

ActiveBatch®

Customer IT Automation Success Story

Ecount, a Citi Company Increases Efficiency with Real-Time Job Scheduling Capabilities



a Citi company

Company: Ecount, a Citi Company

Industry: Finance

Customer Site: Pennsylvania, United States

Brief Company Overview:

Ecount, a Citi company, provides customized prepaid programs for corporations looking for a simple, convenient and cost effective way to deliver payments. Over 1,200 leading corporations, including more than one-third of the Fortune 100, rely on Ecount's prepaid solutions to gain a strategic market advantage.



SUCCESS STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Finding a Solution That Has Scalability, Management Control, and Process Analysis
- The Need for Processes to run Accurately and On Time
- Importance of a Sophisticated Platform with Ease-of-Use
- Assure Service Levels Through High Availability Techniques

Challenge

Nestled away in the Philadelphia suburb of Conshohocken, Pennsylvania, is a company that is quietly remaking the way American companies pay for stuff. Ecount Inc. is a preeminent provider of corporate prepaid services—a diverse segment of electronic banking that includes everything from payroll direct deposits to branded, pre-loaded debit cards that can be used as sales incentives, rebate vehicles, even insurance settlements.

Founded in 1997, Ecount has, in its short history, amassed an impressive customer list of over 1,200 companies, including more than one-third of the Fortune 100. It has also logged a consistent year-over-year growth rate of 50%—a record impressive enough to attract the attention of financial services giant Citi, which recently purchased the company.

Growth, in fact, is a constant challenge for the prepaid services innovator, according to Luke Embree, business architect for Ecount's IT department. "Currently, we process payment files for over 100 customer accounts on a daily basis, and that number continues to grow," Embree said. "We also process vendor files that range from payments to fulfillments, checks, electronic clearinghouse transactions and more. All these files have to run accurately and on time."

Because dependable transaction processing is fundamental to its success, Ecount uses a job scheduling application to manage, execute, and audit its many data operations. Early on, Ecount realized that a rudimentary batch processing platform wouldn't cut it—the company's needs for scalability, management control, and process analysis were too great. It knew that if it were going to deliver on its ambitious business goals over the long term, it had to locate a best-in-class job scheduling application.



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Solution

After reviewing the top job scheduling applications on the market, Ecount chose ActiveBatch for this mission-critical duty. "ActiveBatch is a very sophisticated platform that, remarkably, is also easy to use," noted Embree. "It really helps us keep up with the pace of our business."

ActiveBatch, from Advanced Systems Concepts, is the leading enterprise job scheduling solution, designed to address the automation needs of the 21st Century organization. Able to support a diverse array of platforms including Microsoft Windows, Linux, UNIX and OpenVMS, ActiveBatch is a centralized, single-source product that operates in near real-time, enabling companies to maximize their use of available processing resources.

Event & Data-Based Triggers

One of the unique ways ActiveBatch removes slack time from the processing equation is through its expanded list of job triggers. "Unlike other job scheduling applications that trigger jobs only by date or time, ActiveBatch can start jobs, or job plans, based on a particular event or data state. This helps us to coordinate multiple business processes efficiently," Embree stated.

ActiveBatch's event-based scheduling gives users remarkable flexibility in how they initiate data processing assignments. Through event-based triggers, the application can search for the arrival or modification of a file, spot runaway processes, begin a job on system startup or completion of a previous job, or react to any of thousands of other definable system events.

Data-driven triggers, another ActiveBatch advantage, are possible through the application's use of active variables—values that can be defined by a constant or from a wide variety of data sources. Active variables allow ActiveBatch users to interrogate data, thereby enabling them to initiate processes; e.g., when dollar volume in a process reaches a certain level. Triggers can be managed via Microsoft's popular Windows Management Instrumentation (WMI) interface which eliminates the need for coding.



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Even on the date/time side, ActiveBatch's robust feature set has expanded possibilities. It allows users to attach jobs to fiscal days, fiscal quarters, or specific dates using "date arithmetic" tags that can be specified as part of a job's parameters. Job completion triggers are just as versatile; in addition to "success" or "failure", jobs can be triggered by exit code values.

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Auditing and Availability

Because of Ecount's heavy processing volume, the need for process analysis by Embree and his staff is significant. "We are constantly looking to maximize our system effectiveness. How can we reduce errors? Where can we pick up time? How can we keep IT costs down?" said Embree. "ActiveBatch's solid run book, auditing, and logging capabilities allow us to review our jobs and look for possible new efficiencies."

Scalability is critical priority for Ecount as well. Its 50%-plus compounded annual growth rate puts a constant strain on system resources—and considering that data processing is essential to Ecount's daily operations, there is no room for operational failure.


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"ActiveBatch assures our service levels through multiple high availability techniques," Embree reported. "It automatically identifies servers or other resources—even ones that have been recently added. It offers checkpoint restarts and built-in workload balancing, plus its well-organized user interface allows us to monitor and maintain our whole system easily."

When an alert condition is encountered, ActiveBatch notifies the appropriate member of Ecount's IT staff via email or a text-supported cell phone. Alerts are customizable, meaning that administrators can specify text and even include variables to describe the problem. The system supports the creation of Alert Objects so that when personnel or situations change, alerts are grouped together for easy analysis.

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Impact

Ecount has been using ActiveBatch since 2001, a scant three years after its founding. As the company has grown into a multinational company with business relationships around the world, its processing demands have matured considerably. Yet the company has found little reason to look for an alternative job scheduler.

"Ecount is aggressively pursuing expansion in Canada and elsewhere outside of North America. We are also considered the industry innovator, so we're constantly trying out new services and adding to our product offerings. ActiveBatch hasn't hindered us in any way from growing, which is very important to us," Embree observed.

With a corporate goal to double business volume in the coming year, Ecount is determined to expand and optimize its position in the prepaid marketplace. It routinely evaluates its IT resources for those technologies that will support this growth; only the ones with the necessary flexibility, reliability and scalability are retained.

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