

Chemical Manufacturer Deploys Enterprise Scheduling Model

CSBP saves time and reduces costs using intelligent automation solution.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CSBP LIMITED

- Chemicals for agriculture and mining
- Perth, Western Australia
- 780 employees
- 25 IT staff

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

- Increase process efficiency
- Improve data processing and reliability
- Simplify administration

SOLUTION

- Deploy Cisco Tidal Enterprise Scheduler to automate and manage ERP processes

BUSINESS RESULTS

- Reduced data processing time window
- Better business process flows
- Easier administration
- Faster deployment of new processes

Business Challenge

Since 1910, CSBP Limited, headquartered in Australia, has been a global leader in manufacturing chemicals for agriculture and mining uses.

CSBP operates in a dynamic business context of growth, geographically dispersed customers, and a diverse product portfolio. To support data needs in the face of those multifaceted and evolving business factors, the company has to continuously improve data center efficiency. So IT strives to make complex business processes smoother and administration simpler.

CSBP's approach to managing business processes was good, but the data processing steps required too much staff involvement to run smoothly and on time. That model was neither scalable enough nor flexible enough for the long run.

Like many enterprises, CSBP business processes touch more than one application. The company wanted to bring more cohesiveness and unity to business process data flows that access diverse applications using automated job scheduling

Unifying jobs into larger, smoother, gapless processes that require less intervention would increase data center efficiency for CSBP and reduce the potential for problems.

The company identified processes across financials, sales and marketing analysis, and customer management applications that had potential to become more efficient. Regardless of the category, the challenges were the same, so the company realized that a single automated enterprise job scheduling solution would help make a variety of processes and tasks more efficient. The solution would streamline processes and reduce data processing time windows. It would reduce risk to data quality by providing automated monitoring and alerting. Also, automation would make administration easier through a consolidated view of all processes and a single interface for defining processes.

One key business process to transition was invoicing. Timely invoicing is important to CSBP and its customers, because it is closely tied to customer service, product delivery, and cash flow. Therefore, invoices were sent on schedule, but often credits were issued to reflect special pricing and discount information in the customer contracts. That happened because sometimes orders could not be compared with contracts within the invoicing time window.

The company wanted to reduce the number of credits by delivering more accurate initial invoices, thereby saving time and reducing costs for both CSBP and its customers. The company addressed its invoicing problem by using enterprise job scheduling automation from Cisco to bridge the separate invoicing and contract management systems and simplify reconciliation of the two.

Switching to an enterprise oriented view of job scheduling was an important transition because it helps the company become more efficient.

Intelligent Automation Solution

Adopting the Enterprise Scheduling Model

Deep experience has educated CSBP about the many ways that consolidated cross-technology job scheduling automation can improve business efficiency. Prior to using Cisco® Tidal Enterprise Scheduler, in 2008, CSBP upgraded its JDE ERP system and was also migrating to a Microsoft Windows environment. Due to time and resource constraints, the company temporarily used a simple point scheduling tool for managing complex processes.

That interim solution required workarounds and scripting for scheduling complex processes external to the system. Exception scheduling around holidays and alerting was not possible. In addition, end-of-day processing - including invoicing - would fail on occasion. IT personnel knew that they needed a product designed to be a comprehensive enterprise job scheduler that could meet the complex needs of the company.

In February 2009, with upgrade and platform migration activities completed, CSBP application developers and operations staff chose Cisco Tidal Enterprise Scheduler. The company cited several specific reasons for choosing Cisco, such as coverage for enterprise resource planning (ERP) applications, a single comprehensive view, support for nested dependencies so that processes run in the correct sequence, and many other enterprise oriented capabilities.

Since then, CSBP has been using Cisco Tidal Enterprise Scheduler to manage large, involved processes that include sets of ERP jobs, database jobs that modify ERP data, Structured Query Language (SQL) jobs, and jobs that touch other applications such as the contracts management system. The scheduler manages vital processes such as:

- Re-pricing and invoicing for the chemicals business
- Re-pricing and invoicing for the fertilizer business
- Accounting processes that run after invoicing for the two businesses is complete
- Invoicing/finance stream that runs general ledger (GL) postings and updates
- End-of-day jobs involving maintenance and supply operations
- Creating and delivering timely business reports

The team now sees a global, central view of scheduled jobs, which is easier to work with than multiple scheduling views. Also, job definition is simpler because of a visual interface that lets users define all jobs in one familiar way using one environment. The scheduler runs the processes across multiple technologies, handles the dependencies, and notifies staff of potential issues through information-rich alerts.

