

Case Study

Business Objects Delivers a New View on Information for London Underground

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London Underground has undergone a significant restructuring to support the Public Private Partnership under which it has been broken up into four companies, three of which will come under private ownership in 2001.

In the build up to this restructure, London Underground is using the BUSINESSOBJECTS™ information access, analysis and reporting tool to support the management

of the £1 billion spent annually on underground maintenance and development. This technology and the Business Objects e-business intelligence tool, WEBINTELLIGENCE™, are set to support the increased need for information sharing as the four companies move into Public Private Partnership next year.

Over the past four years, London Underground has undertaken extensive migration of its IT infrastructure, moving from mainframe to Local Area Network based systems. During that time, Procon, one of the specialist application service providers for London Underground has undertaken extensive redevelopment of traditional reporting structures using BUSINESSOBJECTS. Procon's range of application, technical and product services includes helping customers choose, install, implement, support and maintain products such as BUSINESSOBJECTS. Products are tailored or developed by Procon to meet specific business needs. The company has worked closely with Business Objects reseller Blueprint Management Systems throughout the redevelopment and now provides information access to over 250 users across all London Underground companies.

“Our reports support local, departmental, company and Treasury requirements. We selected BUSINESSOBJECTS because we had a tremendous number of reports on the mainframe and, rather than replace them with like for like under Oracle, we wanted to create more flexible access to information to support the developing needs of London Underground,” explains Robert Chambers, IT Business Manager, Procon.



■ London Underground uses BUSINESSOBJECTS to support £1 billion spent annually on maintenance

Implementing the Solution – Blueprint Management Systems and BUSINESSOBJECTS

The re-development was instigated by a requirement to build a new application to support London Underground's ten-year investment programme. An important element of this application was a suite of reports, leading the company to invest in business intelligence technology. "We wanted to provide reporting technology to the user population, empowering them to deliver their own information needs," says Chambers.

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Following an extensive product review in 1997, the company opted for BUSINESSOBJECTS which was supplied by reseller Blueprint Management Systems. "The review took into account user needs, fit with IT strategy and the vendors financial standing, support and future development plans," says Chambers. "BUSINESSOBJECTS was the obvious technology choice. In particular we knew we wanted the ability to move to web-enabled systems therefore our choice of product had to have plans to be internet able."

The initial scope of the development was limited to reproducing existing Access-based reports, a process that Chambers insists was key in gaining user acceptance of the new technology. "Once we had gained user acceptance we were then able to really begin to exploit BUSINESSOBJECTS and provide access to more detailed and more powerful information resources," says Chambers.

Blueprint undertook initial consultancy, skills transfer and user training. "We needed to be able to deliver quick wins to the business to ensure that BUSINESSOBJECTS became adopted as the best strategic business intelligence tool across London Underground. Blueprint worked with us to deliver those wins," he confirms. "We became self-sufficient in the technology very quickly."

Delivering Business Information

Following the initial deployment of BUSINESSOBJECTS, Blueprint trained expert users in specific business areas. These range from project programme officers who are using the tool to gain detailed project information, to departmental finance managers looking at cash flow and monitoring performance against budget, to corporate finance who are responsible for reporting to the Treasury performance against predefined Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

Following on from the initial focus on delivering financial information, Procon has also implemented BUSINESSOBJECTS against physical planning data. "These project plans explain what is being planned at a specific London Underground station each year, based on key milestone information," explains Chambers. "We are now producing cross database reports that enable London Underground to compare physical plans to financial plans, highlighting inconsistencies in financial forecasting and the actual planned projects. The improvement in data quality between systems is a significant benefit to London Underground."

Business Benefits

The implementation of BUSINESSOBJECTS has proved extremely valuable throughout the Public Private Partnership process during which London Underground has been inundated with questions from potential bidders, the Treasury and consultants. "Without BUSINESSOBJECTS we would have really struggled to deliver this information. Instead, users have been able to create reports for fast answers to questions on the fly to deliver the required information. The process has really made people in the business realise the power of the technology," says Chambers.

Management now have up to date information for the first time. In the past, there was a three to four day delay in producing management statistics. This information is now available immediately on-line with up-to-the-minute information.

Even more valuable is the information available through BUSINESSOBJECTS' ad hoc querying capabilities. "It takes seconds to find out how much work a specific contractor is doing across London Underground," says Chambers. "That information would have taken painstaking manual investigation in the past." Additionally, users can now drill down through the information to break down the extent of a contractor's work across different projects. "The depth of information is very valuable," he says.

Enterprise-Wide Use of BUSINESSOBJECTS



Procon is now actively promoting the use of BUSINESSOBJECTS throughout the London Underground companies, with significant success.

The next phase of the implementation is to expand the use of BUSINESSOBJECTS to a broader range of users throughout London Underground. "We want to provide users with access themselves, rather than relying on the expert users in a department," says Chambers. "This will represent a significant cultural shift at London Underground, staff have never had the ability to create their own reports before in such a simple way."

London Underground plans to develop customised training courses with Blueprint that use internal databases. "A training programme is an essential element in achieving the cultural shift. Using their own data will ease users through the transition," adds Chambers.

Additionally, the goal is to move away from traditional reliance on weighty reports, towards individual access to specific information. "Most people don't need a detailed report, they want access to a specific piece of information such as: 'Is this project on target?'" he says. "That approach is far more time efficient and a company-wide roll out of BUSINESSOBJECTS will support this approach to information access."

Sharing Information Via the Internet with WEBINTELLIGENCE

“With BUSINESSOBJECTS we have developed the platform to support the sharing of information. There will be a lot of rationalisation over the next couple of years that, I believe, will lead to an increased focus on BUSINESSOBJECTS as the primary information delivery mechanism.”

Chambers is keen to use Internet technology to support the strategy for a company-wide rollout of BUSINESSOBJECTS. Working with Blueprint, London Underground is now looking at BUSINESSOBJECTS WEBINTELLIGENCE tool for information access, analysis and reporting via the web and is currently using it for piloting the publishing of information on an intranet. “London Underground is formalising its intranet strategy and we are preparing now to ensure that we are able to move onto the intranet as soon as the strategy has been confirmed. We have over 270 stations and many offices and suppliers. Internet access will be key to sharing information cost effectively across the company and with our suppliers,” he says.

Indeed, the creation of the four London Underground companies increases the need for a cost effective, efficient platform for information sharing. Chambers explains, “There is a clear need for co-operation between companies, particularly on the Master Project Schedule which supports global planning of work on the underground.” The Master



Project Schedule addresses areas of the underground that are shared by the Infracos, the infrastructure companies responsible for delivering services to London Underground. For example, Kings Cross station is used by all three but is owned by one of the companies.

“One of the infracos will own the station and they will have to allow the others in to undertake regular maintenance and specific projects on their lines. There has to be a lot of co-operation between these companies. BUSINESSOBJECTS really facilitates that sharing of information, while providing the security functions which will enable infracos to easily define the information they wish to be available to other companies,” says Chambers.

He adds, “With BUSINESSOBJECTS we have developed the platform to support the sharing of information which in turn will support partnership. There will be a lot of rationalisation of our IT systems over the next couple of years that, I believe, will lead to an increased focus on BUSINESSOBJECTS as the primary information delivery mechanism.”

Chambers concludes, “Whatever direction London Underground decides to take, Business Objects has developed future proof technology to support that.”

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