

Leading Interactive Games Designer Accelerates Business Intelligence Program

Electronic Arts improves business intelligence using job scheduling automation.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Customer Name: Electronic Arts
Industry: Interactive Games
Location: Redwood City, California
Number of Employees: 8,000 employees as of March 31, 2010 and several development teams globally
Founded: 1982
Ownership: Public (ERTS)

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

- Provide timely, complete, accurate product-demand data to business
- Decrease time and staff involvement in routine data processing
- Increase available staff time for exploring new opportunities and serving end-users

SOLUTION

Cisco Tidal Enterprise Scheduler with its Informatica connection is used to automate comprehensive extract-transfer-load (ETL) job scheduling

BUSINESS RESULTS

- Consistently deliver timely, accurate business intelligence to users
- Simplify error-free ETL to increase BI delivery speed and accuracy
- Free staff to work on other projects
- Scale BI smoothly and explore new BI services to the business
- Allows for real-time interdepartmental communications and well-informed decision making

Business Challenge

Electronic Arts (EA) is a leader in interactive games and employs 8,000 professionals worldwide with 18 development studios in 11 countries. EA maintains its leadership in this competitive market through its ability to rapidly understand market dynamics and adjust development efforts to match ever-changing market demands. At the heart of EA's market acumen is timely, accurate business intelligence (BI) about products, sales, customers, and finance. Reliance on BI keeps pressure on IT to stay ahead of the company's BI needs.

The IT BI department realized that in order to continue meeting EA's BI requirements reliably into the future, despite growing amounts of data and new service needs, it had to quickly increase its extract-transform-load (ETL) efficiency.

Costly business consequences can ensue if marketing and financial data is inaccurate or unavailable for business decisions. For example, EA sells games both directly and through retail outlets such as Wal-Mart, so the company must know which games are selling well in each of its markets. This knowledge requires processing massive amounts of complex and detailed data very quickly to make it available when needed. Not understanding the developing market dynamics or the financial status of EA's place in the market can lead to bad planning that endangers future success.

Rajesh K. Gupta, EA's senior manager of applications for BI and data services, explains that EA avoids many costly problems because EA

management can access the data it needs when it needs it. But, in order to scale and continue providing excellent decision support into the future, Gupta and his team realized they had to go to the source of their BI implementation and improve ETL efficiency, because ETL processes are big, complex, and time consuming and can be error prone if they are not monitored carefully.

"We use the Informatica Power Center to integrate and access our data," says Gupta. "It's effective, but we were challenged to increase efficiencies and deliver more data sooner. Also, with our growth, more and more jobs had to run within the same restricted time windows."

Gupta and his team could see a potential for serious problems if they could not keep pace with the demand for more data, timely delivery, and reliable intelligence. "Imagine the problems that could occur if important data isn't delivered in time. For example, if we couldn't deliver key financial data on time, then that could delay the close of the quarter or year," said Gupta. "We had to prevent that type of thing from ever happening. We realized that if we improved our approach to ETL by simplifying scheduling and execution of processes, we could get ahead of the challenges and dramatically reduce the potential for errors and delays."

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— Rajesh K. Gupta, Senior Manager, Applications, for Business Intelligence & Data Services

To populate the Informatica data warehouse with the correct data and supply timely information to the business, all of the many data processing jobs that comprise the ETL process that populates the data warehouse must execute according to a schedule and in the proper order. A particular job needs to finish on schedule and supply a subsequent job with the data that it needs to run. Making this happen efficiently was the challenge, because the many dependencies between jobs required staff monitoring to prevent jobs from halting mid-process and stopping the entire data center. Managing this complexity and keeping pace with growth were demanding increasing amounts of staff time.

Prior to deploying the Cisco job scheduling software, EA IT did not have an enterprise scheduling solution and instead used scheduling tools and methods with limited scope that required dedicated personnel to watch the processes run and troubleshoot them if something went wrong. They were able to schedule Informatica jobs using the scheduling capabilities in PowerCenter; however, they could not easily use PowerCenter for jobs outside of Informatica, and much of the data required to populate the data warehouse resides with other applications. The team had neither a single comprehensive enterprise view of all the jobs and processes that populated the data warehouse, nor an automated and thorough monitoring and alerting capability. Neither did it have a single environment for scheduling jobs for processes that ran across several technologies.

"We needed an automation solution that could easily provide the "handshaking" between the Informatica jobs and jobs outside of Informatica," says Gupta. "To be efficient, any job in our environment must automatically let the next job in the queue know it is done, so the Informatica job can start running automatically. We couldn't do that with what we had."

Solution

Gupta and his group decided that a comprehensive, enterprisewide scheduling solution was needed to generate accurate, complete, and timely data. They were impressed with a demonstration of the Cisco® Tidal Enterprise Scheduler.

"Through the demo, we saw that the Cisco solution could address our needs across the entire data center," says Gupta. "We were also impressed that it offered many connection options, including the Informatica and Oracle connections."

“Another thing we liked was how very easy the solution was to configure and use,” Gupta says. “Users can visually create job workflows that span applications and systems without having to write scripts, and the “handshaking” between applications was easily addressed as well. Being able to use the solution to schedule jobs for any application and platform was a key selling point for us.”

PRODUCT LIST

Cisco Tidal Enterprise Scheduler Cisco Tidal Enterprise Adapter for Informatica
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Business Results

The overarching results of automating its ETL processes with Cisco Tidal Enterprise Scheduler are tremendous time savings and greater control of BI processes, which together enable the team to scale BI

with confidence and help the business keep its market responsiveness sharp.

Cisco Tidal Enterprise Scheduler was smoothly integrated into the EA environment, and its ETL job flow was improved right away. Through this automation, the BI team saves many staff hours daily, and ETL jobs run much faster and more efficiently than before, because lag times between processes are significantly reduced or eliminated. Potential errors are flagged for staff so that they can be prevented.

With all data center jobs running smoothly, IT personnel were freed up to better serve users and to support the strategic business objectives required by the dynamic gaming market. Vital data was delivered on time with minimum effort from IT. Financial data and reports, such as sales data and demand-planning data, were available in a timely manner.

One specific business example of how this solution improves EA’s market responsiveness is in demand planning.

“Demand planning data is vital for running our business,” says Gupta. “It impacts our ability to ship the right games at the right time and in the correct quantities to each retailer. The Cisco Tidal Enterprise Scheduler lets us get reliable product-demand data exactly when we need it, which means better, faster decisions.”

Understanding the actual demand data for their game titles is critical before the holiday season, because, in this market, it directly affects EA’s revenue.

“There is a tremendous amount of precision planning required to support the holiday season,” Gupta says. “EA management needs to fully understand how each title is doing to project manufacturing orders that support actual demand. Bad or unavailable data means that titles can be under or over ordered, and that impacts both EA and our retail partners.”

With Cisco Tidal Enterprise Scheduler in place to drive its ETL processes, Gupta and his team have great confidence in their ability to meet not only the seasonal demands of the business but also the ongoing demands of finance and marketing.

Next Steps

With this automation in place, Gupta and his team have freed up staff time and increased their ability to scale BI services smoothly. The team is well prepared to deliver additional BI services that could help the business navigate its fast-changing market. The success in scheduling automation for the BI initiative serves as a model of efficiency for other areas of IT and could lead the IT team to deploy enterprise job scheduling as a way to increase automation and end-to-end process management.

For More Information

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