

Customer Profile

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

FEMA

Snapshot

Organization

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), a U.S. federal agency that coordinates disaster response during a national disaster.

The Challenge

Insurance data required when responding to major floods was buried in greenbar reports printed monthly from a mainframe. FEMA needed to generate reports faster and wanted to reduce huge printing costs.

The Strategy

Build an intranet to give FEMA staff rapid access to online reports that eliminate large volumes of printing and allow them to work in the field.

The Results

Elimination of virtually all paper reports in less than six months, while providing higher-quality reports and faster response to disasters. Using WebFOCUS saved more than 90 percent of the development cost and time that conventional solutions would have required.

Information Builders Solution

WebFOCUS and iWay Software in partnership with Computer Sciences Corporation



Bill Barton, project manager at Computer Sciences Corporation, has used WebFOCUS to reduce the flood of paper generated by the NFIP.

Flood of Paper Ends

Useful Information Flows at Disaster Response Agency

Staff at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), a U.S. federal agency that coordinates disaster response when the president declares a national disaster, always got two floods at once. First, water covered the land. Next, a flood of paper, required to administer the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), covered their desks – pallets and pallets of green-striped reports poured off a mainframe printer and into their offices. Individual reports were sometimes 18 inches thick, with a nugget of information about insurance claims, premiums, or payments buried in them somewhere.

Bill Barton and Mike Miles don't claim to be able to do anything about the weather, but the project manager and computer scientist, respectively, from Computer Sciences Corporation (CSC), have used WebFOCUS software from Information Builders to turn back the flood of paper generated by the NFIP. The program allows the government to work together with national insurance companies to collect flood insurance premiums and pay claims for flooding in communities that adopt flood control measures.

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Streamlining Information Access

As a result of CSC's work, FEMA staff no longer leaf through paper reports to find the data they need. Instead, they browse insurance data posted on NFIP's BureauNet intranet site, select just the information they want to see, and get an onscreen report or download the data as a spreadsheet.

And that is only the start of the savings that WebFOCUS has provided. The number of times that NFIP staff asks CSC for special reports has dropped in half, because NFIP staff can generate many of the special reports they need without calling on a programmer to develop them.

Then there is the cost of creating BureauNet in the first place. Barton estimates that using conventional Web and database software to export data from FEMA's mainframe, store it in a new database and link that to a Web server would have cost about 100 times as much – more than \$500,000 – and taken about two years to complete, compared with the few months Miles spent on the WebFOCUS solution.

“We were able to skip a lot of steps,” says Barton. “The resources we needed to do this were very small.”

Without the rapid WebFOCUS solution, FEMA staff would still have been leafing through mountains of paper when Tropical Storm Allison ripped through Texas in June, 2001.

Performance Under Fire

Tropical Storm Allison was the first major test of BureauNet. Some time earlier, Miles had moved mainframe reports online by developing software that gave FEMA staff the ability to look at static reports over a wide-area network. While this saved a lot of paper and some time, the reports were still the same old static reports that poured off the mainframe each month, and more frequently during a flooding disaster.

Managing all that paper was literally a full-time job for one CSC staffer. If a special report was required, it had to be programmed, and even then the data that FEMA wanted to work with was often buried in rows and rows of other numbers.

FEMA staff who wanted to look only at claims in a particular zip code, claims above a certain amount, or claims from a specific insurance company had to fish through those reports for the data they wanted, then reenter it into a spreadsheet or charting program to analyze it further.

Miles was already familiar with Information Builders' technology, because it's used on FEMA mainframes to manage four million flood insurance policies and \$1.5 billion annually in flood insurance premiums. Miles decided in late 1999 to investigate using WebFOCUS as an alternative to static reports and, partly on the strength of a commitment to put reports online, CSC won the contract to manage the “information factory” that processes all NFIP data.

“When we realized what WebFOCUS could do, it gave us the confidence to put it into the winning proposal,” Barton says. “The only place we went wrong was that we thought it would take a long time to do.”

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**.

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Because WebFOCUS uses the same programming terms and concepts as other Information Builders technology, Miles found writing the new Web interface for insurance data went faster than anticipated. Miles built BureauNet over about six months of part-time work, while he continued his other responsibilities.

BureauNet was an immediate hit with FEMA. “The prototype really became the product,” says Barton. “They were using it steadily from the first day they saw it.” They also saw many more ways to use this powerful tool, and the CSC team improved it over the next year, giving the FEMA team more analytical power – and a lot less paper – than ever before.

When Tropical Storm Allison, a huge slug of sodden, swirling cloud, moved out of the Gulf of Mexico onto the Texas and Louisiana coastline in June 2001, it killed 34 people, most from drowning, damaged or destroyed 16,000 homes and businesses, and displaced more than 10,000 families. President George W. Bush declared 28 Texas counties disaster areas, and FEMA moved in to help.

A Stable, Portable Solution

Because BureauNet offered online reports that delivered much of the data they required in the field, FEMA staff used portable computers in disaster areas and accessed BureauNet over wireless Internet connections. Although insurance data is normally moved only monthly from the mainframe to the Windows server that hosts BureauNet, the field disaster staff needed faster response, so the CSC team developed QuickClaim, which put new insurance and claims data on BureauNet within days.

This first test of BureauNet resulted in FEMA field staff asking for many new types of reports. Fortunately, Miles and WebFOCUS were up to the task. In some cases, Barton says, “FEMA would ask for a new type of report one day, and Miles would have it on BureauNet the next day, thanks to the speed with which he could create new reports in WebFOCUS.

The sudden demand on the system had little impact on its performance, notes Barton. “It handled the demand just fine,” he says. “We had no problems with it at all.”

“And it made a huge difference to FEMA and the job they had to do. They had never had that level of access before, never had been able to just click on their desktop and generate such detailed and specific reports.”

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