

Oracle Profile

with Cambridge University Press

The printing and publishing house of the University of Cambridge

“As an industry standard, Oracle is very intuitive, scalable and reliable”
Nik Louch, Database Administrator, Cambridge University Press



Publishing books is one of Britain's most successful and respected industries. With over 400 years experience, Cambridge University Press now combines traditional skills with e-commerce to ensure customers receive the best possible service. When it wanted to increase IT investment across the business, Cambridge University Press had to find a reliable support partner.

Cambridge University Press was founded on Henry VIII's Royal Charter of 1534 and enjoys charitable status. Operating continuously since 1584, it's the oldest book publisher in the world. Publishing over 2,000 books and 150 journals every year, it also produces maps, wall charts, CD ROMs and online publications. The annual turnover is around £110 million.

Extracting the maximum business benefit from IT is the goal of every organization. According to Database Administrator Nik Louch, Cambridge University Press first invested in Oracle technology in 1996.

However, not many new systems had been delivered some two years later. Another difficulty was managing the licences for various Oracle products used on different projects. To help tackle this and other issues, Louch was appointed DBA in 1998.

“Cambridge University Press decided to concentrate on Internet/Intranet development using Oracle technology. We wanted to replace parts of our Vista publishing package with a web-enabled front-end to help improve our work flows,” said Louch.

Revitalizing legacy systems was not the only task. A proliferation of desktop databases in Claris Filemaker Access undermined effective management reporting. A secondary goal therefore became “data integration” to reduce the number of applications. Open systems databases would help make reporting “more presentable and flexible” using standard tools.

Fortunately, nobody was in any doubt that Oracle was right for the job. As a solid and reliable database, adds Louch, it matched the objective of using proven industry software. Oracle's scalability would also support projected growth and, most usefully, run on the organization's VAX VMS platforms. But if sustained success was to be achieved, it had to find the right help. Explorer (UK) was then recommended by Oracle.

Resolving the practical issues first

Explorer (UK)'s first task was to audit all the Oracle software held, matching licences to products deployed and those actually required. Louch says that a pragmatic approach ensured this task was carried out well; “Explorer (UK) was pro-active and helpful. They came in and acted as a middleman between ourselves and Oracle while also telling us more about the technology.”

Having sorted out the licences, the attention swiftly turned to in-house project development. Considerable efforts were directed to website expansion, online journal services, new Internet ventures and a digital archive. The goal has been to create a scalable system to maintain the market share in a competitive environment.

Most of the new applications are web-enabled, reflecting a desire to improve the user interface and avoid traditional client-server development. But by far the biggest effort has gone into web site improvements for staff and customers. IT personnel have created an Oracle front-end for Vista, one of the publishing industry's best known package solutions for sales, stock control and accounting.

“The issue has been to get Oracle and Vista in balance with each other which we have achieved. As an industry standard, Oracle is very intuitive, scalable and reliable as well as being easy to develop in.”



"When an existing Oracle customer wishes to consolidate their existing investment and add an E-commerce presence to their portfolio, Explorer provides the expertise to achieve this. As an Oracle Certified Solution Partner, Explorer provides a heads-up on the latest Oracle technologies to provide a valuable long term relationship with our customers."

Ian Thomason, Sales & Marketing
Director, Explorer (UK) Ltd.



Powerful database applications for new front-end

The effect on the desktop has been fairly dramatic. Cambridge University Press surrounded Vista with a layer of web-enabled applications driven by an Oracle database. It also holds web site information including catalogues, descriptions and prices. Powerful front-end functionality takes order details which are then passed to Vista for transaction processing. Trade customers have their own special ordering areas while an Intranet contains additional details and applications.

Around 200,000 hits per day have now been recorded on the expanded web site although online ordering remains relatively small. E-commerce is considered a useful adjunct and not necessarily a replacement to traditional telephone or mail order sales channels. Nevertheless, www.cambridge.org is believed to have been visited by over 2.5 million people in a year.

Elsewhere in the organization, Oracle has been used to develop content management, journal publishing, book proposal and financial forecasting systems. Desktop database solutions are disappearing fast in the wake of these more stable applications. Louch says that managers can now use standard reporting tools for the information they need.

"Oracle has helped us make a massive leap forward by giving us a system that's powerful enough to do the database integration work required."

A close partnership has ensured success

Although it's taken no active part in the various in-house software developments, Explorer (UK) has been a constant reassuring presence. This "helpful and professional" company has been closely involved in software selection, supply and advice for over two years.

"I can highly recommend Explorer (UK). They have been very pro-active in discussing with us the Oracle solutions required for our business," said Louch.

This strong relationship will shortly be taken to new levels as Louch has requested Explorer (UK)'s "IT Healthcheck" service. Consultants will be reporting on the efficiency of the various Oracle database applications with most attention focused on database tuning, routine procedures and backups. Designed to provide "constructive criticism", the results will support forthcoming decisions about high availability solutions.

New development is already in hand as the web site is being enhanced to include more sample book pages, cover pictures and order tracking. The remaining desktop databases will also be replaced by standard reporting tools in the Oracle environment. By further investing in technology, Cambridge University Press will help maintain its position as Britain's premier publisher.

Customer Snapshot

Cambridge University Press

Business Profile

Publisher of books and journals

Market Sector

Publishing

Solution Snapshot

Oracle database supporting web site and e-commerce

Business Benefits

Web-enabling legacy applications for e-commerce Integrating systems and data for more effective reporting Providing a scalable platform for future development

Database Size

40 Gigabytes

Oracle Products

Oracle Database 8

Oracle Designer

Oracle Reports

Oracle Forms

Oracle Services

Oracle Support

Hardware

Dec Alpha

Operating System

Open VMS

Number of Users

400



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