

ELM Resources



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Marshall Edgison, Director of Application Development, ELM Resources



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ELM Resources was established in 1994 as the only not-for-profit, open, non-proprietary, lender-neutral student loan delivery system in the industry. Through its members—lenders, guarantors, and loan servicers—ELM administers a common, universal student loan delivery system through the Internet that seamlessly links the diverse computing platforms involved in processing and disbursing a student loan. ELM offers students and schools the convenience of using a single data channel for both alternative and government guaranteed loans.

ELM handles 4.5 to 5 million e-loans each year and represents one third of the marketplace with more than 40 million unique borrowers. Financial aid officers use ELM’s transaction system daily to study reports on student loans. They examine loans that need to be processed or statused in a certain way, or are awaiting work, as well as files with errors that need to be corrected and re-processed.

In addition, lenders use the ELM extranet to extract raw data on loans and load it in their own systems. These users had become frustrated with ELM’s inability to offer on-demand custom reports, and started turning to ELM competitors to meet their reporting needs.

Challenges faced

“Our competitors were taking business away from us because we didn’t have a great reporting solution,” explains Marshall Edgison, Director of Application Development and Support at ELM Resources. “They were driving a wedge between us and our customers with reporting.”

ELM customers also wanted the ability to modify ELM’s standard reports to meet the unique needs of

Industry:

- Banking, higher education

Geography:

- North America

Information Needs

- Easy-to-use reporting tool
- Self service custom reporting for end-users
- Data accessed via data warehouse
- Reporting flexibility

Platforms:

- Windows
- Oracle 10 G
- Siebel CRM On Demand
- IBM Websphere Portal 6.0

Users:

- Up to 30, 000

Solutions:

- Cognos 8 BI

Benefits:

- Tremendous improvement in customer satisfaction
- Customers able to access information when and where they want it
- Reduced IT costs while increasing productivity
- Scalability
- Tight integration with IBM and Siebel solutions

their business. “Our old reporting solution really made custom reporting a manual process. We had one to two resources completely devoted to building, running, and distributing custom reports to our customers,” stresses Edgison. “That frustrated our customers who just wanted access to the information and didn’t want to wait for us to provide it.”



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The reporting solution from Actuate also reported directly against ELM's transactional database, making it vulnerable to outages due to bad queries written from internal and external users. In such situations, the system would be unavailable for up to an hour in the middle of the day. As a result, ELM's customer satisfaction scores were rapidly declining.

"The real danger was that we were exposing ourselves to a world of hurt from a customer or internal user when they would write a bad query and lock it down," says Edgison. "Although it didn't happen every day, it occurred with enough regularity to cause concern."

For ELM, these outages had financial consequences in terms of its reputation with customers. Since customers run most of their business through ELM, it was important for them to have a reliable solution.

Strategy followed

In an effort to keep from losing its customer base, ELM evaluated reporting solutions from Cognos, Hyperion, and Business Objects. ELM chose Cognos based on its friendly user interface, ease of use, and scalability.

ELM leveraged Cognos partner Merador to help implement the solution. Merador also helped ELM build 100 standard reports, 1,600 varied reports, and deploy the ad hoc reporting solution to its customer base. "Merador has been a very good business partner throughout our implementation of Cognos," states Edgison. Moving forward, ELM is planning to work with Merador to provide customers with the ability to schedule and focus reports on particular users.

ELM has been so successful with its customer solution that its executive management is now interested in leveraging Cognos to gain a greater understanding of its businesses through scorecarding and executive dashboards. This will be accomplished by leveraging the tight integration between Cognos and IBM Websphere Portal.

"The dashboard will be the place our CEO, CFO, operational staff, and CIO go every day to understand how the company is performing, how the customers feel about the company and how the system itself is performing," says Edgison. "Cognos is the critical tool to provide that in partnership with IBM Websphere Portal."

ELM is also looking to leverage enterprise tools in the future to fill in some of its internal solution gaps. "Our next phase is integration with Siebel On Demand," notes Edgison.

Benefits realized

"We exceeded expectations with our customers and member community," says Edgison. "We used Cognos to solve what was a significant business problem for us."

With the improvements Cognos made to the reporting framework, ELM customers have the ability to get data how they want it, when they want it. "Customers like it. They constantly tell me 'It's a great tool, we really enjoy using it'. At the end of the day, this is what makes me smile," notes Edgison.

ELM's reporting solution can now easily scale and process the 35 - 40 million transactions, which represented nearly \$22 billion in student loans in 2006. In the first month using Cognos, 1,700 individual reports were run—almost exclusively by external users. In addition, during peak season, roughly 30,000 users accessed data from its Oracle warehouse, which houses nearly a terabyte of data. As the solution now runs against a data warehouse, outages have been eliminated.

The most tangible return on investment for ELM was the significant reduction in the cost of user support. Because of Cognos's ease-of-use and Web-based solution, ELM was able to re-assign one full-time person and one part-time person who were previously responsible for customizing as many as 1,600 reports.

"One and a half people may not seem like a lot, but we are only a company of 100 people—so whenever we can free a resource, it's a big win for us," notes Edgison.

Cognos has also enabled ELM's staff to do analysis on customer transaction data to answer customer questions and point out new opportunities for customers. "Our internal staff sees Cognos as providing a really powerful customer support tool," says Edgison.