With the Cisco product, it is easier for CSBP to control highly complex scheduling dependencies and automate many processes that formerly required time-intensive manual intervention. This Cisco solution is helping the company meet the challenge of improving operational effectiveness, which in turn has a beneficial effect on the bottom line.

Business Results

Several results demonstrate that this scheduler is helping the company become more efficient. From better invoicing and crediting, to faster reporting, to easier planning and development, the scheduler is delivering results.

The Cisco solution makes the verification of sales contracts with customer orders a smoother single flow that occurs in coordination with product dispatches and invoicing windows. The company now reaps the benefits of this approach because it issues about 30 to 40 percent fewer credits annually.

“Cisco Tidal Enterprise Scheduler helps us to be very proactive. This is particularly important in an environment where job dependencies are complex and so tied to the bottom line.”

— IT Representative for CSBP

Orders can now be compared to customer contracts before invoicing deadlines, so that the invoices reflect contracted pricing information. Reducing the number of credits saves the company and its customers time and reduces costs.

Another example is more efficient business reporting. Previously, the reports were good but required more time, planning, and monitoring to complete than they do now. Sales and marketing managers are pleased to consistently have reliable reports, and even Cognos cubes available right when they arrive at work, without any waiting. They are also pleased at IT's ability to respond to new or spontaneous reporting needs more quickly than before.

Another result has been more efficient planning due to better visibility and control. Prior to Cisco Tidal Enterprise Scheduler, staff members had to estimate the time needed for each process and build a cushion to accommodate unforeseeable circumstances. For example, they had to set a processing window of about four hours for end-of-day jobs to accommodate the processes, as well as administration and monitoring time. Cisco Tidal Enterprise Scheduler has reduced that window to about one hour. That time savings is because staff members do not have to estimate or schedule jobs at predefined intervals of time.

Staff knows exactly what jobs are running when and how long they take, because users can see job status anytime and get job execution data that can be used for planning. Users no longer have to schedule jobs at predefined intervals, because jobs can be linked together in a sequence of gapless dependencies that the scheduler executes one after the other, resulting in a faster flow than before. Additionally, IT personnel can plan in less time for unforeseeable circumstances, because they get advance alerts to potential problems from the scheduler, which keeps a watch on factors such as system availability or long-running jobs. Plus, job failures have been reduced by about 50 percent and the team has early notification of them, so staff can begin the resolution process sooner than in the past. Points of failure are also easier to pinpoint, so that the entire process does not have to restart and instead can begin at the point just prior to the problem.

As a special bonus, the solution contributes to employee satisfaction, because it makes daily tasks easier for IT personnel and frees some time. Daily users particularly like the enterprise scheduling model, because it gives them the ability to use job grouping functions and dependencies to build job logic that reflects the business requirements, regardless of disparate systems involved in the processes.

Daily users say that the product makes it easier for them to maintain their technical understanding of the entire job processing environment, which allows them to quickly respond to business rule changes.

“Our users like the fact that this scheduler lets us spend more time on serving the business and less on administering and monitoring the jobs,” says an IT representative from CSBP.

Better visibility over processes means that various application specialists can understand their jobs in a fuller business context and can quickly jump in to solve problems. Plus, they can support the mission by making sure their business processes are accurately represented in the broader workflows. The product helps personnel who have differing skills and various areas of responsibility to work together over a common business process.

Finally, CSBP notes that the Cisco job scheduler helps its ongoing software development efforts become more efficient, because it lets users schedule and manage all jobs in the development environment first, so that application specialists are more confident when they put jobs into production.

The many ways in which Cisco Tidal Enterprise Scheduler helps the company meet its objective of increasing efficiency add up to noticeable improvements in the daily functioning of the business as a whole.

Next Steps

CSBP continues to identify opportunities for improvement with other processes and is extending this job scheduling automation to new processes as needs arise. As the company standardizes job scheduling on this platform, it expects to gain more efficiencies that will enhance its ability to deploy services across the enterprise more quickly.

For More Information

For more information about Cisco Tidal Enterprise Scheduler, go to <http://www.cisco.com>.



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