ActiveBatch®

Customer IT Automation Success Story

From Homegrown Scheduling to an Architectural Approach
How Finland's Tax Administration Transformed Workflow Creation with ActiveBatch

Company: Finnish Tax Administration
Industry: Government
Customer Site: Oulunsalo, Finland

Brief Company Overview:

Carrying out taxation for over 5.4 million people, the Finnish Tax Administration's (FTA) 5,130 full time employees are tasked with the responsibility of collecting over €64.8 billion from taxpayers and remitting the collected taxes and charges into the accounts of tax recipients. In addition to yearly tax collection, the FTA performs critical background processes such as taxpayer registers, tax calculation, tax accounting, as well as taxpayer services including tax auditing and tax recovery.

SUCCESS STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Limitations of a homegrown scheduling system
- ActiveBatch as an automation solution for multiple environments
- Improved security with Active Directory integration
- Decreased manual labor and improved efficiency of IT operations

Limitations of Homegrown Scheduling

Since 2012, the FTA has been using ActiveBatch IT Automation and Job Scheduling to automate its IT processes across the organization's 6 units: 4 taxation units (Individual, Corporate, Tax Auditing, Tax Collection), an Administrative unit, and IT Services.

Before ActiveBatch, the FTA primarily relied on scripts to automate batch processes in their joint OpenVMS and Windows environments. In 2011, they were running about 1,500 OpenVMS batch runs per week in their application, development, and testing environments, and roughly 2,000 batch runs per week in their production environment. These batch runs were managed by a homegrown batch run management system which relied on Oracle Forms 11g, COBOL and DCL scripts, and an Oracle 11g database.

Some of the challenges the IT organization was facing was the need for change management, fine-grained security, and centralized administration of batch applications across development, test, and production environments. While it was possible to expand the FTA's homegrown management system on the Windows platform, maintaining such a tailored system would have been time-consuming and expensive.

The FTA was also dealing with an increasing number of batch applications on the Windows platform. Before ActiveBatch, there were about 200 different batch tasks in the production environment and Windows batch run scheduling was carried out using Windows Task Scheduler. Windows Task Scheduler, however, presented some limitations to the IT organization such as the inability to chain related jobs across systems, lack of event automation, and restricted scheduling.

Due to the increasing amount of batch scheduling performed on the Windows platform, the FTA required an automation solution that supported Windows and OpenVMS, but also wanted a solution that supported UNIX and Linux in the event the IT organization changed its environment down the line.

ActiveBatch: A Central Point of Control

The FTA first went out to market for an automation solution in 2011. After conducting a highly selective RFP, they chose ActiveBatch based on the number of features it had that matched up with the FTA's requirements. Working with international high-end software development solutions provider Nortal, Advanced Systems Concepts was able to meet the FTA's automation needs. At the time, the IT organization was looking for a product that would be easy to implement, had robust monitoring and alerting, support for managing and executing jobs across multiple environments, an intuitive user interface, fine-grained security, and integration with Active Directory.

"The desired features have worked like a charm. As know-how has increased, we're finding new ways and new applications for utilizing ActiveBatch," says Suvi Vihro, Data Administration Specialist at the FTA.

> *"The desired features have worked like a charm. As know-how has increased, we're finding new ways and new applications for utilizing ActiveBatch."*
>
> - Suvi Vihro, Data Administration Specialist, FTA
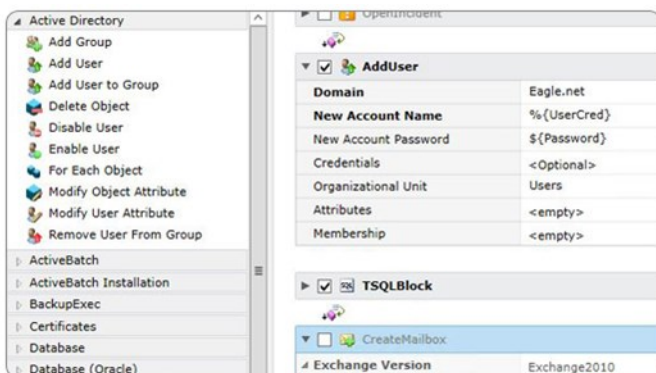
Learn more at ActiveBatch.com ▶

According to Vihro, the transition to ActiveBatch took roughly a year as the IT organization worked to build user knowledge and conduct training, create multiple environments, and transfer existing tasks into Active-Batch. Overall, the transition to ActiveBatch went smoothly and the FTA found that the product had a minimal learning curve, which enabled the IT organization to easily learn and utilize ActiveBatch's capabilities very quickly from the start.

