

Oracle Profile

with Cory Brothers Shipping Limited
The Largest Shipping Agent in the UK

"Oracle is our development platform for the future."

Andy Triscott, Systems Manager, Cory Brothers Shipping Limited



Although Cory Brothers Shipping Limited is concerned with ships, the heart of its business is really information handling. To provide services as a shipping agent, it needs to know ships' movements, cargo details, facilities used and other factors. When customers wanted direct access across the Internet to that information, the company had to find a way to provide it.

Founded in 1842, Cory Brothers Shipping is the UK's largest shipping agent. Part of ports-to-engineering group Powell Duffryn plc, Cory Brothers covers around 205 berths in over 30 UK ports including Felixstowe, Southampton and Tilbury. Serving around 8,000 ships per year, the £11 million turnover business includes a general shipping agency, containers and freight forwarding operations.

The main business of the company is the shipping agency which makes arrangements for everything from harbour pilots and cargo

loading to crew provisions. Although the work is completed to ISO 9002 standards, the IT infrastructure wasn't ideal. Systems Manager Andy Triscott says that customer requests for direct information access were not easily fulfilled.

"Information Technology is a key part of our operation. We faced a growing demand from customers to provide spreadsheets and access via the web. We also wanted web-enabled mobile computing access for ourselves. It was impossible using the existing system," said Triscott.

The original Ships Agency System was a typical 4GL legacy application with a character interface. It produced paper output for presentation to customers and was only accessible via the company's main offices while other locations relied on manual procedures. The pressure for online access came from large

customers such as international oil companies, Far Eastern shipping lines and high street retailers.

Many customers were keen to understand the data relating to ships' movements, loading and provisioning. As part of its work, the company records key stages and makes regular customer reports. Unfortunately, much of the administration was paper-driven which meant the information often lagged events.

"We wanted to build a new Shipping Agency System for competitive edge and to reduce the paper flow. Then, if customers wanted to know anything, all they have to do is enter a web address and log on."

Mobile computing, the other main requirement, was intended as a timesaving move for offices serving large or extended ports. Small offices with no previous IT support would be given ISDN links. There had to be a secure and reliable database with web-enabled access plus protection for an investment in thin client technology.

Competitive Evaluations for Openness and Scalability

Developing web-enabled applications meant looking at Java alongside the right database from a shortlist of Microsoft SQL Server, Sybase and Oracle. The company then received a timely approach from Oracle Certified Solutions Partner Explorer (UK) Ltd.

"Explorer (UK) visited us and looked at our proposed project. Explorer (UK) appeared to offer good support and we got on very well."

"Data management and timely information delivery to customers over the Internet is a popular fit for Oracle's Database and Internet Development technology. As an Oracle Certified Solution Partner, Explorer provides all the required technical skills for a smooth transition into an Internet environment, encompassing initial implementation as well as rapid growth, in order to maintain a distinct competitive advantage."

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



Openness, scalability and robustness were considered alongside the cost of ownership within an Internet development environment. Oracle scored highly in a thorough evaluation with maintenance costs that were lower than the alternatives. It all helped make the difference as Triscott explains, "Oracle had far better Internet development capabilities. They were also keen on thin client computing."

By Spring 2000, the decisions had been made. A new Shipping Agency System would be developed using Oracle Database 8i, Oracle JDeveloper and Oracle Designer. While Explorer (UK) installed Oracle software, a contract Java programmer was found to "kick start" the in-house project.

Developing Solutions for Maximum Benefit

There have been two projects using Oracle technology so far. Oracle 8i is considered "quick to develop for, easy to learn and robust" which

helps open up the database to customers. The first project is about intelligence gathering on ships' movements and cargoes. It was followed by the Ships Agency System, intended for full deployment by the end of 2000. Explorer (UK) has provided support on Oracle technology throughout.

"Explorer (UK) was keen to help us succeed. It's been a smooth transition into using new development tools," commented Triscott.

The results have been very rewarding. For example, the intelligence gathering system outputs information to customers by e-mail and spreadsheet. The application draws on the information Cory Brothers regularly reports to Lloyd's of London. Staff have web-enabled access, something that's on the way for key customers soon. However, the main focus has been the new Shipping Agency System.

Providing Mobile Web-enabled Access for Staff

Paralleling plans for customer web access into the Oracle database, staff are going mobile using handheld computers and GSM phones for direct access from docks, ships or any convenient location. Updating the database in the field means quicker information for customers. And that's where real benefit lies.

"It's all about a competitive edge. If we offer better systems and information to our customers, they'll stay with us and we will attract more business," said Triscott.

None of this is possible without help and Explorer (UK) has always responded quickly to support calls. There's been a discernable keenness, adds Triscott, to "make sure our projects succeed". Given the results so far, Oracle and Explorer were the ideal combination.

"It's surprising how quickly we have developed robust new systems so Oracle is our development platform for the future. We are planning to roll out Oracle technology across the business."

Customer Snapshot

Organisation

Cory Brothers Shipping Limited

Business Profile

Shipping agent, container services and freight forwarding

Market Sector

Shipping

Solution Snapshot

Oracle Database 8i supporting web-enabled applications for shipping services

Business Benefits

- More up-to-date customer information
- Web browser access
- Increased application functionality

Database Size

50 Megabytes

Oracle Products

Oracle 8i Database

Oracle JDeveloper

Oracle Designer

Oracle Services

Oracle Consultancy

Hardware

Compaq

Operating system

NT

Making greater use of Oracle will only add to the advantages. For example, a new web-enabled application will be developed for container services. Increased functionality for the Shipping Agency System will include accounting support and statistical analysis. And customers will be given greater Internet access too. Although Cory Brothers Shipping is one of Britain's oldest businesses, it has its eye firmly on the future.



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