

Case Study

Avery Weighbridge weighs up the benefits of OSM's COSbatch for Baan ERP environment

With concerns about the batch processing reliability of its new Unix-based Baan platform, Avery Weighbridge, high-tech weighing systems and food processing equipment specialist chose to implement OSM's powerful COSbatch tool. In doing so, it has achieved precise control over the complex timing, scheduling and sequencing of regular business critical batch jobs running on the new platform.

Avery Weighbridge, a subsidiary of GEC plc, is a multinational company with operations spanning weighing equipment and systems, food processing equipment, plus a burgeoning servicing division. From small independent retailers to major international enterprises, Avery Weighbridge has more than 150,000 customers across the globe.

Activities are focussed in three businesses – weighing equipment, food preparation machines and servicing. Its world-class products range from retail scales and supermarket systems, to sensitive scientific balances, industrial weighing platforms and vehicle weighbridge solutions, as well as food slicer and preparation equipment. Servicing these and other third party electronic products is a flourishing area of the business.

Cutting edge solutions

As a leading manufacturer and service provider for cutting-edge electronics equipment, Avery Weighbridge is made up of 16 operating companies worldwide, the hub of activity being in the UK.

Over a number of years, each of the three business units has developed its own IT infrastructure, resulting in excessive complexity and a mixture of isolated systems, applications and custom interfaces.

Corporate applications manager Heath Tipton explained: "Basically we'd reached a situation of having one of everything and two of nothing. Many of the systems were long in the tooth and the environment was proving difficult and costly to support. It also inhibited fast development of new services to meet rapidly changing business needs."

Avery Weighbridge realised that the business was crying out for a more responsive, cost effective and flexible IT infrastructure. Two years ago, to create a new level of synergy across the entire operation, it decided to cut over to a new Unix/Baan ERP platform.

Business critical processes such as inventory, stock control and replenishment, order fulfilment and finance were to be migrated from the existing Fujitsu/ICL VME mainframe (running a proprietary orders management and on-line manufacturing control system, two separate bar-code systems and Oracle ledgers) to the new consolidated Unix/Baan infrastructure.

Based on an HP-UX cluster with high-performance EMC disk arrays and Informix databases, systems management of the new platform was outsourced to Fujitsu/ICL, as per the previous mainframe environment.

A robust Baan solution

“Towards the end of 1998, as we were ramping up for staged cut-over to the Baan environment, we began developing various batch schedules that we’d have to perform regularly to keep the business running smoothly,” said Tipton.

“At this point, one of our major concerns was the batch processing stability of the Baan platform. With a major end-to-end Baan implementation supporting our entire business and more than 800 users, we simply could not afford for overnight batch runs to fail, especially as our Baan MRP runs can take up to 8 hours to complete. There simply wouldn’t be any time to catch up without seriously stalling daily business.

“Also some of the batch processing jobs had a cluster of other dependent runs associated with them. The sequencing of these runs was absolutely critical, for example to ensure invoices were raised by the finance system once an order had been dispatched or that stocks were replenished for service technicians in the field.

“In fact, the new UK system manages replenishment for the servicing business across Europe,” he explained. “So the knock-on effects of any failure in the associated batch processing runs were unthinkable.

“For our requirements, the built-in batch scheduling capabilities of the Baan ERP system were just not robust or comprehensive. Rather we needed a tool that would sit at a higher level and give us a view of all jobs and dependencies across the whole Baan network. There was no way we could allow for a server or application failure because that would mean running the same batch job twice.”

Having ruled out solutions such as CA Unicenter, Tipton’s team decided to investigate OSM’s *COSbatch* tool, following the advice of Fujitsu/ICL and other Baan users.

“With Unicenter being a framework solution, we were looking at excessive cost and risk and we were only really interested in a fraction of its functionality. But with OSM, we could buy just what we needed.”

Ease of implementation

In terms of ease of implementation, Tipton’s team was impressed by *COSbatch* and found OSM’s associated training course valuable preparation for the implementation.

Since going live last February, Tipton has been very satisfied with the performance of *COSbatch*. “One of its most important features is the fact that it gives us an understanding of what’s happening not just in the Baan application but also across the UNIX environment. There are a lot of complex dependencies in our batch processing, which the Baan environment simply could not handle.

“With *COSbatch* we have a logically sequenced and reliable way to monitor and control batch processing. Without it we’d almost certainly have batch failures and because of the sequencing there would be serious implications for our business. From a financial point of view, it’s mandatory for certain figures to be reported by specific deadlines,” he said. “Similarly, it’s absolutely essential for management reports to be delivered accurately and on-time.”

As Tipton observed, when this information is the life-blood of the business failures can prove costly.

“Rolling out such a major new ERP platform is a massive undertaking. With *COSbatch* we have had one less issue to worry about,” he said. “There’s so much to tackle on the application side. It’s gratifying to know that armed with *COSbatch*, we won’t have to roll up our sleeves and deal with batch processing problems.”

Tipton concluded: “Our experience with *COSbatch* means we will definitely consider other tools from OSM for Baan as the need arises. We’re confident that with OSM there is no ‘vapourware’ – they deliver exactly what they promise.”

About Open Systems Management

Open Systems Management (OSM) - a privately held company with venture capital backing, founded in 1988 and based out of Wokingham, UK; Seattle, WA, USA; and Perth in Western Australia - develops and markets low cost, high quality systems and IT operations management software for UNIX, Linux and Microsoft Windows systems. The software is supported worldwide out of offices in Perth, the UK and Seattle, WA, USA.

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