

Experian helps clients quickly give credit where credit is due with flexible, scalable IBM solution.

Overview

■ Challenge

To quickly respond to clients and efficiently deliver the consumer-credit products and services that they need and to give Experian a distinct competitive advantage

■ Solution

IBM @server® pSeries® p655 and p690 systems running in the IBM AIX® operating environment; IBM DB2® Universal Database™, Version 8.1 software, IBM Tivoli® Monitoring software; IBM Business Consulting Services

■ Key Benefits

A flexible, scalable infrastructure that provides the ability to deliver accurate, current data to lenders faster, increasing satisfaction; 60% improvement in system turn-around time based on system performance; decreased time to market for new products; ability to quickly respond to client demand; lower total cost of ownership; potential to set new industry standards

On the surface, consumer lenders—credit card companies, mortgage corporations, banks, and even energy and cable providers—vie for consumer dollars and any associated accrued interest. Stacks of preapproved offers with low interest rates seemingly flood consumer mailboxes. But beneath the surface, lenders take only well-calculated risks with creditworthy consumers to ensure short- and long-term profitability.

To target the most creditworthy prospects and to proactively protect and expand relationships with existing valued clients, consumer lenders rely on Experian. With 4,500 employees in North America, annual global sales exceeding US\$2.2 billion and more than 30 years of experience in providing innovative solutions to lenders with complex, large-scale consumer data integration requirements, Experian helps lenders analyze, understand and effectively manage crucial consumer credit data.

Aggressive product development goals required flexible mainframe environment

In an industry under increasing scrutiny and government regulation, credit bureaus like Costa Mesa, California-based Experian face stiff competition

and increasingly complex and inventive client requirements for data interrogation and processing. Experian Americas Credit Information Solutions business unit recognized the imperative to thoughtfully differentiate its products and services. The direction was clear: help lenders respond more rapidly to consumer opportunities. That meant delivering the freshest, most accurate consumer credit data to those lenders as quickly as possible. Experian wanted to upgrade its legacy mainframe environment to support aggressive product development and strategic growth plans for its Credit Information Solutions business.

“We wanted a solution that would allow us to stay in front of evolving market needs,” explains Ly Do, vice president of application solutions, Experian. Changes to Experian’s legacy system—such as adding new data elements—meant changing nearly every existing application, so efficiency gains were desired. Converting, migrating and integrating data between newer technology and the legacy system also required additional effort. “We wanted to focus our IT resources on new product development and meeting our clients’ needs.”

The goal of the new system was to deliver faster interactions with other systems and processes within the Credit Solutions business, increase productivity and decrease the new product development cycle.

Rock-solid assessment leads to the right solution

The Experian team began a comprehensive, methodical evaluation of the company's existing systems and potential new solutions, "We want to be the partner of choice for any lender in the industry—the partner they think of first and the one that can provide solutions for them fast and easily," says Laura DeSoto, senior vice president of product management and development,

"We feel very strongly that our IBM solution is going to position us to meet our primary objective: becoming our clients' partner of choice."

— *Laura DeSoto, senior vice president of product management and development, Experian*

Experian. "To achieve that goal, we knew we had to build a system flexible enough to accommodate even the most out-of-the-box client requests."

Do's IT team searched for a flexible, scalable environment that could support the Client Services unit's high volumes of data (2.5 terabytes). Facilitate the rapid development and deployment of new products and services. And meet client and market demand head-on. After talking with other Experian business units and doing extensive research, the search was narrowed to two providers.

Both providers were required to deliver an extensive proof-of-concept for their proposed infrastructure solutions, based on Experian's requirements. The IT team created a scorecard, assessing criteria that included price/performance, total cost of ownership, maintainability and the provider's attitude toward partnership. After rigorous testing with complex, real-world jobs, IBM emerged as the clear leader.

Flexible, scalable technology drives down costs

Employing a building-block approach to help ensure flexibility, scalability and cost-effective growth, the IBM Business Consulting Services team recommended IBM @server pSeries p655

8-way symmetric multiprocessing systems that run in the IBM AIX operating environment. IBM DB2 Universal Database, Version 8.1 software houses critical Credit Services consumer data. And IBM Tivoli Monitoring software detects bottlenecks and any potential problems in essential systems and helps the system to automatically recover in the case of a critical situation. Experian selected a number of third-party tools—including Ascential Data Stage software to support data extraction, transformation and loading from the company's DB2 repository; Unica Affinium Campaign software (running on an IBM @server pSeries p690 system) to support job processing and campaign management; and Business Objects software to deliver business intelligence reporting and ad hoc queries—rather than to develop solutions in-house. The system also integrates an EMC storage area network disk infrastructure.

