

Customer Profile

Information Builders is one of the largest independent software companies in the world. We are committed to customer success, providing comprehensive business intelligence solutions that help you grow your business through the power of information.

Qenos

Snapshot

Organisation

Qenos is the cornerstone of the Australian petrochemical and plastics industry. As Australia's sole manufacturer and leading marketer of polyethylene, its products are a part of every day life.

The Challenge

Empower users with an improved reporting solution to reduce complexity; improve turnaround time for creation of new reports; and provide the ability to easily consolidate information from a range of disparate data sources.

The Strategy

Create an integrated, web-based, enterprise-wide reporting environment that consolidates information from SAP, Oracle, Lotus Notes, Excel, SQL databases as well as a variety of other disparate legacy systems - and provides users with access to customised reports based on focused subsets of data specific to their needs.

The Results

Cost-effective solution for a wide variety of needs with the ability to easily pull data from multiple systems and combine it for more functionally rich end user reports. Easy development of parameter-driven reports means maximum end user flexibility. Ability to export HTML reports to Excel or PDF for further analysis or sharing with other internal or external parties.

Information Builders Solution

WebFOCUS



WebFOCUS is the standard enterprise reporting tool at Qenos, with 800 employees from the senior management, sales, marketing, HR, product and safety areas relying on it to provide web-based information as required.

Qenos Robust Technology Helps Qenos Succeed

With a commitment to provide its customers with reliable supply, consistent, high quality product and superior support and service, Qenos' experience in solving complex problems is enhanced with the most sophisticated technology - both across its manufacturing facility and IT area.

With manufacturing sites in Victoria and New South Wales, Qenos adds value to Australia's oil and gas reserves, through conversion into high value petrochemicals and plastics that are used as raw materials by hundreds of companies in the downstream Australian plastics conversion industry.

The final products are used in a myriad of applications, including the key packaging, agriculture, automotive, water, mining and waste management industries. Qenos also supply a diverse range of specialty polymers, making it a vital link in the Australian manufacturing chain. In fact, hundreds of businesses rely on the key raw materials manufactured by Qenos to produce thousands of household, consumer and industrial products that are part of every day life.

With more than forty years experience developing and manufacturing products to meet the specific needs of its customers and their markets, Qenos produces olefins and a full range of polyethylene (PE) products (HDPE, LDPE and LLDPE).

“When we evaluated solutions, strong web-based functionality was very important from a long term point of view. WebFOCUS provides a great solution that has enabled us to reduce complexity on the desktop and provide considerably enhanced functionality to our users. As well, it allows us to support fewer applications in the long term, and significantly improve our service levels to the business.”

Strong Market Position Demands High Quality Business Services

Qenos has evolved over the past twenty years as a result of mergers of five different companies, and supplies 60-70% of the Australian virgin PE market. It is very much an integrated business - from the oil and gas fields of Bass Strait and the Moomba Basin to the finished plastic pellet products.

Qenos is Australia's sole producer of PE and is domestically focused with around 70-80% of its product sold within Australia. It maintains the number one market position because of its comprehensive product portfolio, and high levels of reliability and customer service. Ray Thomas, Applications Development Team Leader for Qenos commented, “We have significant overseas competition. However local manufacturers rely on our technology, speed of service, quality and reliability - we have a distribution, sales and technical network to support our customers around Australia.”

Qenos' primary goals for the future include:

- maintaining its current pre-eminent market position;
- maintaining the excellent safety record;
- operating to full capacity; and
- maintaining the highest quality product and service standards.

Business Requirements Lead to WebFOCUS

WebFOCUS was purchased in 2001. At the time Qenos was building an application to capture information about safety and environmental incidents impacting its plants. One of the business requirements dictated the ability to conduct detailed analysis of incidents to identify potential opportunities to improve business processes and reduce future risk to plants and employees, however Qenos had no standard reporting tool.

