



With the help of Interstage Business Process Manager, Electricity Company Unphased by New Legislation

EPCOR is one of Canada's top electricity providers. Headquartered in Edmonton, Alberta, EPCOR, through its wholly owned subsidiary EPCOR Distribution Inc (EDI), provides and maintains all power lines and meters for the City of Edmonton, and services more than 300,000 accounts in both the commercial and residential sectors. It also provides power to 38 electricity retailers. EPCOR provides power and water solutions to customers in Alberta, Ontario, British Columbia and the U.S. Pacific Northwest. EPCOR Utilities Inc. employs more than 2600 people and has over \$4 billion in assets.

In recent years, there have been a number of regulatory changes impacting EDI. Many of these changes have resulted in increased levels of reporting and accountability. EDI senior management realized that the company needed to modify its existing inflexible in-house legacy application infrastructure in order to comply with the new requirements. One of these changes requires that electricity providers line up specific information — such as electric energy charges, distribution charges, administrative charges and customer consumption rates — on customer bills. Another piece of regulation, the Tariff Bill Code, requires that the owner of an electricity distribution system provide tariff billing information to retailers in a standardized format. Looking into the future, EDI executives also see that Canadian companies will be required to comply with Canada's eventual version of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act. Companies will need to provide documentation of their internal auditing capabilities and practices and rapidly report on changes in financial status to comply with this mandate. EDI recognized that a BPM solution's active process models doubled as an effective means of documenting business processes while proving continuous compliance with the ever-changing regulatory landscape.

Accuracy Was Paramount

With the responsibility for delivering power to over 300,000 customers, EDI required a solution that could not only respond to the new regulatory requirements, but also meet the company's high standards for accuracy. "Regardless of which path we took to adapting our business processes, accuracy in reporting was paramount," said Ian MacNeill, EDI Regulated Default Supply Project Manager. As part of their overall assessment of the most effective solution, EDI did explore an in-house BPM solution. The company rapidly recognized that it could realize substantial benefits by using vendor software to deliver this functionality.

Industry:
Utilities

Offering Group:
Software

Solution Areas:
Fujitsu Interstage Business Process Manager

Regions:
North America

Challenges:

- React quickly and accurately to new and impending
- Reduce manual intervention in a complex billing process

Results:

- Flexible solution allows business processes and rules to be changed easily
- BPM automatically documents business processes and jobs, greatly simplifying auditing
- Systems operators manage exceptions rather than submitting jobs, a more interesting and valuable job

Members of the EDI Workflow Team started to examine off-the-shelf solutions. After reviewing a best-of-breed report produced by Gartner Inc., a leading provider of industry research and analysis, they picked a few of the most recommended solutions for evaluation. EDI selected three vendors from Gartner's Pure-Play BPM Magic Quadrant. An Evaluation Matrix was then completed.

"Two of the offerings were pretty even", explains MacNeill, "But Fujitsu's out-of the box BPM solution ended up being more cost-effective since the competition's add-ons – for example, a document management piece - dramatically increased its price "We really liked the full package option that Fujitsu offered," MacNeill said. "Fujitsu's Interstage Business Process Manager came packaged with all the functionality we needed, was licensed the way we wanted to be licensed and met all our business requirements," MacNeill said. "We needed a resilient and accurate solution."

Interstage Business Process Manager now helps EDI with demonstrating compliance with additional regulatory requirements (both existing and down the road), such as the Canadian version of Sarbanes-Oxley. "The solution helps EDI document its business processes and provide audit trails and business transparency, effectively eliminating the need to spend time creating and manually mapping out the 230 plus business processes it uses to bill clients", said Michael Lundquist, Workflow Team Lead, EDI.

Extra Value Added

"The installation went very smoothly", Lundquist said, "In part, because Fujitsu's BPM APIs are very well documented, making it easy to write extensions to integrate BPM with EDI's applications and databases. Now the processes are run by Interstage Business Process Manager rather than requiring heavy user interaction." he said. "This has been a nice bonus to the process," he added, "Since previously system operators were working around the clock, sometime submitting batches of data at two in the morning. The role of operators has changed – now they manage exceptions, rather than submitting jobs." he added. "It is more interesting and valuable work."

Today, data is collected from the field via meters and then loaded into the BPM system. It automatically detects when a new file is dropped in and starts processing the data. Interstage Business Process Manager automates the billing process and ensures that customers are billed accurately and on time, generally within 5 working days. Additionally, using the BPM solution, top level managers are now able to generate a myriad of billing reports. Examples of reports produced from the data include the precise amount of money collected and the time it takes to process specific transactions. With this additional information senior managers can further understand and quickly react to business imperatives.

EDI's environment includes Microsoft Windows and UNIX servers (including HP-UX), while its applications (there are five in all) are database-centric and run on Oracle 10G.

With Interstage Business Process Manager, EDI has a flexible, agile business tool that is able to respond more easily to future changes in the business environment. Lundquist and his team are very happy with the working relationship they have developed with Fujitsu. "The support staff definitely goes the extra mile, definitely an unexpected value-add," Lundquist said. "They even built a Java application for us to allow us to batch import and export process templates from our development and testing environment, which in turn saved us a great deal of time."