



**GOOD AS GOLD**

PwC BPO's Kevin Elliott contends that business intelligence resulting from effective analysis of business data can return big dividends...helping companies spot trends and respond faster to rapidly changing markets.

# Turning Routine into Business Intelligence Gold

**P**ricewaterhouseCoopers Business Process Outsourcing (PwC BPO) group serves as the Global Back Office for multinational corporations and government organizations in North America, Europe, Latin America and Asia Pacific. Among the largest business process outsourcing facilities in the world, PwC BPO provides an integrated, multi-process solution to managing finance and accounting, applications process, procurement, human resources, real estate process, and customer relationship management operations for clients in a wide range of industries. Since its establishment in 1999, the Business Process Outsourcing group has enjoyed the distinction of being one of the fastest growing practice areas of PricewaterhouseCoopers.

The young company recognized that if it could take in one oil company's data and efficiently manage its back-office processes, it could do the

## SNAPSHOT

**Organization:** PricewaterhouseCoopers Business Process Outsourcing Solutions Inc. (PwC BPO), Calgary, Alberta

**The Challenge:** To be more efficient and capable than its clients were with their own data and to maintain those capabilities with many diverse data sources and standards, a challenge that none of its clients faced with their internal systems.

**Strategy:** Develop a multi-client business model that can access data from any client's business, populate a data warehouse with that data, and process the client's business rules on it. Add analysis tools that enable clients to effectively measure key performance indicators, identify trends and spot new relationships in the data.

**The Results:** Immediate returns on investment for the company and its clients. One client's costs were reduced in one unit by 25%. Clients can control back-office costs more effectively, treating them as variable rather than fixed costs. Clients have analysis capabilities they have not had in the past, even when running their own back-office systems.

**Information Builders Solution:** WebFOCUS, iWay, and IB Consulting

same for other companies, running the same processes on different data. In fact, by specializing in back-office business processes, it could not only manage them better than most companies do for themselves, but it could take all of its clients' routine back-office tasks and turn them into strategic gold—business intelligence (BI).

It's an innovative, but daunting goal. Client companies have many different computer systems, desktop software and networks already in place. To work with them, PwC BPO must be capable of reading their data, processing it,

routine, allowing them to focus on the extraordinary or the unusual, the strategic data that gives them insight into how well their firm is doing.

Information Builders was ultimately selected to provide the basic business tools, data modeling and data warehouse. Clients use standard Web browsers and Microsoft Office applications to create and access reports generated by WebFOCUS. WebFOCUS integrates into Microsoft Content Management Server to provide dynamic personalization and security for a multi-client environment.

Information Builders Consulting initially designed and delivered a proof-of-concept that validated the technical and business viability of the solution. Once approval was



Team members (left to right): Angie Trinh, Dave Kiss, Lyle Sutherland, Craig Wilkinson, and Hon Chung



Shannon Ryland, Don Posmituck, Kevin Elliott, Terry Rattai, and Philip Vander Ziel

then translating it back into the client's data formats.

#### Processing Excellence

PwC BPO found the solution to that problem in software from Information Builders and from iWay Software, an Information Builders company that specializes in rapid integration of applications, data, and systems. iWay adapters allow PwC BPO to connect to any data source its clients might use, while iWay ETL Manager transforms and loads client data into PwC BPO's informational model for processing. Clients use Information Builders WebFOCUS to create and view reports and seamlessly drill down to the operational data, using only a desktop browser. They can easily move data to desktop applications, such as Excel, directly from WebFOCUS.

The WebFOCUS ad hoc report generation capabilities, combined with WebFOCUS Report Caster, which sends standard reports to clients automatically, give clients a better view of their business than they ever had before. More important, they take managers' eyes off the ordinary and

given to the project, Information Builders Consulting worked closely with PwC BPO to gather the business requirements and to do the necessary data analysis and modeling. The consultants designed and developed the ETL and BI applications and provided project management of the development efforts.

#### Better Than the Original

The choice of software was critical to the success of PwC BPO, because it would play a huge role in giving the company the flexibility and efficiency on which its business model was based.

"We had to be a multi-client company," explains Kevin Elliott of PwC BPO. Few efficiencies are possible with only one client, but as each new client comes on board, the per-client costs of PwC BPO's infrastructure and staffing go down, while revenues grow.

The most important deliverable that PwC BPO provides to its clients is business flexibility, because back-office expenses rarely scale with the economic environment, Elliott says. If a company's revenues decline—not uncom-

mon in the highly cyclical oil industry—the cost of performing routine back-office tasks rarely goes down. Instead, they eat into the declining revenues. By outsourcing these functions, companies can pay only for the volume of services they need.

Fortunately, the actual output—invoices, checks, regulatory and financial reports—doesn't vary dramatically from company to company in the oil business. That gives PwC BPO the edge it needed to create its business. By building a set of robust business applications on Information Builders' data access and data warehousing solutions, PwC BPO can pull in raw data that a client's business operations generate and return finished financial and business docu-

the ubiquitous desktop client for Calgary's oil community, because PwC BPO doesn't want to manage its client's desktop systems.

"Our clients have and know Excel, but most systems do a terrible job exporting data and reports to Excel," he comments. One contender for PwC BPO's business was proud that exporting data to Excel required only seven steps.

With the Information Builders solution, "there's no effort. It just produces it right in Excel. Any user can do it. When it comes to opening database tables and inputting data—something that you'd never let users do with other products—Information Builders is head and shoulders above the competition," says Elliott.



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– Kevin Elliott,  
Team Leader, PwC BPO Group

Ralph Millard, Brian Paley, Kevin Krippes, Ken Lain, Parm Sandhu, Kevin Dugan, Diane Renning

ments and reports, along with new intelligence about the client's performance.

#### Choosing a Solution

Most of the solutions Elliott had reviewed from other software companies were complex, inflexible and costly, and would take far longer than his young company could afford to wait.

Before he investigated Information Builders, his leading choice was a database vendor that wanted 16 months and an eight-figure check to come up with a solution. Information Builders promised a proof-of-concept in weeks, and initial production modules in four months—and delivered them, at about one-third the cost.

Information Builders' support for dozens of databases and network protocols is a huge advantage at the back end, but its capabilities on the client's desktop are equally critical to PwC BPO's business, because it's on the desktop that business intelligence is ultimately turned into smart business decisions.

Elliott needed a solution that could integrate seamlessly with a standard Web browser and with Microsoft Office,

#### Utilizing Capital Better

Elliott believes the return on investment, for both PwC BPO and its clients will be compelling. Most companies will see immediate returns as they reduce their personnel costs, or reapply employees to truly strategic work.

Even with a single client, the new system will enable PwC BPO to reduce costs in a 50-person unit within PwC BPO itself by 25 percent in the first year, Elliott estimates. "Utilizing your IT capital investments better is a key lesson that we got from Information Builders."

The business intelligence that results from effective analysis of business data could return even bigger dividends, Elliott believes, helping companies spot trends and respond faster to rapidly changing markets. "It's easy for them to drill down from how the business went, to actual numbers, to actual invoices, even if the data is on separate systems," Elliott concludes. "We're redefining what IT does and what business people do, and we're showing clients stuff they just couldn't do before." ●

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