

Edmonton Public Schools



Standardization on Sun and Oracle Pays Off for School System

Key highlights

Company

Edmonton Public Schools

Industry/Market

Education

Key Business Issues

- Enable online entry of financial data for processing by individual schools
- Improve efficiency
- Save data center costs

Key Business Benefits

- Schools enter their own data online and generate their own up-to-date reports
- User productivity increased 10 to 20%
- Data center staff reduced from 20 to 10
- Month-end processing reduced by 75%

Configuration Specifics

- Sun Fire™ 3800 server (2 UltraSPARC® III processors)
- 3 Sun Enterprise™ 450 servers
- 4 Sun Enterprise 250 servers
- Netra™ T1 server
- 2 Ultra™ 10 servers
- 2 Ultra Enterprise™ 1 servers
- Sun StorEdge™ disk arrays (252 GB)
- Solaris™ 8 Operating Environment (Solaris OE)
- Oracle Financials 10.7NCA
- Oracle 8i database



“A lot of our success is due to the excellent synergy between Sun and Oracle, one of the reasons why we’ve standardized on them for all our high-end administrative computing needs.”

– Brenda Boychuk, Senior Data Base Analyst, Edmonton Public Schools (EPS)

The public school system of Edmonton, Alberta uses Sun platforms and Oracle® databases for all its high-end administrative computing needs. Edmonton Public Schools also chose the Oracle E-Business Suite to provide its Financials applications. The synergy between Sun and Oracle is paying off in many ways for the school system. Compared with the previous mainframe-based applications, the Sun and Oracle solutions are delivering up to 20 percent higher user productivity and 75 percent shorter month-end processing while allowing the data center staff to be reduced by one half. Most importantly, individual schools have easier and quicker access to financial information to enable better control over financial resources.

School System Moves from Mainframe to Client-Server with Sun and Oracle

Edmonton Public Schools (EPS) consists of 208 schools where 2,600 non-teaching and 4,400 teaching staff members provide K-12 instruction to 82,000 students. EPS prides itself as a leader in school-based budgeting, where spending decisions are made at the school principal level as opposed to centrally. The school system feels that school-based budgeting accounts for much of EPS’ success, since those responsible for assuring that money is spent wisely are the very same people who decide how that money is spent.

Prior to the mid-1990s, when a centralized mainframe and legacy financials applications were in place, processing of financial transactions was inefficient in many ways. Individual school administrators had no personal access to this system. They had to forward hard copy documents to central services for entry into and processing through the accounting system. The accounting system data was consistently two to six weeks behind because of the time required for transportation of documents to central servicing and centralized data entry. Schools had to maintain a second set of books that recorded spending commitments that were not yet reflected in the system’s reports. Furthermore, financial reports could only be generated by the data center staff and not by the schools.

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“By simplifying and shortening many of our data center personnel’s tasks, and by moving a lot of activities out of their hands to the schools, we’ve greatly reduced our staffing requirements. In the mainframe days we had 20 staff working in Computer Centre Services, and now we’re down to ten.”

*– Bob Maksymic,
Manager of Computer Centre Services,
Edmonton Public Schools (EPS)*

To improve efficiency and quality of information, and to cut costs, EPS migrated from the mainframe environment first to client-server and then to an Internet architecture. The technological foundations for both these moves were the products of Sun and Oracle.

“We chose Sun as our platform using a competitive Request for Proposal (RFP) process,” said Bob Maksymic, Manager of Computer Centre Services for EPS. “The requirements we stated are all strong points of Sun—reliability, scalability, and price/performance among others. Besides, we’d already chosen Oracle as our database vendor and so the strong relationship between Sun and Oracle was a big plus.”

EPS began by converting its internally authored student information system from the mainframe to an Oracle database on a Sun platform. The success of that project gave EPS confidence in its next project, the implementation of PeopleSoft Human Resources on a Sun and Oracle platform. Once again the result was a very stable, high performance solution that served the school system’s personnel needs better than ever before.

The final step in EPS’ migration from the mainframe to Sun and Oracle was to implement Oracle Applications. “We chose Oracle over the other major Enterprise Resource Planning vendors in another competitive RFP,” Maksymic said. “Oracle Financials had everything we were looking for—the functionality we were seeking, a solid track record, a large market share, and a reasonable price.”

Next Step: On to the Internet, Again with Sun and Oracle

Oracle Financials entered production in 1996, concluding EPS’ move from the mainframe to Sun and Oracle. The modules implemented included Fixed Assets, General Ledger, Accounts Payable, Inventory and Purchasing. The school system then turned its attention to keeping the solutions modern, upgrading both hardware and software as Sun and Oracle introduced improvements. When Oracle was among the first vendors to develop an all-Internet architecture with its E-Business Suite, EPS was quick to capitalize on its innovations. Since this solution supports full interaction over the Internet, users at the many schools became able for the first time to enter data directly into the financial applications database and to run their own reports. A great deal of paperwork was eliminated and far less labor was required.