To meet high-performance computing demand and to support the Credit Information Solutions multiterabyte database, the Experian team deployed 23 reliable, efficient IBM p655 servers. The pSeries servers incorporate IBM POWER4+™ microprocessor technology, among the fastest 64-bit processor chips in the world.* Logical

partitioning lets Experian match resources to workloads, further increasing efficiency, helping to lower total cost of ownership, reduce complexity and save administration costs.

Clustering—an advanced computing technique that promotes performance, scalability and availability—enables Experian's multiple servers to be interconnected into a single unified computing resource to drive down datacenter administration expenses. And to help ensure continuous access to business-critical data and applications. So, no processor nodes are overworked or underutilized. To boost availability, each p655 server can automatically detect errors and problems—before they become apparent to users. Dynamic reconfiguration helps Experian minimize costly outages and reduce support requirements.

Chosen for performance, high availability and usability, standards-based DB2 software enables Experian to do more than simply process data faster. Moving from flat-file, sequential processing to an IBM DB2 relational database improves Experian's efficiency, helps ensure data consistency and accuracy of millions of new records from thousands of data sources. Provides the flexibility the company requires to create new, innovative products. And

transforms a data storage and processing environment into a prospecting database shared by multiple end users. DB2 software also provides the capability to scale up or down as business needs dictate to support Experian's high-volume database, complex workloads and increased parallelism for administration tasks.

"IBM is excited to enable and support Experian's industry-leading approach to combining a parallel processing environment with relational database technology in order to push their capabilities and services to the next level," says Robert W. Massie, vice president financial services sector, IBM.

"We feel we have forged a true relationship with IBM," says Do. "We've been able to leverage our relationship with the IBM team not only for IBM solutions and services, but for support in other areas. IBM helped us research and then narrow down third-party candidates and offerings as well." Do says the new system has been in production since April 2004, coming in on time and under budget. "That's why we've received approval to move forward with our next phase, which launched in September 2005," she exclaims.

"We know our IBM solution will cost-effectively drive our product development and our growth over the years to come."

– *Laura DeSoto, senior vice president of product management and development, Experian*

Client promise fulfilled—cost-effectively

With the new IBM solutions, Experian can help clients find new prospects, extend preapproved offers, determine risk, nurture relationships and manage consumer accounts—quickly, accurately and cost-effectively. Historical data will further help lenders plan future campaign strategies based on documented consumer behavior and trends.

From an IT perspective, the IBM solution's benefits have been immediate: a data warehouse that requires only one copy of the data to support all of Credit Information Solutions' product lines, reducing the redundancies and costs associated with multiple copies of extremely large files. A 60 percent improvement in system turnaround time based on system performance. And an uplift in staff productivity by reducing the time to develop and deploy new functionality in a less complex environment.

“Personalized, high-quality and responsive service is a priority for Experian, which clearly gets what it takes to lead in an on demand world. IBM is excited to have the opportunity to help Experian push its service capabilities to the next level.”

— *Robert W. Massie, vice president, Financial Services Sector, IBM*

“One of the things we’re most excited about is the new system’s ability to help us develop new products faster,” says DeSoto. “Ideas we had floating in the pipeline were difficult to execute with our former systems. We know our solution will drive our product development and our growth over the years to come.” Experian’s future plans? Enabling its system as a shared prospect database to be used by clients across industries.

“We believe our new Customer Prospecting and Portfolio Servicessm will help us create a fundamental shift in the marketplace,” DeSoto says. “Our clients say they believe the new capabilities are going to change the way they do business today, allowing them to access and interrogate data as they’ve never been able to do before.”

“IBM and Experian are committed to working together to advance our collective capabilities in order to deliver innovative solutions to the industry,” says Massie.

“We look at all projects across the company from the perspective of our client promise. Part of our company-wide promise is that Experian is easy to do business with, and we believe the new system absolutely enables that. The system further enables us to fulfill our promise of providing information our clients can trust. We feel very strongly that our IBM solution is going to position us to meet our primary objective: becoming our clients’ partner of choice,” says DeSoto.

For more information

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* Based on SPEC CPU2000 benchmarks on a 1.7 GHz POWER4+ pSeries 655 processor available at www.spec.org. Submitted to SPEC on January 27, 2004.