IBM Information Management software

Storebrand improves agility by integrating business processes with IBM solution.

Overview

- ***Challenge***
  Improve business agility, ability to make timely and informed business decisions and provide better customer service
- ***Why IBM?***
  Storebrand is a longtime IBM customer and has worked with IBM in the testing and development of new products
- ***Solution***
  Implement a service oriented architecture based on IBM DB2® and IBM WebSphere® solutions, including IBM DB2 9 data server
- ***Key Benefits***
  Expected ability to handle five times as many customers; reduced order processing time; faster time to market with new products and product combinations; improved customer service through 24x7 online access and ability to view all orders; richer ability to query stored customer and product data for business insight; dramatically reduced time, complexity and cost to conduct database queries; improved productivity for programmers

Storebrand's use of IBM DB2 9 data server will enhance the company's service oriented architecture by allowing them to quickly respond to customer inquiries and gain business insights needed to make informed business decisions more quickly.

With roots dating back to 1767 and fiscal year 2004 profits of 2.4 billion NOK (358 million USD), Storebrand Group is Norway's oldest and one of its biggest financial services companies, and a leading player throughout Scandinavia. The company provides life insurance, pension products, commercial retail banking and asset management to many of Norway's largest companies as well as to private individuals, municipalities and public sector entities.

"In combination with our service oriented architecture, IBM DB2 9 can help us achieve, with far greater ease, our goal of using information on demand to readily respond to market changes and customer demand."

– Thore Thomassen, Senior Enterprise Architect, Storebrand Group

Key Components

Software

- IBM DB2 9
- IBM DB2
- IBM WebSphere Application Server
- IBM WebSphere MQ

Servers

- IBM System i™
- IBM System z™

Services

- IBM Global Services

A well-recognized name in Norway, Storebrand rose to prominence due to its readiness and ability to meet the challenges of new situations. To maintain its reputation, ensure continued brisk growth and improve its focus on customers in a highly competitive market, Storebrand sought to become a more agile business, one able to flexibly and quickly respond to customer needs. To achieve its goal, however, required overcoming significant hurdles: integrating its disparate products and IT infrastructures and then finding an optimal way to query its product and customer data.

Many of Storebrand's products and sub-products have their own IT solutions and associated business processes. Product and customer data is spread across numerous databases and a mix of mainframe, UNIX® and Microsoft® Windows®-based platforms. Storebrand wanted to link all its products and processes to simplify and expedite orders, increase product customization, create product packages, speed time to market for new products and improve quality control, all while driving down costs. More recently, the company has sought a way to efficiently store and query transaction data to improve its ability to respond to customer requests and to make timely and informed business decisions.

Creating a single view of business-critical data

To create a unified and responsive information architecture for handling orders of financial products, Storebrand developed a service oriented architecture (SOA)—applications and information that can be broken apart as components and reused via a Web-services interface to create new business processes. IBM Global Services helped Storebrand implement its SOA using IBM DB2, IBM WebSphere Application Server and IBM WebSphere MQ on IBM System z and IBM System i servers.

Storebrand has transformed tailor-made transactions to more efficient, standardized transactions through its SOA. A business services gateway based on Web services handles incoming transactions and provides Storebrand's legacy applications with reusable business services. Storebrand's integration architecture offers distributed transactions while also providing consistency and synchronization among legacy system applications.

"With the pure XML support available in IBM DB2 9, it is far easier, faster and less expensive to run queries, share and retrieve data, and make document changes in response to new business requirements without impacting applications."

– Thore Thomassen

IBM DB2 9 pure XML support enhances SOA

As a flexible way of exchanging data among devices, systems and applications, XML and the ability to store it are key to Storebrand. All its product offerings are stored as XML documents known as a collection of large objects (CLOBs). While CLOBs enable more data to be stored in a database, they are difficult to retrieve and update. The next evolution of the company's SOA will include IBM DB2 9 (formerly codenamed Viper) data server, which is the industry's first hybrid database management system (DBMS) that supports pure XML — that is, XML documents in their original structure — in addition to SQL and tabular data structures. DB2 9 provides performance improvements and greater flexibility for storing, searching and managing XML. Storebrand is testing DB2 9 and plans to deploy it to store transaction records and business services.

