA directorate uses Information Builders' newest BI capabilities for a variety of operational reporting and integration tasks.

"As our requirements have grown over the years, WebFOCUS has grown at the same rate or quicker," says Ron Phelps, a project manager in the Launch Vehicle Processing Directorate. "Time and time again, the software has evolved to provide the capabilities we need."

“WebFOCUS enables our engineers to use their time more effectively. We can jump right into collecting and analyzing information rather than spinning our wheels merely looking for information.”

In an era of tough cost controls, NASA must complete its IT initiatives – whether developing new portals or creating BI dashboards – with minimal resources. Providing flexible data publishing and reporting functionality, WebFOCUS gives about 600 Directorate employees and contractors access to dozens of complex reports via standard browsers. Users throughout the organization can create and deploy richly formatted reports. WebFOCUS also supplies all the advanced web-based features needed to effectively use reports, such as integrated proactive hyperlink drilldowns – in all supported output formats – to any other report, program, or location without any additional client or viewer.

“WebFOCUS enables our engineers to use their time more effectively,” Phelps says. “We can jump right into collecting and analyzing information rather than spinning our wheels merely looking for information. We can request detailed, parameterized reports. And because WebFOCUS is browser-based, we don’t have to spend much time learning how to use new BI applications.”

Technology Grows With the Program

For many years the Directorate relied on WebFOCUS as one of the applications in its Insight system. Insight was key to NASA’s vision for a total knowledge management system, in which contractors and engineers share information across systems, platforms, and organizational barriers. “Knowledge management involves getting the right information to the right people at the right time, which helps people create knowledge,” explains Phelps. “Then they can share and act upon information in ways that will measurably improve the performance of NASA and its partners.”

Based on this premise, the Directorate also created electronic log and surveillance systems to identify and track the requirements associated with processing vehicles. NASA engineers also developed a WebFOCUS application that tracks all of their IT requirements. “If people need to purchase hardware, software, or other IT equipment, this application allows them to identify recommended products and costs, then obtains approvals and authorizations,” says Phelps.

The Directorate also created a budget application that helps control costs, as well as a WebFOCUS-based travel expense system that uses an e-mail-based workflow to gather information and route approvals. Budget managers formerly used spreadsheets to create and track budgets, which became confusing when people passed data back and forth. Now they use WebFOCUS to input data in a consistent way. “These processes all used to be manual,” Phelps explains. “Now they generate data automatically, and they use iWay adapters to interact with PeopleSoft, Maximo, and other business applications.”

Data integration solutions from iWay Software, a division of Information Builders, simplify access to many types of data, enabling the Directorate to address many different users’ information needs, including extract, transform, and load (ETL); enterprise information integration (EII) initiatives; and web services deployments.

Boosting Analysis and Integration Capabilities

As the Directorate revamps its user environment, it is integrating its WebFOCUS applications with a Microsoft SharePoint portal environment. A WebFOCUS BI dashboard, in conjunction with

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**.

“When it comes to the final countdown of a mission, WebFOCUS gives us confidence that we’re ready for launch.”

Open Portal Services, enables developers to deliver real-time BI content to the SharePoint Portal Server with little or no programming (Read our related story, “NASA Aims High With Integration of WebFOCUS and SharePoint”).

NASA also plans to use WebFOCUS Magnify to enhance searches within its portal environment. “By linking unstructured and structured data, we would be able to search on all sorts of enterprise information, enabling quicker decisions,” Phelps notes. “We think Magnify could help us in our search criteria, because we have a lot of unstructured documents. For example, it could let us search on keywords and set filters to find particular reports.”

With WebFOCUS Active Technology reports, Directorate engineers can access analytic capabilities even when they are disconnected from the network. Active Technology reports are particularly useful for analyzing cost and expense data during annual budgeting exercises. Phelps says this approach is very economical because it allows the Directorate to supply a few key data points, and then lets users drill down to the details as necessary. “Instead of formatting a PDF or Excel report, we can just send one key piece of information,” he explains.

Phelps used WebFOCUS Active Technology reports to create an emergency notification application that helps NASA evacuate the Kennedy Space Center in the event of a disaster. “For example, if a hurricane is coming in, managers at the director, division, and branch levels receive an Active Technology report that lists all pertinent employees – including their addresses and emergency contact numbers – so they can get a hold of each member,” he explains. “If Cocoa Beach gets hit hard they can instantly bring up a list of employees and filter on people in certain areas to make sure everybody is accounted for.”

Ultimately, Phelps envisions integrating WebFOCUS Active Technology reports with the SharePoint environment in order to provide selected data to both employees and contractors, and to automate the process of obtaining comments and reviews.

“WebFOCUS allows us to develop applications and get user buy-in very quickly,” he says. “We’re meeting operational requirements and administrative requirements with the software.”

Phelps and his team have relied on Information Builders Professional Services for various projects throughout the years. “Information Builders has been very responsive, and it has been a real treat to work with them,” concludes Phelps. “When it comes to the final countdown of a mission, WebFOCUS gives us confidence that we’re ready for launch.”

Active Technology Reports

WebFOCUS Active Technology reports combine data-sharing and analytic capabilities in a single, JavaScript-powered document that can be downloaded and viewed within a browser, online, or offline. Because the source data is included in the file, users can drill down and perform custom analyses.

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