ActiveBatch®

Customer IT Automation Success Story

BlueBay Asset Management
Invests in Enterprise-Wide Workload Automation

Company: BlueBay Asset Management
Industry: Financial Investment
Customer Site: London, United Kingdom

Brief Company Overview:

Founded in 2001, BlueBay is a leading specialist manager of fixed income and alternative investment products and manages over US$60 billion for institutions and high-net-worth individuals.

BlueBay offers a defined product range that covers investment grade, high/yield/distressed, convertibles, and emerging markets. BlueBay is an active asset manager, focused on capital preservation and the generation of attractive, risk-adjusted returns.

SUCCESS STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Convert from a group of disparate, platform-specific scheduling tools to a centralized job scheduling solution
- The importance of ease-of-use, cost, flexibility, and scalability in a solution
- Avoid the time and costs of script rewrites and manual errors
- Auditing capabilities are critical to meet regulations
- Improved system performance by 30% by freeing up CPU and memory

Reliable, Enterprise-Wide Job Scheduling

In the world of financial asset and investment management, timely data equals money. In 1815, Nathan Rothschild famously proved this when he used carrier pigeons to report the news of the Battle of Waterloo to create one of most famous banking investments in history. Nearly 200 years later, for BlueBay Asset Management the same still holds true, only applications and systems are now delivering the data and it's the job of IT to ensure the processes that deliver that information are executed in a timely manner.

For John Carlisle, IT manager at BlueBay Asset Management, ensuring this meant converting from a group of disparate, platform-specific scheduling tools to a centralized job scheduling solution, and that meant ActiveBatch Workload Automation from Advanced Systems Concepts, Inc.

Prior to 2010, BlueBay ran and monitored a series of jobs via SQL Server Scheduling Agent, Windows Task Scheduler and an in-house job scheduler that was custom-developed for BlueBay's risk assessment software. By 2009, BlueBay was running various jobs and processes across all three, in addition to subscription-based reporting via SQL Server Reporting Services (SSRS). This situation presented a myriad of challenges, mainly a support team that had no central point of control to manage and monitor workflows and a disparate alert framework that meant job failures would not be discovered until after the business was impacted. "With such a disparate and widespread environment, the decision was made to centralize all job scheduling into a single solution," says Carlisle.

The process associated with BlueBay's risk assessment software presented its own challenges. At the heart of this process is an analytics solution that takes data from a combination of SQL Server and DB2 databases in addition to financial and investment data from a third-party vendor based in the United States. This data is then processed and passed downstream to trading applications to be reported on by BlueBay's financial analysts the next morning.

The in-house scheduler developed to manage these processes lacked any form of event automation framework to trigger jobs based on specific events or triggers and no capability to recognize holidays or first/last business day of the month. "If you reset the scheduler, it would simply run every job it needed to run since midnight of that day," Carlisle says. In addition, the custom scheduler couldn't handle the complex dependencies between job steps. "Certain jobs could only run at a particular time or had to wait until the preceding job completed. That had to be coordinated among users and groups with handshakes and flags," Carlisle said jokingly.

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From Homegrown to Enterprise-Wide Scheduling

The homegrown scheduler represented a silo of automation, and discussions to move other batch processes onto this homegrown solution quickly underscored its limitations. As a result, in November of 2009 BlueBay went to market in search of an enterprise scheduling solution. In addition to evaluating ActiveBatch, BlueBay also considered Tidal Software from Cisco Systems, AutoSys from CA Technologies, and Control-M from BMC Software. ActiveBatch's ease of use, cost, and the flexibility offered by its pricing model won Carlisle's team over. "With ActiveBatch, the ability to start small and build the implementation around our environment was critical."

Microsoft compatibility also played a big role. "We could use our native Microsoft languages, SSIS packages, batch scripts, and more within ActiveBatch with minimal rewrite, and for other jobs we could leverage the production-ready Job Steps that are part of the Integrated Jobs Library, which require no coding at all," Carlisle says. And a Unix-based scheduling system was something the support staff was looking to avoid as well. "We didn't want to get a call at 3:00AM to tackle a command line-based scheduler due to a job failure. With ActiveBatch, we knew that wouldn't be an issue."

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>
> - John Carlisle, IT Manager at BlueBay Asset

Risk Averted Via IT Automation

With ActiveBatch in place, Carlisle has migrated the risk management processes over. The entire workflow, which includes some 300 individual job steps, kicks off at 10:00PM, and using various SFTP steps, collects the data, produces files, and sends them downstream to applications used by the business analysts —all prior to the start of the next business day at 6:30AM. With ActiveBatch automat-ing the process, the support staff sleeps soundly at night knowing this mission-critical process is executing smoothly. "We've seen a dramatic reduction in system delays and callouts, and when there is an issue, Active-Batch's monitoring and alerting is much more robust than what the custom scheduler provided."

And restarting a workflow midstream due to a job failure has never been easier. "The ability to restart from a specific step in a workflow is great. A process which runs for three hours then fails at the last job step can be resumed at the failing step once remedial action has been taken, saving hours of time," Carlisle says.

ActiveBatch has also centralized BlueBay's SSRS reporting, which is leveraged throughout the company by finance to process and run critical financial data. Prior to ActiveBatch, employees would create and run their own reports, all under their own security credentials. When an employee left, their reports stopped running, leaving BlueBay's financial department and partner banks high and dry without critical financial data. "It's like they would simply disappear," Carlisle says. Carlisle has now consolidated all SSRS reports within ActiveBatch, allowing him to run a report every morning to see which, if any, reports have failed, rerun those that did, and distribute them to the appropriate group. This central point of control for SSRS jobs also provides BlueBay with a central point of auditing, preventing employees from setting up ad-hoc reports that the business or IT can quickly lose track of.

This central point of auditing has proved invaluable in an industry where regulations have tightened. ActiveBatch provides a full audit and security framework that limits the risk of unauthorized changes to any ActiveBatch object, while Revision History allows for a comparison of

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changes that exist between revisions on any ActiveBatch Object and the ability to restore back to the properties of any earlier revision. Carlisle uses this frame-work to do spot checks on any workflow alterations and leverages ActiveBatch's role-based permissions to pre-vent unauthorized personnel from making changes to jobs.

Along the same lines, ActiveBatch's Change Management system is used to move workflows from test environ-ments into production by giving Carlisle a graphical in-terface to compare Objects, allowing him to approve, accept, or exclude individual changes, handle exceptions, and transfer Objects to the production environment. "Change management is great," Carlisle says. "The release process is now error free. The Change Management tool simply copies from our UAT environment to production with no manual intervention. It appears in production untouched."

From Business Process Automation to IT Operations

All told, BlueBay is now running approximately 2.5 million jobs a year with ActiveBatch with 15 users. In addition to automating critical business processes, such as updating the company's risk assessment and trading software, au-tomating SSRS reporting and more, the implementation of ActiveBatch has been expanded to include automation of IT operations and infrastructure management. Server patching processes, which required hours of manual, on-site support, are now installed and the machines sched-uled for shut down and restart via workflows within Ac-tiveBatch, resulting in improvements in system reliability and saving BlueBay's IT staff hours of work. Additionally, by moving the SQL Server Agent job steps into Active-Batch, Carlisle says system performance has improved 30% by freeing up CPU and memory usage.

"With ActiveBatch, it's all about improving the reliability and availability of core business systems and the data they produce," Carlisle says. "For BlueBay Asset Manage-ment, IT is a cost of doing business; but if we can spend that money in a way that gets the business their data and updates their systems more efficiently, without any is-sues, that's dollars well spent, and that's what Active-Batch does for us."

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