



Guernsey Electricity improves system performance and cuts application operating costs by 70% with move to flexible Windows platform

“Our core business applications were developed over many years to meet our specific requirements as a full service island energy provider, but old, proprietary technology limited our ability to gain full benefit from our critical business data. The powerful Windows-based development tools from Micro Focus enabled us to move to an open, modern environment while preserving our unique business logic and eliminating the need for scarce proprietary system skills.”

[David Elliston, IT Services Manager, Guernsey Electricity]

The Customer

Guernsey Electricity (GEL) is the sole provider of electricity to the island of Guernsey. The company is engaged in a broad range of activities from generating and distributing power to running retail and contracting businesses.

The Challenge

The IT systems at Guernsey Electricity have to support an unusual combination of business processes that result from the company’s role as the sole provider of electricity and associated services on the island of Guernsey. The varied activities involved include generating power locally, delivering additional supplies via cable from France and managing distribution, in addition to running related retail and contracting businesses.

As a result, most of the company’s core business applications are bespoke and were developed internally over many years using proprietary technology from ICL, which presented Guernsey Electricity with a major challenge. “The availability of ICL skills on the island is very limited and would continue to be so,” explains David. “A further pressing issue was the need to share the valuable business data from our core applications with other business software.”

GEL had successfully replaced standard functions, such as payroll, with packages running on Microsoft Windows, but this approach could not be taken with the critical MIDAS application suite at the centre of the company’s business operations, because of the unique functionality it provided.

The Solution

“As no standard package could be used to replace MIDAS, and the user community was happy with its functionality, we decided to migrate the application to the Windows platform, using Microsoft SQL Server for the data and a standard web browser for the user interface,” reports Christine Westwell, IT Development Manager. “Blue Phoenix was selected to assist with the project as its migration software was already being used and was well regarded by the IT team.”

Challenge:

Guernsey Electricity’s main corporate application suite, supporting its core administration and business functions, was developed using proprietary ICL software and ran on a VME platform. This made access to key business data difficult and put the company at risk from a shortage of scarce VME skills.

Solution:

Application Modernization:

- Micro Focus Net Express with .NET
- Micro Focus Server for .NET

Benefits:

- Dependency on scarce proprietary mainframe skills reduced
- Open and flexible data access using industry standard methods
- Application operating costs cut by 70% while boosting developer productivity
- Improved batch performance by up to 50%

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Micro Focus’ advanced COBOL tools – Net Express with .NET and Server for .NET – were recommended by Blue Phoenix as an integral part of its migration suite, providing a Windows development environment fully integrated with Visual Studio and a high performance run-time environment.

Blue Phoenix worked closely with GEL’s IT staff to migrate all the ICL Application Master and COBOL code of MIDAS – a largely automatic process, but with some code changes necessary to resolve functionality differences. Some 1,670 user screens were involved, together with 22,500 Application Master modules and 360 C2 COBOL programs. Blue Phoenix’s Xitec Dictionary holds the Application Master elements and creates Micro Focus COBOL code for the runtime environment. Blue Phoenix software was used to convert the IDMSX data to the SQL Server relational format.

The Result

By moving to a modern, industry standard platform, Guernsey Electricity has mostly achieved its main objective of eliminating the need for scarce ICL mainframe skills; however, Application Master programming skills are still required. The limitations of the mainframe data repository have also been removed, allowing corporate data to be easily accessed by the wealth of applications and data enquiry tools available on Windows. The IT team also took the opportunity to remove unnecessary functions and reduce the number of printed reports to improve efficiency and support the company’s ‘green’ initiatives.

Removal of the mainframe itself, together with its specialized Disaster Recovery facilities, has reduced system management overheads and enabled application operating costs to be cut by more than 70%. Overall, savings of £120,000 per year, or 10% of the entire IT budget, have been achieved.

With such a major business system being involved, it was important that neither performance nor usability were impacted by the migration. “We were pleased that, despite the move to web interfaces, the online performance of the new system matched the mainframe’s high speed TP monitor,” says David, “and batch performance was much improved, with run times being reduced by as much as 50%.”

The development cycle is another area that has seen dramatic performance improvements. “Using Net Express with .NET, we can now recompile and rebuild the entire MIDAS suite in about four hours,” comments Christine. “On the mainframe, the process used to take weeks. The resulting gains in developer productivity have been considerable.”

The Future

With all its core business applications now on the Windows platform, Guernsey Electricity can use the powerful Micro Focus development environment to leverage the rich functionality of the .NET world and the options for integration with external packages it provides.

About Micro Focus

Micro Focus provides innovative software that allows companies to dramatically improve the business value of their enterprise applications. Micro Focus Enterprise Application Modernization and Management software enables customers’ business applications to respond rapidly to market changes and embrace modern architectures with reduced cost and risk.

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