ActiveBatch®

SThree Drives Business Efficiency with End-to-End Automation for Onboarding/Offboarding and BYOD Provisioning

Company: SBA Communications
Industry: Recruitment
Customer Site: London, United Kingdom

Brief Company Overview:
SThree, headquartered in London, is a global leader in the recruitment industry with more than 28 years in business. As the company's growth expanded globally over the years, SThree's IT department needed to find a way to automate various processes across different time zones. ActiveBatch provided just the solution, and has scaled so well that even with the significant growth in business, the IT organization has not had to grow its user base and has been able to keep the same back-end processes in place.

SUCCESS STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Expanding company needs more than Windows Task Scheduler
- ActiveBatch as a flexible, multi-platform solution
- Onboarding/offboarding automation saves IT organization time and resources
- ActiveBatch allows employees to self-service and add/remove their own devices

IT Organization Facing Critical Crunch Point as Business Grows

In less than three decades, specialized recruiting giant SThree has gone from a single office with just four employees to a global operation with over 2,300 employees in 18 countries across the world. In this time, technological advances have dramatically changed the recruitment industry, enabling 24/7 communications with increased pressure on IT for fast information, data transfers, and seamless end-to-end processes.

SThree Senior Partner, Garry Lengthorn, has been with the company for over 17 years, most recently as Director of IT Services. Lengthorn is responsible for a team of 50+ IT professionals specializing in the development of infrastructure services, telecommunications, security, and support. Within the span of those 17 years, Lengthorn has seen the organization grow from three locations based in Europe to 44 offices dispersed throughout North America, Europe, Asia, and Australia. Based out of the UK, Lengthorn and his team run SThree's global IT operations for all 44 offices and a host of contract workers around the world.

Before ActiveBatch, SThree relied primarily on Windows Task Scheduler. However, as the business began to grow and expand, Lengthorn saw that the IT organization was going to get to a critical crunch point in the near future.

"We were starting to build a much more complex environment that certainly needed to be more readily available 24/7. When I first started at SThree, we were a European-based business, so we pretty much ran things solely during the European time zone. We didn't really run things overnight. We didn't really have a concept of full-on batch production runs. It was very basic housekeeping or data population type scripts."

With the expanding growth of the company, Lengthorn knew the IT organization needed to find a way to automate the manual, script-driven processes they had been running as well as manage the dependencies and scheduling of processes across different time zones.

"We literally had to run things around the clock and IT services needed to meet a lot of new business conditions," Lengthorn commented. At this point, Lengthorn went out to market for an automation solution that could scale with SThree's growth and meet the 24/7 demands being imposed on the IT organization.

The IT Automation Solution

In 2006, Lengthorn began looking at automation solutions for SThree. A key requirement was finding a solution that was cross-platform and could integrate well with a variety of technologies.

"It became clear quickly that ActiveBatch was a multi-platform solution and we felt that flexibility would be critical moving forward. Although we had a Microsoft server infrastructure at the time, we were starting to do a lot more work with other technologies. Advanced Systems Concepts' ActiveBatch fit that need perfectly."

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Learn more at ActiveBatch.com ▶

ActiveBatch®

ActiveBatch manages tasks, applications, and workflows across a range of platforms including Microsoft Windows, Linux, UNIX, z/OS, OpenVMS, and more. In addition, ActiveBatch's unique licensing point system accommodates system and environment changes without additional fees or licenses.

Today, Lengthorn reports that even with the growth of the company and the IT organization, ActiveBatch has scaled so well that SThree has not had to change the initial configuration it had in 2007. Lengthorn says, "Our user base has grown significantly, but the same backend processes are still in place. Those backend processes deliver provisioning for our external customers in terms of their products as well as managing processes internally."

Drag-and-Drop Automation with the Integrated Jobs Library

Over the years, SThree has used key ActiveBatch functionalities like the Integrated Jobs Library to improve its automation environment. The Integrated Jobs Library provides production-ready, templated Job Steps for hundreds of key technologies and applications like SAP, Oracle, and more. The Integrated Job Library's drag-and-drop interface allows developers to quickly and efficiently assemble complex workflows and reduce the need for custom scripting.

In particular, Lengthorn says the IT organization has really benefitted from the Integrated Jobs Library as well as the script-language independence and intelligence of ActiveBatch to directly query what they already had. "The Integrated Jobs Library has been fantastic for expanding our automation scripts, making it easy to pass variable information between APIs. The most frequently used Job Steps are related to PowerShell and we use regular expression functions to manipulate workflows and create conditional branches and other dependent workflows. This is regularly used in combination with file event triggers when events associated with our provisioning process occur."