Thomas said, “We looked around the organisation and a lot of the reporting we were doing was via custom built applications. Depending on the back-end database, we had a number of different solutions in place such as Visual Basic, data extracts loaded into Excel or Access and a Lotus Notes solution. The problem with this approach was that we are a small IT team and effectively supporting the multiple technologies across different back-end databases was difficult and time-consuming.”

A new solution was sought after the primary goals were identified as:

1. standardise and simplify;
2. improve turnaround time for creating new reports; and
3. provide better overall support to the business.

Evaluation Included most Major Suppliers

Qenos evaluated a number of Business Intelligence and Reporting solutions with the goal to find a flexible and powerful web-based solution that could provide reporting from multiple databases including both standard and home-grown legacy systems. The key criteria were:

- ease of use;
- good local support; and
- easy access to multiple back-end technologies.

On the selection of WebFOCUS, Thomas commented, “No one else had the range of connectivity solutions that Information Builders had, and WebFOCUS' web-based architecture was one of the best.”

WebFOCUS Provides Standard Enterprise Reporting Tool

WebFOCUS has become the standard enterprise reporting tool at Qenos. Five core business teams meet with the IS management team on a regular basis to identify and prioritise IS support in providing solutions to business problems. The steering committee, together with key representatives from each of the five business groups identify the problem and look at technical solutions to ascertain the optimal solution. “If there is any component of reporting required that cannot be provided by the native applications, we adopt WebFOCUS to provide the optimal solution to meet the business need,” said Thomas.

“If there is a standard available, we will not rebuild in WebFOCUS, however, WebFOCUS has proved particularly effective when there is the requirement to combine data from different SAP modules or with external data sources. In the case of our Lotus Notes, Oracle and SQL Server applications, the reporting is limited and provides only basic functionality. Our users want customised information with the ability to further tailor a report if required, so we use WebFOCUS to quickly develop something that’s appropriate for their specific needs.”

With most of Qenos’ 800 employees using WebFOCUS, the range of users covers employees from the senior management, sales, marketing, human resources, product and safety sectors. Many employees may not even know they are using WebFOCUS - to them it’s an application that provides the information they require.

WebFOCUS is also providing many specialised reports from SAP. Even though SAP includes a whole series of standard reports, Thomas said, “If there is a standard available, we will not rebuild in WebFOCUS, however, WebFOCUS has proved particularly effective when there is the requirement to combine data from different SAP modules or with external data sources. In the case of our Lotus Notes, Oracle and SQL Server applications, the reporting is limited and provides only basic functionality. Our users want customised information with the ability to further tailor a report if required, so we use WebFOCUS to quickly develop something that’s appropriate for their specific needs.”

Business Benefits Achieved across all Qenos Teams

The real strength of WebFOCUS at Qenos is the ability to pull data from multiple systems and combine it. As well, the flexibility for end users to customise their own reports as required, by changing parameters or drilling down into the required level of detail is important. Thomas commented, “Most of our reports are parameter-driven. We set up an entry screen where users enter a product name or group, plant, customer name and/or some other criteria like time periods and the data is pulled back into a HTML report - generally with the ability to export it to EXCEL and PDF format. WebFOCUS enables us to provide people with the flexibility to do what they want with the data - and sometimes that includes more detailed analysis in EXCEL or a printed report for other external users.”

Qenos has many examples where WebFOCUS has been used to provide a solution in days that previously would have been impossible. It has impacted many people in the organisation with the consensus being that WebFOCUS is an appropriate, cost-effective solution for a wide range of business problems.

In the Operations area, WebFOCUS reports from SAP are being used to assist maintenance & reliability staff, manage complex task schedules and to provide detailed cost analyses since the standard reports don’t meet current business requirements.

Laboratory and Quality Assurance employees are also big WebFOCUS users. There are a number of Oracle databases in which laboratory test data is stored. Again the standard reporting solutions aren’t flexible enough for users, so WebFOCUS provides more flexible and appropriate standard reports on plant quality data to enable laboratory staff to more effectively communicate their results to the process operators; and monitor product quality prior to release for sale to customers.