By simplifying and speeding queries and reporting capability, DB2 9 will enhance Storebrand's ability to make informed business decisions about its product offerings, while simultaneously reducing IT resource costs. "With the pure XML support available in IBM DB2 9, it is far easier, faster and less expensive to run queries, share and retrieve data, and make document changes in response to new business requirements without impacting applications," explains Thore Thomassen, senior enterprise architect for Storebrand Group.

The ability to query data rapidly will also improve Storebrand's responsiveness to customers. "Until IBM DB2 9, it was impossible to comprehensively query product and customer data because of the way the information had to be stored," says Thomassen. "With DB2 9, we can, for example, easily and quickly respond to a corporate customer's request for order and status information on products purchased by one of its subsidiaries."

"Our development time using IBM DB2 9 data server is a radical improvement over existing XML shred technology. We are now able to make schema changes in minutes rather than days and will be able to dramatically improve our customer response time."

– Thore Thomassen

Improved quality and speed of offerings enhance customer service

With its SOA, Storebrand can more flexibly handle orders. It can provide customers with around-the-clock access to account information, accept orders 24x7 online and control transaction flow to legacy systems to avoid performance bottlenecks. Storebrand has been able to shrink order processing time for many products. For example, an application for a license to implement a pension plan previously took up to three weeks to process but can now be completed in 10 minutes. Faster processing gives Storebrand the ability to handle five times the number of customer orders. Much of the manual data re-entry done by individual departments has also been eliminated, leading to fewer mistakes, higher quality and more efficient customer service.

Storebrand can also rapidly introduce new products and product combinations simply by gluing together existing XML-based product definitions that it has for each of its products and sub-products. "This ability speeds our time to market, which is extremely important because customers will go elsewhere if they can't find the products they want," says Thomassen. The XML format also allows for variations in data, helping Storebrand to easily add new sub-products to a package without changing or slowing the transaction.

DB2 9 improves business agility

Storebrand conducted multiple tests using DB2 9 and found that it was able to perform queries, program searches and make changes to pure XML data far more quickly and easily, while also improving programmers' productivity. The alternatives tested involved querying XML stored as CLOBs and shredding XML, which involves decomposing the data into multiple columns and sometimes tables to query it. These options have performance, cost and manageability limitations.

Using DB2 9, queries that once took up to 36 hours shrunk to 10 minutes or less. Programming search processes required 30 minutes for pure XML data versus 2 to 8 hours with the alternatives. The time it took programmers to prepare for a search shortened from one week to one half day. Updating XML schema in response to a business change was also much faster — five minutes compared to one week with shredding. Storebrand also achieved a 65 percent reduction in the amount of I/O code by converting 20 of its services to pure XML. "Our development time using DB2 9 data server as our pure XML store is a radical improvement over existing XML shred technology. We are now able to make schema changes in minutes rather than days and will be able to dramatically improve our customer response time," says Thomassen. "In combination with our service oriented architecture, DB2 9 can help us achieve, with far greater ease, our goal of using information on demand to readily respond to market changes and customer demand."

For more information

Please contact your IBM sales representative or IBM Business Partner.

Visit our Web site at:
ibm.com/db2
ibm.com/websphere

For more information on Storebrand, visit: *www.storebrand.no*

© Copyright IBM Corporation 2006

IBM Corporation
Route 100
Somers, NY 10589
U.S.A.

Produced in the United States of America
06-06
All Rights Reserved

DB2, IBM, the IBM logo, System i, Sytem z and WebSphere are trademarks of International Business Machines Corporation in the United States, other countries or both.

Microsoft and Windows are trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the United States, other countries, or both.

UNIX is a registered trademark of The Open Group in the United States and other countries.

Other company, product or service names may be trademarks or service marks of others.

This case study is an example of how one customer uses IBM products. There is no guarantee of comparable results.

References in this publication to IBM products or services do not imply that IBM intends to make them available in all countries in which IBM operates.

GC38-0731-01