

Customer case study

BT Retail

Business background

BT is a leading player in the communications market with 20 million customers ranging from single line domestic consumers to global companies. The services offered by BT Retail cover everything from voice telephony to the most sophisticated data communications, including broadband. In addition they have a selection of hardware products, from domestic telephone handsets through to commercial switches.

Such a large and sophisticated sales and support operation requires a comprehensive and highly developed computer system. A multi-application system called BT CSS (BT Customer Service System) covers the majority of these operations, including customer billing which is responsible for issuing more than 100 million bills every year.

The move to Direct Debit

Six years ago the BT Billing department undertook a strategic review of their operations and a decision was made to significantly increase the number of bills paid by Direct Debit. This policy was successfully implemented over the following years, so that today BT has over six million Direct Debit customers and has plans in place to increase this number over the next 2-3 years.

Subsequently when the new bt.com service was being planned to provide online viewing and paying of bills, it was decided to offer customers the opportunity to set up Direct Debit payments online. Although a Paperless Direct Debit system provides significant benefits for customers, it can also be a potential source of expensive errors for BT and the banks unless handled in the correct way. Allowing customers to either contact BT's customer service advisors who enter the bank details on line via a computer system or by entering their own bank details into a website without proper validation is likely to result in an unacceptable volume of errors.



Evaluating validation software

BT is very thorough, systematic and experienced in its software development and procurement processes. In this case the procurement followed two parallel paths, with the first taking the formal functional route. A definition of the functionality was produced in-house, with help from the firm's banker, HSBC, and from BACS. The key issues related to volume management, validation data updates and platform compatibility; it was also specified that any solution should be sourced from a supplier recognised by BACS. The formal procurement process evaluated not only the functionality of the product, but also the competence of the supplier.

In parallel with this formal evaluation, contact was made with another large utility provider. Jayne Askey, BT's Billing Development Manager recalls: "Given the size of BT's billing operation, an important selection criterion was that any solution would be able to handle the very high volumes of bills generated by BT. The utility provider we spoke to were implementing a similar system with comparable billing volumes and were further ahead in terms of the implementation of their project. One of the valuable lessons shared between the two companies was the positive experience in using BANK WIZARD from Eiger Systems."

Customer case study

BT Retail continued

Frequent data updates

There are frequent changes to bank details across the UK. New sort codes are assigned, bank branches are opened and closed, and new online services are launched. Validation solutions for bank details comprise both the software for processing checks on bank data and an accurate database of the source data itself. To be effective, validation software requires frequent updating of this source data, both to the raw numbers and to the modulus checks that apply to those numbers. With this in mind, another key criterion for the selection of validation software was the frequency with which validation data was updated. By constantly updating its data, BANK WIZARD ensures that errors caused by bank changes are kept to an absolute minimum. BT Retail considered the regular monthly update offered by BANK WIZARD to be ideal for its operation.

Computer platform

The validation software was required to run on the single large IBM MVS mainframe that handles all BT's billing and payment systems, including the company's BACS payment submissions. Due to the mission-critical nature of payment processing, an impact assessment was conducted prior to selecting BANK WIZARD. This revealed that Eiger Systems software was able to be installed on a number of different platforms, and concluded that they had an excellent track record of installations on MVS machines.

Implementation

Implementation of new software to sit alongside a complex legacy system on a large mainframe requires a team effort, with good communication between the vendor and the client's staff. For this implementation project the total team numbered 12, including a small number of Eiger Systems specialists, and the installation was completed without problems.

"The people from Eiger Systems were very customer focused throughout procurement and implementation, and the process was very smooth. The software has performed exactly as required, filtering out erroneous entries at source and enabling the user to correct them instantly – the obvious benefit of on-line validation at the point of entry. We could not run our services as effectively as we do without BANK WIZARD.

The benefit is not simply that validation is being undertaken, but that the validation is rigorous, based on the constant pro-active research undertaken by the Eiger Systems' Data Administration team, who ensure the latest changes are included in the regular updates quickly and accurately. In my view no company should write their own validation system. This solution needs to come from a specialist company that has the detailed knowledge to ensure that all the checking logic and data is correct, and even more important, the research capability to keep it correct into the future. That is exactly what Eiger Systems does for us, in a very demanding environment."

Jayne Askey
Billing Development Manager, BT

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EIGER SYSTEMS LIMITED

Eiger Point, Swift Park, Old Leicester Road, Rugby, Warwickshire CV21 1DZ
Telephone: +44 (0)1788 554800 Telephone (Sales) +44 (0)1788 554810
Facsimile: +44 (0)1788 554900
www.eiger.co.uk