

Customer Profile

Information Builders enables agile information solutions with business intelligence (BI) and integration technologies. Flexible, scalable, and secure, WebFOCUS – the most widely utilized BI platform – permeates every level of the extended enterprise through a simple and intuitive user experience.

University of North Carolina Charlotte

Snapshot

Organization

University of North Carolina Charlotte (UNCC).

The Challenge

Enable self-service reporting to make information more readily available to 3,000 staff members, as the university migrates its Information Management (IM) infrastructure from mainframe systems to UNIX servers and relational databases.

The Strategy

Create a Web-based reporting system as a front-end for the campus ERP applications; create Web-based reporting applications tailored to the specific needs of individual university departments; and teach users to build their own reports and quickly choose the data they require.

The Results

WebFOCUS creates a more efficient IM infrastructure, eliminates paper-based reports, and delivers operational savings in printing, labor, supplies, and maintenance.

Information Builders Solution

WebFOCUS, Education.



Left to right: UNCC's Simone Keith and Tamara Kuhn, applications programmers; Bonnie Rugar, manager, information management; Ralph Harrel, manager, database administration; and Betty Johnson, applications programmer.

Learning Valuable Lessons in Self-Service Reporting

WebFOCUS Enables a Broad Curriculum of Reporting and Analysis

Dr. Carl Sagan, the American astronomer, writer, and scientist, said, "Intelligence is not information alone but also judgment – the manner in which information is collected and used." Administrators of colleges and universities know this concept well. For them, the order of the day isn't simply tracking and exchanging information, but putting it to use to improve student learning and streamline administration.

Advanced business intelligence (BI) technology is what makes this possible at the University of North Carolina Charlotte (UNCC). The five-person Information Management (IM) department serves the data-management needs of 3,000 staff and 20,000 students. Administrators at the school need reports on everything from student enrollment to finance, while faculty members need to know about the history and performance of their students.

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To meet the needs of this diverse institution, UNCC has depended on Information Builders' products and services for more than a decade. Most recently, the college deployed Information Builders' WebFOCUS business intelligence environment to automate a wide range of self-service reporting tasks.

“Our IM group is excited about WebFOCUS because it enables us to more efficiently fulfill our charter – delivering information into people's hands,” says Bonnie Rugar, manager of Information Management at UNCC. “Word is spreading around campus, and we have a lot of people in many different departments who are using the tools. They can run reports themselves and even write their own reports. The vast majority of these activities can be accomplished through a standard Web browser.”

Making a Smart Technology Purchase

For many years, UNCC has used SCT/Plus, an enterprise resource planning (ERP) application tailored specifically to the needs of educational institutions. In conjunction with Information Builders' mainframe FOCUS, this comprehensive software package has been used for a wide variety of business functions, including HR, finance, administration, financial aid, and alumni development. Today, the university is in the process of converting from SCT/Plus to SCT Banner as part of a move from mainframe systems to smaller servers and relational databases. “This is a logical progression for Plus users, and it mirrors an overall technology migration at our institution – from flat files to relational data,” Rugar explains. “WebFOCUS fits in perfectly with our new architecture.”

While SCT Banner has its own reporting tools, IM professionals at the university determined they would need a general-purpose report writer to take full advantage of the new ERP system. “We wanted more flexibility and better business intelligence capabilities,” Rugar says. “When we first deployed FOCUS, we shopped around, looking at several products. FOCUS allowed us to do what we needed, and WebFOCUS extends these capabilities even further.”

As an enterprise business intelligence suite, WebFOCUS satisfies myriad reporting, analysis, and information-delivery needs for users across campus. Its robust architecture can scale to meet the needs of an unlimited number of users both on and off campus while delivering consistent, efficient performance.

Receiving Expert Instruction

At UNCC, the migration from a mainframe platform to Sun Solaris servers running the Oracle 9i database has been a lengthy process, and it is still ongoing. As part of this process, systems engineers at Information Builders helped deploy and upgrade WebFOCUS, then went on to create several key reports. “The engineering team at Information Builders was very helpful,” Rugar states. “We couldn't have done it without them.”

Since then, applications programmer Tami Kuhn has used WebFOCUS to create self-service reporting applications for many departments across campus. Information is extracted from mainframe file systems each night and loaded into an Oracle database, where users can access it on demand using standard Web browsers. “Users in our academic departments love the self-service reports that WebFOCUS delivers,” says Kuhn. “Faculty members can instantly get information about their students or about the student population as a whole.” Some of the most popular reports include a comprehensive list of majors and minors, student contact information, and lists of pending graduates.

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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In addition to these self-service reports, the university's IM staff also created a variety of customized reports tailored to the unique needs of individual academic domains. Authorized faculty members can select individual reports, plug in parameters, and obtain instant results through their Web browsers. “The application we created for the Athletic Department was so well received that many other departments wanted the same thing,” Kuhn says. “We now have 20 different academic departments using WebFOCUS applications, which we wrote to meet their specific requirements.”

Kuhn uses WebFOCUS Managed Reporting to develop reports, set up domains, and manage these various reporting environments. “WebFOCUS is powerful, and so easy to use that most users can generate reports on their own,” she says.

Gaining Advanced Knowledge of Reporting

UNCC plans to use WebFOCUS Developer Studio to extend its data management capabilities even further. This Microsoft Windows-based development environment simplifies all aspects of the report-development cycle with intuitive, graphical tools. Developer Studio provides data visualization, color exception reporting, intelligent drill-downs, and the ability to generate HTML pages without writing code – making it ideal for a growing cadre of power users across campus, who are learning to use WebFOCUS via courses hosted by Information Builders.

“We attend classes along with users from 10 other North Carolina schools that also use WebFOCUS,” Kuhn says. “Information Builders has great instructors, and we also have a good relationship with their engineers and support staff. They know what we need and where we want to go with our IM infrastructure.”

Meanwhile, a handful of users in UNCC's Finance Department are receiving training in the WebFOCUS Financial Reporting Environment. This knowledge will streamline budgeting and resource modeling activities and enable more specific types of financial analysis. The Financial Reporting Environment can dynamically read varying hierarchies, such as charts of accounts, making it easy to generate sophisticated financial reports like balance sheets and income statements.

Earning High Marks in Information Delivery

To streamline report-distribution tasks, Rugar and her staff plan to use WebFOCUS ReportCaster to deliver information to specific offices and groups. For example, users in the Finance Department want to create budget reports and automatically send subsets of the data to pertinent users, so they only see what is relevant to them. “Right now we are still distributing some of these reports the old fashioned way – printing out green bar reports and manually selecting the information for mailing to each department,” Rugar explains. “ReportCaster will eliminate a lot of manual effort in this process.”

Another manual process that UNCC hopes to eliminate is the printing and mailing of the university's grade distribution reports. Historically, these reports have been printed and bursted in hardcopy form, and then physically shipped to each user. With ReportCaster, each user can be directed to a Web page to view the relevant portions of the report.

“We're doing business differently thanks to WebFOCUS,” Rugar says, enthusiastically. “We have already seen measurable operational savings by automating many of our manual reporting processes – not to mention established a more convenient way to access information for users all across campus. Our IM infrastructure is more efficient. WebFOCUS has been a big win for us.”

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