Lengthorn reports the IT organization runs about 520 jobs per day with an average of about 250,000 instances per day. The success rates are very high because of the self-healing and conditional logic that the team has built into their ActiveBatch environment. "Let's say we have a routine that fails to run because of disk space. We'll add some conditional routine processes that will clean up the disk space and start the job again," says Lengthorn.

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Success with an Architectural Automation Strategy

With ActiveBatch, SThree has been able to achieve an architectural automation strategy by adopting a unified, enterprise-wide approach that has scaled well throughout the organization's growth. Lengthorn says, "It's safe to say that over the last three years, we couldn't have delivered the level of service we provide without Active-Batch being one of the key tools we use. As SThree has grown over the years, we have not had to grow our Operations team because we've been smarter in the way we deploy our processes so that we don't have to have more people running things."

When SThree first implemented ActiveBatch, Lengthorn explained that automation was always secondary as the strategy revolved around getting the technology out first. The organization would often create processes manually at first, produce the output that was needed, and then think about automation after the fact. The problem, however, was that they never got around to automating these processes because they were too busy running the processes to produce the output.

"We've completely turned that on its head now. Whenever a process is introduced that we need to run through our Operations team, the first thought is to make it automated. ActiveBatch gives us the ability to do that. Automation now comes first for us in delivering a new product or service to the organization," says Lengthorn. As a whole, SThree has experienced benefits internally to the IT organization as well as externally at the business level. In terms of automating core business processes, Lengthorn says, "ActiveBatch has become an integral part of our business, allowing us to automate business and IT processes faster and more reliably."
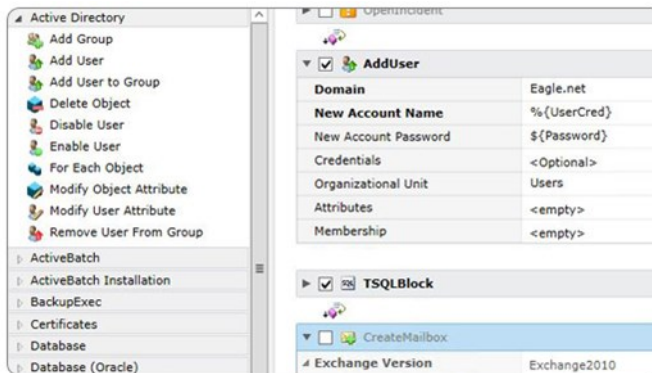
*ActiveBatch Active Directory Job Steps
Employee Onboarding Workflow*

Onboarding/Offboarding Automation

For a recruiting company like SThree, which has both permanent and temporary workers all over the world, effective onboarding/offboarding is critical to the success of the business as a whole. In early 2014, the IT organization was able to eliminate a third-party tool they were using to automate the onboarding/offboarding process by turning to ActiveBatch.

Using ActiveBatch's built-in Active Directory and Microsoft Exchange Job Steps, the IT organization transitioned onboarding/offboarding processes to ActiveBatch. Now when the IT organization is notified of a user joining the company, the Operations team will run an automated process in ActiveBatch that will add an Active Directory account and the necessary access permissions. Similarly, when a user leaves, their account will be decommissioned and access permissions will be updated.

Lengthorn says, "We've made the new process more efficient and robust, automating it better than it was previously. We knew ActiveBatch could do 100% of what we needed to do and so we said why don't we just take ActiveBatch and decommission the other product? We've saved around £10k per year as a result, and gained more flexibility. We actually made the third-party software redundant, enabling true cost savings."

Provisioning Good™ for Enterprise and Additional Technologies

SThree implemented Good for Enterprise, a secure mobility solution, nearly two years ago as a "Bring Your Own Device" (BYOD) program for employees. For Lengthorn, it became clear from day one that they would need to automate the provisioning of Good technology because of the constant churn of mobile devices.

To address this, the IT organization developed a process in which all users go through SThree's service management tool to request Good provisioning. With ActiveBatch automating Good provisioning, users can switch devices as many times as they want, enabling greater flexibility and a level of self-service that wouldn't be possible if the IT department had to manually add and delete users' devices.

Lengthorn says, "ActiveBatch was the absolute key component in the middle. Today, 99% of our requests around provisioning are done automatically because people go to our service management tool to request the service and then in the background ActiveBatch goes off and does all the account creation to set up Good on the device."

