IT Maturation Through Automation:
ASM International Automates SQL Server and Crystal Reporting with ActiveBatch

Customer Site
Materials Park, Ohio
United States

About the Company

Company:	ASM International
Industry:	Materials Science and Engineering Services
Installation:	Materials Park, Ohio, United States
ASCI Product:	ActiveBatch® Workload Automation & Job Scheduling

Brief Company Overview:
ASM is Everything Material, the society dedicated to serving the materials science and engineering profession. Through a network of 36,000 members worldwide, ASM provides authoritative information and knowledge on materials and processes, from the structural to the nanoscale.

Case Study Highlights

✓ Simplify and Automate a Myriad of Mission-Critical IT Processes
✓ ActiveBatch Delivers a Level of Simplicity in a Complex IT Environment
✓ Create and Deliver Complex Reports to Thousands of Members Through Simple Workflows
✓ ActiveBatch as an ETL Tool
✓ Using ActiveBatch to Keep the CRM, Online Portal and Web Authentication Software in Sync

It's All About the Members

ASM International is one of the world's foremost leaders in the field of material sciences and is consistently recognized as the gold standard for engineers, scientists and industry pundits alike. Its website defines the society as an engineering and scientific community "led by its members, guided by the members needs and fueled by member participation." With 36,000 members worldwide, fulfilling this mantra requires an IT staff that's up to the billing. To help get the job done, ASM International's IT department relies on ActiveBatch Enterprise Job Scheduling and Workload Automation to simplify and automate a myriad of mission-critical IT processes.

Founded in 1913, ASM International is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to benefit the materials community by providing scientific, engineering and technical knowledge, education, networking and professional development. ASM achieves this by the sharing of information through local chapters, conferences, seminars, and among others, content that includes reference guides, handbooks and other various forms of literature. Supporting the distribution and collaboration of this content is an IT department that has evolved and grown as the entire society has, says Bill Raley, director of IT at ASM International.

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Maturation Through Process Automation

When Raley joined ASM in 2005, he found an IT department that was "struggling to mature. We had a number of set processes and ways of doing things. As ASM grew, we needed to become more nimble, more efficient."

As part of this maturation, in 2007 Raley went to market and began evaluating enterprise schedulers as part of a solution for a bigger problem. "At the time, we had approximately 20 SQL servers that we were scheduling through a combination of Windows Task Scheduler and SQL Scheduler. We had no visibility to see what was planned to run and analysis of what had run and no logging/output of those scheduled jobs."

The IT team was also looking to automate a series of Crystal Report processes that distributed reports throughout the organization. At the time, it was leveraging a boutique solution the company found online. "This solution really wasn't adept to scheduling Crystal Reports; it was basic" says Tony Purkins, Business Systems Analyst. "If a job failed we wouldn't know about it till somebody else notified us they didn't receive something. We had one report that wasn't parameterized, so it needed to be run 120 different times with hard-coded values. With ActiveBatch, it's just one parameterized job."

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Finding Simplicity in ActiveBatch®

During his evaluation of the market, Raley came across ActiveBatch via a recommendation from another vendor who wasn't able to meet ASM's new requirements. "None of the job schedulers we evaluated had the Crystal Report job steps we were looking for, but Advanced Systems Concepts stepped up, worked with us to understand our technical requirements and customized and delivered the new functionality in record time. Although an ActiveBatch competitor said they could deliver, they weren't able to."

ActiveBatch delivered a level of simplicity that Raley and Purkins appreciates in a complex IT environment. "The installation and use of the product is far easier than any other competitor we evaluated," Raley says. "It's become the cornerstone of automating a series of processes that span both business and IT operations."

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Leveraging ActiveBatch®

At the center of these processes are predominately Microsoft-based technologies and tasks, specifically SQL server and SQL Server Reporting Services (SSRS), in addition to Crystal Reports. One such process is the ability to coordinate amongst senior management on a global scale. With ActiveBatch, financial and performance information is now delivered to senior managers via a workflow that Purkins developed. The workflow draws data from various SQL servers and loads it into a data warehouse, runs the reports leveraging SSRS and distributes them to managers on a daily basis, giving them the ability to drill-down to the transaction level. Prior to ActiveBatch, their only access to such financial data was via a PDF they received once a month. "We're really using ActiveBatch like an ETL tool to move data from our disparate systems into our data warehousing environment so we can coordinate reports across a society with tens of thousands of members." Purkins says.

SSRS and ActiveBatch is also serving as the cornerstone of keeping ASM's 36,000 members abreast of new content. "We have a workflow that runs an SSRS job, creates a PDF and automatically emails it to our online collaboration website." Additionally, Raley and Purkins are using ActiveBatch to keep the organization's CRM, online portal and web authentication software in sync. A workflow within ActiveBatch has automated the entire process, so when a new member signs up online, they can access the secure content via their recently verified log-in credentials and security settings. The workflow runs on an hourly basis, 24/7, 365 days a year.

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For insight into web analytics, ASM International leverages IBM's UnicaNetInsight. Prior to implementing ActiveBatch, Purkins kept ASM management informed of online metrics via NetInsight reports that he'd run manually, save as a PDF and then post the individual reports to ASM's network. With ActiveBatch in place, Purkins was able to create a custom script that generates dynamic XML files on the fly and built a workflow within ActiveBatch that automates the entire process from A to Z. A manual process that previously took Purkins 26 hours a month has now been reduced to 25 minutes. "It's a huge time saver and drives efficiency," Purkins says. "More importantly, I can now focus on other initiatives."

These other initiatives include the SQL servers and Crystal Reports that are so critical to ASM International's business. ActiveBatch is used to run a series of Secure FTP jobs that calls upon SQL stored procedures and statements and automates the distribution of the flat file outputs to ASM International's internal network.

"As a director of IT, I have the opportunity to work with a lot of different vendors, some of which are better than others." Raley says. "I've worked with Advanced Systems Concepts for years now and they're one of the best and are very responsive. It's a first rate product supported by exceptional customer support; they've really got it together."

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