

BY ROBERT MAUSS

Crédit Agricole Indosuez Invests in Comprehensive Reporting Solution



In a recent survey conducted by CFO Research Services, 56 percent of senior finance executives cited technology as the primary hindrance to financial accuracy and visibility. IT managers need to develop systems that can collect, organize, and disseminate information, the report said, with the goal of providing true visibility into the operational drivers of the business.

Crédit Agricole Indosuez, an international corporate bank that also provides financial advice and private portfolio management services, is leading the charge to better information management. Business analysts at this global financial institution formerly had to wade through reams of paper reports to collect and combine account balances with reconciliation information, then use complex reporting algorithms to analyze the data. Now, they use Information Builders' WebFOCUS Business Intelligence environment to quickly generate and deliver reports over the bank's intranet, via a portal interface that can be customized by each user.

"We wanted to achieve customized access to the information," says Michel Bakowski, a director in the bank's Information Systems Division. "Information Builders offered a complete Business Intelligence package."

Crédit Agricole Indosuez manages offices and subsidiaries in more than 50 countries, primarily in Europe, the Middle East, Asia and the U.S. As an investment bank, it operates from 17 trading rooms spanning several international time zones, giving it a dominant position on European and Asian stock markets. Crédit Agricole Indosuez also trades on the futures markets through Carr Futures, headquartered in Chicago, the world's leading marketplace for raw materials.

Managing the Reporting Workload

As specialists in investments and financial solutions, Crédit Agricole Indosuez offers customers a full range of services for cash management and conservation, along with simple or complex credit and financing mechanisms. The bank is open to up-market private customers via its BGP Indosuez subsidiary, and through its offices in Luxembourg, Monte Carlo and Switzerland.

This diversity has helped drive a profitable operation. However, as business operations expanded, managers found it increasingly difficult to manage the reporting workload. "Every day, our managers were receiving stacks of printouts detailing the current situation," recalls Bakowski. "The information they really needed was buried in the heap."

In early 2000, the bank's financial and general accounting divisions asked Bakowski's group to create a user-friendly reporting system that would allow account managers to

PORTAL-
DRIVEN BI
ENVIRONMENT
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ON DEMAND

SNAPSHOT

ORGANIZATION: Crédit Agricole Indosuez, an international financial services firm with banks, investment offices and subsidiaries in more than 50 countries.

THE CHALLENGE: Extract meaningful information about customer accounts and reconciliation processes from a massive database of transaction data.

THE STRATEGY: Simplify the process of creating scheduled reports, executing predefined reports on demand, and allowing users to create their own reports – all via a customizable, portal-driven BI interface.

THE RESULTS: An enterprise-wide reporting environment that simplifies many types of report-generation processes while ensuring consistency in the way information is accessed, delivered, presented and stored.

INFORMATION BUILDERS SOLUTIONS: WebFOCUS

access situation reports in a customized manner from their workstations via an Intranet browser. With 12,000 employees in three core businesses – investment banking, corporate banking and private banking – the reporting solution had to be scalable and comprehensive enough to meet the needs of a wide range of users, representing many different skill levels.

As Bakowski puts it, the bank needed a Business Intelligence solution that could create scheduled, recurrent reports; execute predefined reports on demand; and allow users to create their own reports through a graphical inter-

face. They chose Information Builders' WebFOCUS to build this comprehensive reporting system. "We had been using FOCUS for a long time, which made it easy to learn the WebFOCUS software," he says. "The bank tested other reporting solutions as well, but none of them had the complete capabilities we were looking for, particularly the ability to interface with our MVS scheduler, which manages batch processing activities."

Adopting Enterprise-Caliber Technology

WebFOCUS meets critical enterprise information requirements through one powerful Web-based reporting solution. This makes it easy for business managers to create richly formatted reports from enterprise data in real time. The WebFOCUS environment includes a graphical user interface to simplify the development of new reporting applications, and a dynamic chart of accounts to produce "self-maintaining reports," with no need to reload data in a warehouse when changes are made.

WebFOCUS also supplies all the advanced Web-based features the bank's account managers need to use reports effectively, such as integrated hyperlink drill-downs to any other report, program, location, or multiple locations via a simple Web browser. Because WebFOCUS was designed first and foremost for the Web, Crédit Agricole can effortlessly extend these powerful reporting capabilities to managers in many different business units.

To streamline access to this advanced reporting environment, the bank wanted to interface WebFOCUS with a portal solution. WebFOCUS Open Portal Services made it easy to add business intelligence content to the bank's chosen portal environment via a series of "portlets" – point-

and-click templates that allow users to personalize the way they view, store, and retrieve content. For example, users can decide what reports appear in each section, how content is displayed, and how it is organized.


Meanwhile, system administrators can use portlets to assign access privileges, launch reports, create lists, navigate reports, and perform other administrative tasks. "Our portal environment integrates well with WebFOCUS," says Bakowski. "All the reports generated by WebFOCUS are made available through a graphical environment that can be customized for each user."

Supplying Personalized Information

Today, with the new Business Intelligence environment online, account managers at Crédit Agricole can access situation reports, accounting reports, and financial performance indicators on demand. The system went live in April 2001 and is now available to hundreds of users, who access the system through their Web browsers. According to Bakowski, having a unified reporting layer ensures consistency in the way information is accessed, delivered, presented and stored. A "deep zoom" feature allows users to drill down from the summary level to progressively more detailed information. "The first information levels are prepared and delivered automatically, whereas the last pages in the reports are dynamically formatted in response to user requests," he explains.

Being able to access live data throughout the enterprise makes it much easier to obtain correct information. Crédit Agricole users can view information in a variety of common business formats, including Excel, HTML, and PDF. Additionally, reports can be "pushed" to designated users via e-mail, either on a scheduled basis or as alerts when designated business conditions arise. A single report can be automatically bursted into multiple sections, and then delivered simultaneously to many different users.

Crédit Agricole uses a centralized IT system consisting of IBM mainframe computers running the OS/390 operating system. The mainframe hosts DB2 data, which is duplicated and processed by WebFOCUS. Each night, WebFOCUS summarizes the information contained in the DB2 database and produces more than 2,000 HTML, PDF and XLS files, which can be easily accessed through the reporting portal. A Unix gateway transfers files between the central site and a Microsoft Windows NT server that hosts the portal software. "This server fields the report requests issued by hundreds of users," Bakowski explains. "The IT department plans to replace the Unix gateway with a real-time messaging tool based on IBM MQ Series."

Future deployments will focus on enhancing the system, improving performance, and creating more reports. Approximately 15 types of situation reports have been developed so far, out of 80 included in the original specifications. The reporting solution is being rolled out to about 20 regional Crédit Agricole banks, extending real-time reporting and analysis capabilities throughout the enterprise. 

Robert Mauss is a French journalist who writes about business and technology.

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Information Systems
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Crédit Agricole