LANSA Case Study

BCS gets ongoing value from LANSA

Body Corporate Services (BCS), established over 30 years ago and with over 20 branches on the eastern seaboard of Australia, are pioneers in strata management. BCS uses LANSA to develop and maintain its core Property Management System, for integration with customer and staff WebSphere portals and several Windows systems, as well as for communication with third parties.

Michelle Stack, Manager Information Systems at BCS, says, "LANSA is of ongoing value to BCS, as its continued development keeps the product up with the latest technologies and trends. Just as important, LANSA also keeps true to its core promises, helping us to deliver accuracy, stability, security and fast development turnaround. I am very confident our LANSA and IBM i based PMS will remain a key factor in staying ahead of the competition."

IT is a Differentiator

BCS provides a comprehensive range of services to facilitate the smooth running of strata plans, neighborhood and community title schemes, as well as company titles. The company's portfolio of property under management includes several thousand residential, commercial, resort and mixed use developments. BCS has over 30 years experience in the strata management industry in Australia and has recently started operations in Dubai and Bahrain.

Stack explains, "Every building we manage is equivalent to managing a small business, each with their own group of stake holders and their own set of accounts. We pay several hundred thousand invoices per year on behalf of our clients, collect levies from each lot owner and process a huge number of banking transactions each day."

"Our size gives us the opportunity to out-value our competition, but that is by no means a reason to become complacent. We have to remain competitive and keep proving ourselves. Next to the quality of our staff, our IT systems are an essential factor in providing a differentiator."

In the early nineties BCS purchased an off-the-shelf strata management solution, but because of the large amount of modification that was required, its implementation was failing. Together with an IBM business partner, BCS developed its own LANSA-based custom Property Management System (PMS). The PMS was in production within six months and has been growing and evolving ever since.

Stack is positive that their PMS and the LANSA technology behind it are still the right choice, "Just under a year ago we had the PMS and our development tools reviewed by an

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independent firm. Our PMS, and the LANSA tools, certainly stood up well and the recommendation was that our system is well positioned for the future."

Core Logic and Integration

BCS's core PMS system consists of LANSA based modules for client maintenance, levy billing, accounting, taxation, financial reporting, banking, electricity billing and 'BCSblue', a property services and contractor management system. BCSblue has been extended to the Web for the general public also using LANSA.

Portfolio Managers access the PMS via a WebSphere intranet portal for managing general enquiries, planning meetings and voting, creating repairs and maintenance tasks and for a variety of other tasks.

Authorized clients, such as lot owners, can access BCS's 'Extranex' WebSphere portal to view their individual levies, buildings details, plan documents and repair requests. They can also change their contact details and view the contact details of other parties associated with their property. Strata committee members have access to additional information, such as the balance of bank accounts and current insurance details.

Anthony Belz, System Architect and Technical Lead at BCS, explains, "The WebSphere portal space is heavily supported by LANSA Integrator's Remote Function Invocation (RFI) service, which makes integration between Java and non-Java

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applications simple. Our back-end host functions are being serviced through LANSA Integrator to the portal. So, there is good modularity and reuse of code. In addition we use LANSA Integrator to exchange XML between applications."

LANSA Integrator also plays a roll in a large number of PMS integration points with third parties. These include integration with the Australian Taxation Office for the preparation and filing of several thousand electronic tax statements every quarter. Integration with a mailhouse for outsourced printing and mailing of periodic statements to clients. Plus integration with debt collection agencies, insurance companies and banks.

Belz comments on the high level of banking integration, "Each building has its own bank account, and all accounts together generate thousands of transactions each day. Receipts flow automatically through the accounts receivable and general ledger and are matched with the levy. We have the same degree of automation on the creditor side. The investment made on our banking interfaces is very valuable."

Integration points between the PMS and other BCS internal systems using LANSA Integrator include: Billback, a package for cost recovery of photocopy costs and other client expenses; PDF and HTML cover page generation for RightFax electronic faxing; Integration with Redmap for electronic document management and integration with FinanceOne and Crystal Reports for reporting. All of these are Windows based packages.

LANSA Integrator is also used for generating and exchanging legal documents in PDF format and for quote requests to BCSblue contractors.

Transparency and Visibility

"With a small development team and using the LANSA tools, we can build and maintain our own property management system and its integration points with other systems. Having the in-house skills and a productive development tool gives us the flexibility to quickly respond to requests of clients and portfolio managers, helping us to stay ahead of the competition," explains Stack.

To make sure the system is well documented, BCS uses LANSA iApplication Explorer (LiAE). LiAE provides an interactive online browser overview of all the fields, files, functions, processes and system variables used in an application, including pseudo code, making the system understandable for auditors and other non-developers.

BCS still sends, receives and stores many documents as paper rather than electronically, which is according to Stack mainly due to the industry's cautious uptake of technology.

"LANSA makes integration between Java and non-Java applications simple.

However, documents and invoices will soon be scanned, OCR-ed and managed in BCS's electronic document management system. "It will allow us to handle data entry and invoice processing much more efficiently, for example by giving our clients the option to approve their invoices online," says Stack.

The electronic management of documents forms part of a larger workflow management project, which will further streamline communication between clients, portfolio managers, administrative and compliance staff. Stack explains, "Our vision is that everything we do for our clients will be captured as an electronic work item. At the moment almost every question or request is written on a piece of paper, or being tracked through email. In the future we want to capture every item in our database and make it visible in a proper workflow environment, so it can be tracked online by all parties involved."

"One of the major competitive differentiators the PMS helps us to provide is transparency and increased interactive access for clients. Providing visibility so that clients can view at any time of the day what's going on in their building is a major advantage and will help show the value of our service to our clients."

Ongoing Value

Future directions for BCS system development include a move towards SOA, explains Belz. "We will expand our use of LANSA Integrator for any task that requires SOAP services and LANSA will play an important role in the workflow project, as well as in the integration with the Redmap document management system."

BCS's expansion to the Middle East brings along new requirements as well, such as offering the core PMS modules in a Software as a Service environment, possibly using LANSA's RAMP. Plus there will be additional integration points with local banks and regulatory authorities.

Asked for his overall opinion about LANSA, Belz concludes, "LANSA is a fine and competent development platform, partnered very well with the IBM i. LANSA's capabilities on the Windows platform are interesting for us as well. I can testify for LANSA's productivity claims and its easy integration with both WebSphere and Windows. Last but not least, we have a fairly large application and LANSA's documentation and impact analysis facilities are important to help us externalize application knowledge and expertise."

Company and System Information

- BCS, headquartered in Sydney, is the market leader in the Australian Body Corporate/Strata Management industry and has 350 staff at over 20 branch offices throughout the eastern states of Australia.
- BCS's development team consists of one system architect, four analyst programmers and one business analyst.
  For more information visit: www.bcssm.com.au

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