

Redwood Business Solutions

Making complex processes easy to manage.



At A Glance

Industry

- Finance & Banking

Environment

- Oracle based Customer Management System
- Sun Solaris™
- 7 million database transactions a day

Key Challenges

- Growth in the number of overnight transactions
- Inability to control batch runs effectively
- 11 hour batch processing window interfered with online systems

The Solution

- Cronacle management and control of over 4500 jobs a day
- Automatic fulfillment of statement requests
- Management of all internal processes

Key Benefits

- 80% reduction in batch processing time
- Next day mailing of customer statements
- Ability to add in new processes easily with minimal maintenance
- More efficient overnight batch processing with fewer errors and interruptions
- 3 1/2 days saved in synchronizing test data with the production system data



Virgin Money on to a winner with Redwood Software's Cronacle

When business growth was matched with a corresponding increase in daily transactions, Virgin Money knew that it needed to find a sleek, automated solution to manage its daily business processing needs. Cronacle was the answer.



Since 1995, the financial offerings at Virgin have gone from strength to strength. In 2001 Virgin Direct (the personal finance business) and virginmoney.com (the e-broker business) merged to form Virgin Money. Headquartered in Norwich, UK, Virgin Money now provides insurance, credit cards, loans, pensions, savings, investments and share dealing services to more than 500,000 customers.

Innovation and IT go hand in hand

The call center at Virgin Money is the hub for all customer related inquiries. Virgin Money's IT systems need to be up and functioning at optimal performance, to support over 100 call center staff, dealing with thousands of calls on a daily basis. Virgin Money customers can also use the virginmoney.com Web site, where all services are available online 24 hours a day.

Virgin Money's homegrown Customer Management System (CMS) was developed around Oracle Forms. The Oracle8i database supports Virgin Money's customer contact management, billing, unit trust, life insurance underwriting, cash deposit accounts,

general accounting and e-business applications. David Carney, Enterprise Infrastructure Analyst at Virgin Money explains: "On a typical day as many as 6000 customers use our Web site or ring the call center to check their account status, make transfers and execute other banking functions. This activity generates over 7 million Oracle transactions daily that need to be processed by CMS. With such a business-critical IT system, it's crucial that we keep the online systems as responsive as possible and that we process all the background workload as efficiently as possible."

Mission-critical job processing

Prior to the merger and formation of Virgin Money, Virgin Direct was running its overnight batch processing based on a

"Before we had Cronacle in place our overnight batch run would take over 11 hours. Now we can complete everything in 2 1/2 hours."

David Carney
Enterprise Infrastructure Analyst
Virgin Money



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series of shell scripts. David Carney elaborates: "Due to the lack of dependencies built into our scripts, we had to allow enough time within the batch schedule to ensure that the previous job had completed before the next one began. This crude level of dependency between jobs just wasn't efficient at all."

"The fact that we had no control or way of knowing when jobs had finished, meant that our batch schedule was taking up to 11 hours to complete! With our overnight batch starting at midnight and not completing until 11am the next day, our call center staff would often complain of slow response times when using the online systems."

As the number of overnight transactions grew to over 10,000, the shell scripts were not able to handle this level of activity. The amount of errors and interruptions to the workload was impacting the timely completion of the batch run.

The overnight problem was compounded with frequent changes to financial regulations. Carney continues: "A change in the financial regulations can mean up to 800 changes in our IT system. These changes would have to be made overnight which often meant that getting the overnight batch to complete would be an impossible task."

A solution in Cronacle

At that time, Virgin Direct implemented Cronacle for overnight batch processing. Carney adds: "We took one look at Cronacle and just knew that this was the solution for us. We didn't even have to look at alternative solutions because Cronacle's ease of use, flexibility and tight integration with the Oracle database impressed us a lot."

"We were extremely amazed with the speed of implementation. It took just 3 weeks to migrate over 1500 scripts into the Cronacle system and we haven't

looked back since. Even with the merger and creation of Virgin Money, Cronacle has helped us all the way."

Prior to the merger, Virgin Direct shared its Oracle CMS database with its sister company Virgin One at its Norwich data center. Following the formation of Virgin Money, the company had to extract CMS data for Virgin Direct customers and move it to an independent system that would serve Virgin Money exclusively. This had to happen within a 24-hour window during the weekend in addition to the running of normal overnight batch workload.

Carney continues: "The transfer of jobs was easy, as we'd already set them up separately within the Virgin Direct and virginmoney.com systems. Cronacle was ready to manage our critical processing from the moment we migrated all the data."

Event-driven scheduling at its best

Virgin Money now depends on Cronacle to manage all workload that needs to run to support its financial business, from the processing of statement requests to the completion of its BACS (Banking Automated Clearing System) payments. Carney explains: "We use Cronacle for all of our fulfillment requirements. For example, when customers call in to request a statement, our CMS flags the database with the request. Five times a day Cronacle is set to check the database and run the processing and printing of these statements. With Cronacle in place, our customers receive their statements the next day."

Other critical tasks include the BACS job, which is a daily event-driven process. This job cannot start until all data is received and processed. "Cronacle allows us to control all the jobs that need to run first, before kicking off the BACS job automatically, having also checked that all other events have completed. We love the solution because a process like BACS

can now be event-driven as opposed to being time-driven," says Carney.

Cronacle also helps Virgin Money process credit card applications. Credit card operator, MBNA, assists the organization in collecting credit card applications. The files are sent to Virgin Money from MBNA on a daily basis and Cronacle then picks the files up and processes them without any human intervention.

Cronacle is also used in innovative ways to ease the burden of regularly occurring internal processes. Carney adds: "During the day users are continually asking for reports. Such requests used to take days to turn around. With Cronacle, the processing of report requests happens automatically with reports being emailed to end-users within minutes."

Another pioneering use for the solution is in the synchronization of the production system, located in Leeds, with the test system. "This task used to take four days, but with Cronacle, we've now cut the job down to 3 hours," adds Carney. "We are now able to synchronize as and when required, as opposed to every few months!"

The bottom line

Cronacle's ability to run processes in parallel as opposed to sequentially, together with its capacity for recovering jobs from the point of error has given Virgin Money a solution that not only takes the management and control of daily and overnight processing out of the hands of the operators, but has also resulted in an 80% reduction in Virgin Money's batch window.

Cronacle's reliability has given Virgin Money the confidence to feed every possible process into the solution. Carney concludes: "Cronacle is a key part of our IT strategy and we certainly wouldn't be able to run the business without it."