

FORTIS MODERNIZES APPLICATION AT 1/10TH THE COST OF REPLACEMENT

Challenge

FortisBC is committed to energizing British Columbia. But its decade-old customer information system wasn't energized enough to keep up with changing business demands. The 24/7 billing system used daily by customer service was out of warranty and needed a language, interface and database update. The system had proven functionality worth preserving. Replacing it could have cost tens of millions of dollars.

Solution

By leveraging a team of onsite, nearshore and offshore developers, FortisBC was able to extend the system's life at a fraction of the cost of a system replacement. The modernization, based on webMethods technology, has "re-energized" the application, making it more reliable, easier to support, more secure and accessible to mobile users. For the first time in a long time, IT has a system it can more easily enhance—for example, by streamlining processes—to deliver greater value to the business.

Benefits

- New Web front-end is easy to develop, deploy and use
- Development costs reduced by 30 percent by using offshore resources
- Millions of dollars saved by avoiding a system replacement
- System enhancements rolled out in days
- ROI achieved in three years or faster
- Greatly improved user experience for customer service representatives
- Easy access for remote and mobile users

Customer

FortisBC Inc. is a fully integrated electric utility in south eastern British Columbia Canada, serving approximately 120,000 customers. FortisBC Inc. is part of the Fortis group of companies, which includes six other electric utilities and one gas utility in Canada.



Partner

Techlogix is a global consulting and IT services company with more than 300 employees worldwide. The company helps deliver complex solutions for large enterprises using best-practice methodologies.

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“Software AG has really shown itself to be a really strong and really accountable business partner. They really do walk the talk. The level of accountability Software AG took was really above and beyond many other organizations we’ve worked with in the past.”

Tim Swanson | Director, Information Systems | FortisBC

Preparing for the future

“At FortisBC, we are dedicated to energizing British Columbia today and for the future,” says the website of the oldest utility in the province. Being dedicated to the future means assuring business-critical systems are ready to support new business initiatives, from automated metering to B2B integration.

So, in 2010, FortisBC undertook a major modernization of its customer information system. The system went live in 2000 with Software AG’s Natural for UNIX®, Oracle® software and a presentation layer written in Smalltalk, an object-oriented language. The system had become out of warranty and difficult to support.

Explained Director of Information Systems Tim Swanson, “We’d reached a point where we needed to get the system more supportable, sustainable and easier to maintain.”

FortisBC decided to modernize the system at a fraction of the cost of replacing it.

Other goals were to:

- Add a Web front-end
- Create a single sign-on environment
- Improve security and eliminate manual password changes
- Assure easy mobile and remote access
- Build a platform for a next generation of business services
- Improve ability to deliver more self-services to the customer

Managing a global project team

To modernize the application, FortisBC called on Software AG Global Consulting Services.

The consultants proposed a modernization solution that used webMethods EntireX to replace the outdated middleware and to create Web services. webMethods CAF would be used to recreate 155 Smalltalk screens “like-for-like”.

Software AG partner Techlogix provided offshore development, lowering project costs by 30 percent. At one point, resources were spread across six different locations—Canada, the U.S., Pakistan, India, Israel and the Philippines.

What kept the team together was experienced project management, which required diligence, attention to schedule and resources, and open communications channels, said Project Manager Tamara Tilley.

“Software AG was a very good partner in stepping up and recognizing where the challenges were,” Swanson added. “Software AG did more than their share to make sure the relationship was managed and that the work was getting done. The level of accountability Software AG took was really above and beyond many other organizations we’ve worked with in the past.”

“Really successful” rollout

FortisBC couldn’t be more satisfied with the project’s results, according to Solutions Architect Allan Santano. “We revamped the system relatively cheaply, and the rollout was really successful,” he said. “We had a high benchmark and had to exceed it. It was probably one of our most tested implementations ever.”

Software AG trained the internal team on how to use webMethods CAF and EntireX so the team could manage the production rollout on its own. That methodology has paid off since the internal team can update the system quickly and independently. New releases are now rolled out in days.

Swanson cited few issues since go-live. “It is more reliable than the technology it replaced,” he said. Customer service agents are able to access the system from virtually anywhere via a URL. They’re impressed with the look and feel of the system.

Ready for what’s next

With the system transformed, IT can forge new solutions to deliver greater value to the business. “We’re going to be more process-driven where we get information that was in multiple places onto one screen with step-by-step processes,” Swanson said. “You’re going to see value that we could never add before.”

KEY COMPONENTS

webMethods EntireX turns application functions into business services so companies can re-use application assets.

webMethods CAF is used to develop composite applications and put a modern user interface on proven systems.

Global Consulting Services helped FortisBC design and deliver the modernization solution by working with partner Techlogix.

ABOUT SOFTWARE AG

Software AG helps organizations achieve their business objectives faster. The company’s big data, integration and business process technologies enable customers to drive operational efficiency, modernize their systems and optimize processes for smarter decisions and better service. Building on over 40 years of customer-centric innovation, the company is among the top 10 fastest-growing technology companies in the world and is ranked as a leader in 15 market categories, fueled by core product families Adabas and Natural, ARIS, Terracotta and webMethods. Learn more at www.SoftwareAG.com.

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