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Spotlight on
Client Success

Client Profile

Name:

Specialty Distribution Firm

Description:

A specialized distribution firm wanted to migrate their existing BI solution from SAP BusinessObjects to Actuate iHub with a minimum amount of change to its existing business processes.

Need:

Transition internal business developed reports from SAP to Actuate iHub.

Results:

• Successful Adoption of iHub Server Architecture

• Convert 8 SAP Universes into iHub Information Objects

• Convert 80 DESKI reports to BIRT Designs

• Create custom email solution

• Enhanced parameter interface

Background

Our Client, a specialized distribution service with 10 billion in sales, decided to discontinue the use and support of its SAP/BusinessObjects (SAP) enterprise business intelligence (BI) system. The migration from SAP was a multi-year project for the Client and the initial focus was to move their data warehouse analytics to MicroStrategy.

Having completed the analytics migration, Client was left with a large number of operational reports that were critical to the operation of specific business teams. Attempts to migrate these operational reports to MicroStrategy proved difficult and expensive, so Client decided to find a new product specifically for operational reporting.

A review of operational reporting solutions led Client to Actuate's iHub 3 product. Actuate's capabilities[1] and cost were all significant decision factors. Most importantly, Actuate's products provided a close match to the existing SAP solution, allowing Client to migrate from SAP without a significant change to its business intelligence architecture.

Innovent Solutions is an experienced Actuate and SAP system integrator, including multiple conversion projects (from SAP to Actuate and from Actuate to SAP). The client selected Innovent as its consulting partner to provide both high level guidance as well as low level development skill as they migrated from the SAP operational reporting system to a new Actuate iHub 3 based system.

Business Requirements

Client's reporting service model relied on corporate IT for server infrastructure and business teams for content generation. This meant that corporate IT was responsible for data provisioning, server maintenance, security, and deployment through an automated process. The business teams were responsible for report development and scheduling using both Web Intelligence (WEBI) and Desktop Intelligence (DESKI).

A successful migration required Client to first duplicate the corporate IT structures using Actuate products. With the IT infrastructure in place, the business users were then tasked with converting their reports. Functionally this meant that:

- iHub server was setup, establishing best practices for maintenance
- Actuate Information Objects replaced SAP Universes for data provisioning
- Actuate Business Report Studio (BRS) replace WEBI for business-generated reports
- Complex DESKI reports were replaced using BIRT Report Designer

Innovent first worked with Client's reporting services team to help establish best practices for the management, administration and security of the iHub platform. The iHub 3 platform was quite new, and contained several new features, such as 'Applications', that were new to the Actuate community. Innovent, working with both Client and Actuate engineers, was able to leverage these new features to reduce the administration tasks associated with the iHub server.

The majority of the report development work was to be performed by business users using iHub BRS. Before business users could start building reports, the IT department needed to convert the SAP Universes into Actuate Information Objects. Innovent was able to provide guidance to the IT developers on best practices for the development and test of Information Objects.

DESKI report conversion was outsourced to Innovent consultants since it was too technical for the business users, and did not fit under corporate IT governance.

[1]Important capabilities include: LDAP integration, user defined reporting, scheduling, and data provisioning using Information Objects.

Business Solution - Migration to Actuate iHub

Business intelligence conversions from one product to another typically call on our consultant's technical expertise. Whether it is reverse engineering the original designs or designing and building the target system, our consultants have the knowledge and experience required. This SAP BusinessObjects to Actuate migration was no exception; Innovent's team of consultants were able to deal with issues in a timely and cost effective manner, leaving Client with simple and maintainable solutions. A few examples of the ways that Innovent's technical expertise helped this project follow.

Report Conversion

Client had 80 DESKI reports of a relatively high complexity (six to ten queries each), that had been used as a part of the operations for three business teams. Due to the complexity of these reports, development work had to be performed using BIRT Report Designer (BRD). Innovent's experience with the BIRT project allowed us to quickly migrate all of the reports using one developer. His experience with the product allowed him to take full advantage of BIRT's libraries, styles, and programmatic interfaces to significantly speed the development effort.