The Benefits

The FTA has six different environments, which all run jobs on their own agents. Even with the multiplicity of environments and the high number of batch run servers, the FTA reports that ActiveBatch has provided them with a central point of control and management organization-wide.

The FTA leverages ActiveBatch's Change Management System to synchronize and manage objects across several different environments. Using a visual approach in comparing objects, ActiveBatch's Change Management System allows designers to approve, accept, or exclude each of the changes, handle exceptions, and transform object names to ensure a reliable navigation through different environments and successful execution in the new environment.

The FTA has found ActiveBatch to be a feature-rich product with several key capabilities that have helped streamline their operations. Among some of these capabilities are ActiveBatch's robust alerting system, which supports over 30 different alerts and alert objects, as well as its intuitive graphical interface, which facilitates simple drag-and-drop workflow creation. Additionally, the IT organization has also built custom taxation .Net batch runs into their environment and heavily makes use of ActiveBatch plans, process jobs, and scripts to generate new workflows.

"ActiveBatch allows for more diverse and more complex batch runs. With ActiveBatch, we've been able to reduce manual work/problem solving and significantly decrease the amount of custom scripting we do," says Vihro.

One of the key requirements for the IT organization was an automation solution that would provide improved security for the FTA. ActiveBatch met the organization's security needs with its ability to use Active Directory accounts for user identification in batch runs. ActiveBatch's Active Directory integration helps IT organizations automate and manage user/group access to applications and systems as well as enable better compliance with internal and external audit and control requirements.

ActiveBatch Integrated Jobs Library Active Directory Production-Ready Job Steps

> *"ActiveBatch allows for more diverse and more complex batch runs. With ActiveBatch, we've been able to reduce manual work/problem solving and significantly decrease the amount of custom scripting we do."*
>
> - Suvi Vihro, Data Administration Specialist, FTA

The FTA wanted to ensure production, testing, and development environments, as well as their respective databases, could be differentiated from each other in order to prevent misuse and promote reliable management of user rights. With ActiveBatch, the FTA has experienced improved security as a result of not needing to give permissions to batch run servers as well as being able to limit user/group access to only certain applications.

The FTA has also made heavy use of ActiveBatch's reference objects to create workflows faster and reduce time spent on manual maintenance. A reference object is a job or plan that points to an existing job/plan, also known as the "master" job/plan, and runs the core of the job/plan it points to. The benefit is that users can easily make changes to one job or plan that can be incorporated across hundreds or thousands of jobs with a single keystroke, resulting in less clutter and improved management of related reference jobs.

"ActiveBatch has reduced the need for manual labor, and consequently, improved the efficiency of IT operations. There has been a noticeable difference in the amount of manual work required in our Operations," Vihro reports.

> *"ActiveBatch has reduced the need for manual labor, and consequently, improved the efficiency of IT operations. There has been a noticeable difference in the amount of manual work required in our operations."*
>
> - Suvi Vihro, Data Administration Specialist, FTA

Achieving Success with Professional Services

Advanced Systems Concepts also performed on-site consulting services for the FTA to facilitate the transition to ActiveBatch. One of Advanced Systems Concepts' training representatives spent two weeks at the FTA's office, helping the team with implementation, knowledge transfer, and getting them up to speed with ActiveBatch best practices.

"We have found ActiveBatch to be very useful and we feel like we've gotten exactly what we were looking for in an automation product. We're very happy with the product, its features, performance, and support services, and have realized a lower cost of operations as a result," says Vihro.

Learn more at ActiveBatch.com ▶