First, employees will make a request for Good technology via the service management tool. ActiveBatch then takes that request and does all the background work from creating the account to generating an email for the user with instructions in the mobile application. At the front end, the user sees the service management tool, but behind the scenes ActiveBatch is integrating with the service management tool to automatically provision user requests and deploy Good technology.

"This was a key strategic moment for us because from that point on we decided we would exploit ActiveBatch with any new service we introduced throughout the service catalog. ActiveBatch has become a key tool for joining up processes from different technologies and automating them," Lengthorn says.

The IT organization also uses ActiveBatch to automate business processes that rely on technologies like SAP, Oracle, Siebel, PHP, and more. For example, when consultants get a good candidate or a new job, and they want to put it out for candidates or clients to see, they'll run an e-shot, which is automated by ActiveBatch.

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Ease of Use with Alerting

In order to chain these disparate technologies together, SThree's IT organization makes use of ActiveBatch's extensive Alert capabilities. The IT organization creates an ActiveBatch Alert Object associated with all of its Jobs so that when an Alert is raised, a Jobs Library workflow is triggered to run a PHP script to interface with the service management tool's API to generate support tickets.

Lengthorn says that although they can look at the failing jobs in ActiveBatch, the team actually triggers it in the service management tool so that they have a ticket for every failure of a process in ActiveBatch. This allows the organization to do profiling of incidents and fix long-standing issues.

> *"ActiveBatch's Alert System is easy to use and deploy, and integrates very well with the technologies in our environment," says Lengthorn."*
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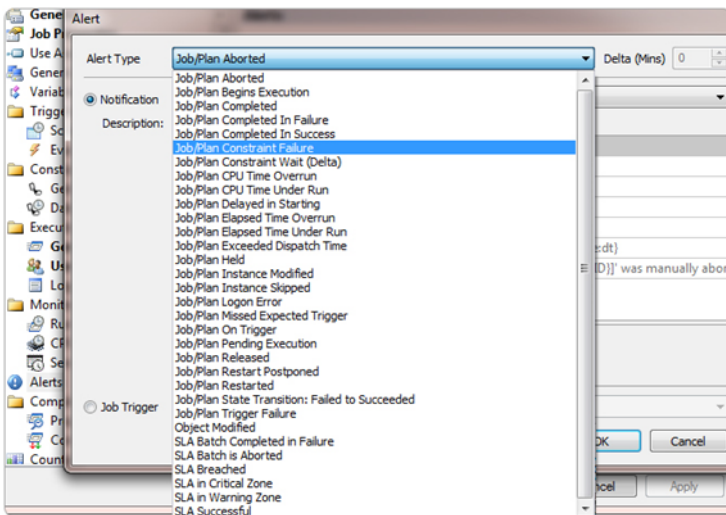
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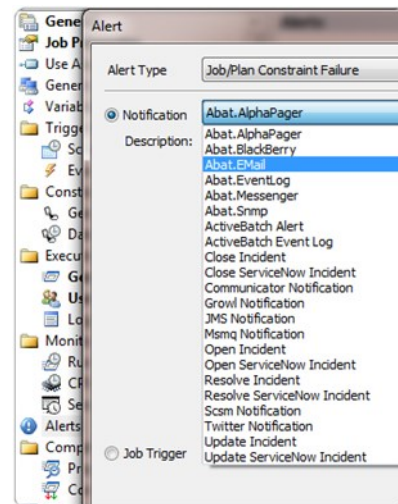
ActiveBatch Alert Notification Types

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Support

From SThree's location in the United Kingdom, they have always had phenomenal customer support with ASCI's US-based technical support team. James Perry, Operations Team Lead, says, "ASCI's Support has always been incred-ibly helpful when we've raised any Support queries, help-ing us to grow in our understanding of the Jobs Library Job Steps and how we can use them to get the best out-comes."

Looking Towards the Future

Given the success of ActiveBatch, Lengthorn has full confi-dence that ActiveBatch will meet SThree's business needs in the medium to long term. "Our processes are scalable so if we doubled the size of our organization, the existing ActiveBatch environment and associated support staff could handle the growth."

"ActiveBatch is part of our landscape for the long term. The vast majority of our automation strategy is around exploiting ActiveBatch. There's only so much you can do with various other technologies and ActiveBatch is a tool that we can use to integrate with those different technologies and join them up to deliver an end-to-end seamless service. It's extremely powerful. We've now seen this investment over 6-7 years and we're still learning and getting real value from the product." Additionally, Lengthorn notes, "The pricing model of the prod-uct means that you can also achieve very sizeable returns very quickly."

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