

ActiveBatch®

Customer IT Automation Success Story

ACES Achieves Improved Productivity and Resource Savings with ActiveBatch IT Automation



Company: ACES

Industry: Energy

Customer Site: Carmel, Indiana, United States



ACES
excellence in energy

Brief Company Overview:

ACES is a nationwide energy management company that helps its Members and Customers buy, sell, and manage energy more efficiently and with less risk. ACES transacts several billion dollars annually on behalf of its Members and Customers, who operate in all of the major electricity markets in the United States. As an ActiveBatch user for more than a decade, ACES found the flexibility and scalability it needed to move to an enterprise IT automation solution.



SUCCESS STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Reduced Processing Time from Several Hours to Just Minutes
- Exponential Growth in Jobs from Between 50 and 100 to Thousands Per Day
- People Resource Savings
- Improved Operations with ITPA Capabilities
- Faster Troubleshooting & Remediation with Comprehensive Alerting

For ACES, moving to ActiveBatch Workload Automation and Job Scheduling translated into significant productivity gains and people resource savings. Scott Williamson, Manager of Network Services at ACES, says that in the twelve years ACES has used ActiveBatch, his team has been able to reduce processing times for certain tasks from several hours to minutes. At the same time, ACES has significantly increased job processing with ActiveBatch, from running between 50 and 100 jobs a day before ActiveBatch to thousands of jobs today.

“Without ActiveBatch we could not effectively support the thousands of jobs we currently process in production. Managing and monitoring jobs would otherwise take a significant amount of time to develop, monitor, and audit in-house. I have no way of quantifying the numbers, but we would not be able to come close to doing it with our current staff given the sheer number of jobs we run in ActiveBatch,” says Williamson.

Founded in 1999, ACES is an energy management company that helps its Members and Customers buy, sell, and manage energy across the United States. Williamson has managed the company’s network department including its LAN/WAN, data center, and Help Desk for nearly 8 years, and has been with ACES for more than 15 years. Williamson’s team of five handles the administration and operations of ActiveBatch for ACES and assists other ACES departments with their use of ActiveBatch.

Addressing the Need for a Centralized Automation Environment

The solution that ACES previously used to manage job execution and IT processes simply wasn’t robust enough.

“There wasn’t a central management system for jobs in place. We had too many processes running with little notification and audit ability,” says Williamson.

That’s when ACES began the search for an enterprise-wide automation solution. With Williamson leading the search, the company evaluated several different solutions, including ActiveBatch.

“We determined we could immediately benefit from ActiveBatch’s comprehensive notification system and the ability to stream plans and jobs together to kick off other jobs using the ActiveBatch notification and workflow process. We also realized that ActiveBatch could give us the central management we needed and the ability to distribute jobs across different servers and platforms, which our previous solution could not do,” says Williamson.

Automating Price Forecasting and Reporting

As an energy management company, ACES provides numerous services, including forecasting and analytical services. Using ActiveBatch, ACES runs automated price forecasting jobs that interact with the company’s price forecasting application. These jobs process data that is used for forecasting, hedging, and trading.

ACES also uses ActiveBatch extensively for exchanging data and reports with systems on premises, in the cloud, and with third-party vendors, Members, Customers, and other energy companies.

Williamson says some of these processes occur overnight, but most run during the day at various intervals, as frequent as every minute, to ensure data is fresh.

Learn more at ActiveBatch.com 



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- Scott Williamson, Manager of Network Services, ACES

“ActiveBatch actively publishes and retrieves information from our information portal. We use an enterprise file transfer and web transfer solution for our information portal, but behind the scenes ActiveBatch is the engine for data delivery and retrieval.

We also utilize ActiveBatch triggers to process data immediately upon delivery or receipt. Triggers are also utilized to pass database parameters and filename wildcards to various jobs and tasks,” says Williamson.

Improving Operations with ITPA Capabilities

Another major area ActiveBatch is used for is file archiving and management. Before ActiveBatch, this was accomplished manually by ACES staff, which was an inefficient and time-consuming process.

“We have jobs set up to generate backups on specific systems. Periodically, we also have some jobs that backup legacy network equipment and configurations. Much of it is just archiving historical data that is accumulated over time. We have jobs that will archive files or delete files depending on the business need. It is much more effective for us and saves a lot of time that would otherwise be spent manually performing backups,” says Williamson.

Dynamic Event-Driven Scheduling and Alerting Reduces Latency Time

Surrounding these file archiving, analytics, and reporting processes is a comprehensive set of alerts and triggers that promote faster job execution with less downtime.

“The biggest benefit for us is the alert function ActiveBatch provides. There are certain jobs for which we need notifications processed immediately. We’ve set up various alerts over the years that allow us to be notified of job failures before they become major problems. When we do find something that requires investigating, we are able to troubleshoot faster and remediate the issue by looking through the log files or using ActiveBatch’s reporting engine,” says Williamson.

ACES heavily utilizes ActiveBatch’s event-driven architecture to create dynamic workflows that will kick off jobs based on the success or failure of certain preceding tasks or events such as an email arrival or file modification. As a result, ACES can significantly reduce wait time between jobs, ensuring faster and more reliable job execution.

“We’ve been able to accomplish exponentially more with ActiveBatch than what we could have with our previous solution.”

- Scott Williamson, Manager of Network Services, ACES

Ensuring Compliance with Auditors and Strengthening Security

ACES uses ActiveBatch's built-in audit and security features to track and report on job execution.

Williamson shares, "Our auditors will ask us to show that a specific job ran on a specific date at a specific time or times. With ActiveBatch, we can easily find the information in the log and send our auditors the information that is required for compliance."

ACES also uses ActiveBatch's support for the Windows security model to segment access among developers and operations. According to Williamson, developers do not have access to make any changes in the production environment.



Looking Toward the Future

Overall, ACES has found a scalable, flexible automation solution with ActiveBatch that has really empowered the IT department.

"With all of the processes we run in ActiveBatch, it wouldn't surprise me if we are saving enough time to forego hiring another employee. The reality is we have been able to accomplish exponentially more with ActiveBatch than what we could have with our previous solution. Before ActiveBatch we had between 50 and 100 jobs on various servers. Now, it's well into the thousands with ActiveBatch," says Williamson.

When Williamson pictures what's next for ACES' ActiveBatch implementation, he foresees expanding the company's use of ActiveBatch gradually as business needs evolve in the future.

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- Scott Williamson, Manager of Network Services, ACES

"The great thing about using the Windows security model is that setting access permissions based on various factors is simple. At ACES, we have a test environment in which developers can make changes and test jobs. However, to ensure a more reliable production environment, we do not allow developers to make changes in production. Since developers need to monitor jobs in production, we've segmented access so that they can view the production runs and trigger certain jobs, but not actually edit the jobs."