Maven Integration

Client uses an automated life cycle management (ALM) based on Maven to promote code to its servers. Actuate does not provide any out-of-box Maven integration. Innovent created custom Maven plugins (MOJOs) that allowed the automation of Actuate builds. This work allowed Client to automate the process used to promote developer created objects (Information Objects and reports) to the various server environments. Once the programs were completed, a simple ticket to the JIRA system enabled build engineers to trigger an automated process that a) pulls the code from version control, b) builds the distributable package, c) places the distributable code into the Nexus repository, and d) publishes the distributable code to the appropriate server environment (DEV, QA, or PROD).

Enhanced Parameter Collection

A significant difference exists between SAP and Actuate in the way multi-value parameters are handled. SAP allows users to specify a delimited set of values (e.g. states as "AL, MN, MI, CO, CA") as a report parameter. In Actuate, multi-value parameters need to be selected from a drop-down list. Client had several parameters with ten thousand or more possible selections, which would not work well with a drop-down selection list. Innovent used BIRT extension points to create a report template with WEBI like parameters built in. Business users creating reports with BRS end up having parameters that behave like WEBI reports.

Email Solution

Client needed to be able to schedule and deliver emails to its external clients by email. Email of scheduled reports from iHub is easy for named iHub users. Client however did not want to add external clients to the internal facing server; they wanted to just schedule to an email address as supported by SAP. Innovent created an email solution which allowed users to specify email properties for scheduled jobs which would then be used to send the emails when the job completed.

Issue Resolution

iHub 3 represented a major product upgrade introducing many new features. Client ran into a few issues as they deployed the product. Innovent was able to work with Client and Actuate support to deliver fixes and work-arounds in a timely manner. Our knowledge of both BIRT and the Actuate iHub3 platform allowed Innovent to isolate the issues in a repeatable manner which allowed Actuate to create fixes quickly.

The Results

Successful Universe Migration: Client was able to convert its SAP Universes to Actuate Information Objects that were deployed and used on the Actuate iHub3 server.

Successful Report Migration: Client was able to migrate all of its WEBI and DESKI reports from SAP to Actuate. The conversion included extensions to BIRT reports to allow them to handle multi-value parameters in the same way that SAP does.

Successful Enterprise BI Conversion: Client was able to shut down the SAP servers following a successful conversion to Actuate iHub3. The project was completed in under six months and delivered under budget. Included in the project was a custom email solution allowing scheduled reports to be sent to any email address.

Automate Actuate Build Process: Actuate Applications are automatically deployed using Client's automate build process which incorporates custom Maven MOJOs that are used to build and deploy the applications.

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Innovent Solutions provides consulting, training and support services and solutions for Search, Business Intelligence and eCommerce technologies. We build systems that enable our clients to:

- Find the information they want and need
- Understand the context and meaning of information
- Trust the information to be accurate and timely

Our focus on customer goals and objectives combined with deep technical depth and experience, allow us to build successful, high visibility solutions that deliver immediate value to our clients.

Innovent Solutions is a privately held company headquartered in Irvine, California with offices in Minneapolis.

How can we help you?

Innovent Solutions provides consulting, support and training services to organizations that use Actuate and SAP Business Objects. Innovent has extensive experience with both Business Objects and Actuate including:

- Requirements Scoping and Analysis
- System Architecture
- Installation and Configuration
- Security Design and Integration
- SDK/API Development
- Web Integration with existing or new systems
- Data Provisioning using SAP Universes, Actuate Information Objects, and Actuate Data Objects
- Report development using SAP (WEBI, DESKI, and Crystal) and Actuate (eReport and BIRT)
- Conversion from SAP BusinessObjects to Actuate
- Conversion from Actuate to SAP BusinessObjects