In the sales and commercial teams, there is a sales trends report pulling data directly out of SAP. This enables the sales, marketing and management teams to quickly and easily analyse customer sales data and actual trends over the month versus plan. This cannot be done directly out of the SAP R/3 standard reports. In addition, a WebFOCUS dashboard solution has been built to provide a high level summary of sales and production data with data being pulled and combined from both SAP and a number of production systems.

Qenos has also started building what Thomas calls “composite applications” where WEBFOCUS technology is embedded into other applications to provide significant additional functionality.

One such application is the SHIFT LOG where each of the Operations teams operate on a 12 hour shift and record information during their shift about processes, how well the plant ran, quality and other issues that may arise. WebFOCUS reports are embedded into this application to automatically extract source data from other systems. This is of great benefit to users since they don’t have to access multiple systems to manually collect and consolidate information because it’s already there in one location for them. Because of the nature of the business, this particular application sources data from more than six sources including

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SQL Server, Oracle and Lotus Notes databases as well as a number of plant data historians that collect process data from the control systems in real time.

Prior to this solution being developed, operators would access these separate source systems and manually write summaries of the events during their shift. That effort and time is no longer required. Thomas said, "We've been able to develop a solution that enables operators to focus on the key issues rather than running around trying to find the data. It's all about efficiency and making life easier for them - which comes back to our goals of a safe and smooth running plant. We're putting the information at their fingertips and WebFOCUS' functionality and connectivity capability made that process very easy for us to achieve."

Low IT Costs Speak Volumes for Qenos

Thomas said, "The IS team has developed a good relationship with our business over the past five years and our IT costs are benchmark quite low by international standards. We've been able to deliver cost-effective solutions so the business is happy to trust us (most of the time). We haven't tried to quantify the benefits of WebFOCUS and didn't officially measure ROI on this project, however my gut feel says it would have paid for itself within the first twelve months. A lot of what we do today, we wouldn't be able to achieve without WebFOCUS. Given the size of our team and resources, it would be impractical to even attempt some of the reporting we've been able to achieve."

"Part of the problem with all business systems is that they contain a lot of important data, but people encounter significant problems pulling it out and making sense of it."

A recent example saw a solution developed in 24 hours that Thomas says would have been impossible to achieve using any other solution or toolset available to them. With Information Builder's easy connectivity to Oracle, the solution was up and running in less than 24 hours. The database captures plant alarm event and process change data and the report is required in situations where a plant may need to shut down or there is an interruption to a process. The support engineers need to get in quickly - often remotely and make sure the problem is resolved as soon as possible in order to keep the plant on line.

No Problems Encountered with WebFOCUS

Most of the problems encountered during implementation were with data quality. Thomas said, "There weren't many issues with WebFOCUS because the installation, configuration and development process was and continues to be relatively painless through to our most recent upgrade to release 7.6.1. A few weeks and everything is up and running smoothly. Most of the major issues we encountered initially and ongoing are to do with data quality and understanding exactly what the business wants to achieve. It may not be what was initially thought, so you have to investigate further and this is usually what delays the release of an application or takes time in the development phase."

The Primary Keys to Success

One of the drivers when Qenos implemented WebFOCUS was to provide the ability to support operations off-site. There are around 200 speciality applications supported on the desktop, so it is a mammoth task. With Web technologies Qenos is developing an architecture where it's easier for people off-site to log in, check mail, check maintenance data and check SAP or other source information. WebFOCUS is a key part of this architecture. Thomas said, "When we evaluated solutions, strong web-based functionality was very important from a long term point of view. WebFOCUS provides a great solution that has enabled us to reduce complexity on the desktop and provide considerably enhanced functionality to our users. As well, it allows us to support fewer applications in the long term, and significantly improve our service levels to the business."

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