In today’s Financials system, a Sun Fire™ 3800 server fulfills back-end needs, managing an Oracle database that is housed on Sun StorEdge™ disk arrays. A Sun Enterprise™ 450 server runs the Oracle 10.7NCA Financials applications as well as a pilot test of Oracle Applications 11i version 11.5.7 that is expected to be in full production by late 2002.

The Workflow enhancements in this version will significantly improve servicing for EPS personnel. “11i will eliminate even more paperwork,” said Brenda Boychuk, Senior Data Base Analyst. “It will also be friendlier than ever for our users. It’s everything you expect a Web-based applications suite to be.”

Several Sun Enterprise 450 and 250 servers, as well as Ultra™ 10 and Netra™ servers that continue to serve the school system’s needs well even after many years, fulfill a variety of roles in school administration. These include a test environment for Oracle Financials and systems that host PeopleSoft HR, the student administration application, in-house Web applications, firewalls and DNS, and backup. All production servers are protected by Sun Support Services at the SunSpectrum Gold™ service level while test servers are on the SunSpectrum Silver™ service plan.

“Sun and Oracle have a seven-year track record of delivering stable, reliable service to the school system,” reported Boychuk. “We haven’t had any unscheduled downtime to speak of for years. And the service that Sun and Oracle personnel provide has been excellent.”

Many Benefits Result from the Synergy between Sun and Oracle

“The effect of our new financials solution has been to enable online processing by the schools themselves,” added Sultan Ibrahim, Manager of Financial Operations & Accounting. “Now when they have data to enter, like local purchase invoices, they do so immediately without involving the data center. They always have an accurate, up-to-date picture of where

they stand relative to their budget, which is essential if they are to effectively control their financial resources. Now when they enter a purchase requisition, an encumbrance is automatically set up against the budget. That dispensed with the need for a second set of books—just one reason why user efficiency has jumped 10 to 20 percent in my estimation.”

“Another productivity boost resulted from the huge reduction in the time it takes to generate month-end financial reports,” said Maksymic. “It’s way down from the mainframe days. Just our most recent move—to the Sun Fire 3800 database server from a Sun Enterprise 450 server—slashed the report generation time by 75 percent. By simplifying and shortening many of our data center personnel’s tasks, and by moving a lot of activities out of their hands to the users, we’ve greatly reduced our staffing requirements. In the mainframe days, we had 20 staff in Computer Centre Services, and now we’re down to ten.”

“A lot of our success is due to the excellent synergy between Sun and Oracle, one of the reasons why we’ve standardized on them for all our high-end administrative computing needs,” concluded Boychuck. “There’s never any finger-pointing between their service personnel. The Oracle Web site tells Solaris™ Operating Environment users like me exactly what we need to know, what levels of Oracle software are needed for particular Solaris OE versions for example. The synergy is just as strong locally. Sun and Oracle even host a golf tournament for their joint customers here in town. They make a great team.”

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Manager of Financial Operations
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Sun Microsystems, Inc. 4150 Network Circle, Santa Clara, CA 95054 USA Phone 800 786-7638 or +1 512 434-1577 Web sun.com



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Sun Worldwide Sales Offices: Africa (North, West and Central) +33-13-067-4680, Argentina +5411-4317-5600, Australia +61-2-9844-5000, Austria +43-1-60563-0, Belgium +32-2-704-8000, Brazil +55-11-5187-2100, Canada +905-477-6745, Chile +56-2-3724500, Colombia +571-629-2323, Commonwealth of Independent States +7-502-935-8411, Czech Republic +420-2-3300-9311, Denmark +45 4556 5000, Egypt +202-570-9442, Estonia +372-6-308-900, Finland +358-9-525-561, France +33-134-03-00-00, Germany +49-89-46008-0, Greece +30-1-618-8111, Hungary +36-1-489-8900, Iceland +354-563-3010, India-Bangalore +91-80-2298989/2295454; New Delhi +91-11-6106000; Mumbai +91-22-697-8111, Ireland +353-1-8055-666, Israel +972-9-9710500, Italy +39-02-641511, Japan +81-3-5717-5000, Kazakhstan +7-3272-466774, Korea +822-2193-5114, Latvia +371-750-3700, Lithuania +370-729-8468, Luxembourg +352-49 11 33 1, Malaysia +603-21161888, Mexico +52-5-258-6100, The Netherlands +00-31-33-4515-000, New Zealand-Auckland +64-9-976-6800; Wellington +64-4-462-0780, Norway +47 23 36 96 00, People's Republic of China-Beijing +86-10-6803-5588; Chengdu +86-28-619-9333; Guangzhou +86-20-8755-5900; Shanghai +86-21-6466-1228; Hong Kong +852-2202-6688, Poland +48-22-8747800, Portugal +351-21-4134000, Russia +7-502-935-8411, Singapore +65-6438-1888, Slovak Republic +421-2-4342-94-85, South Africa +27 11 256-6300, Spain +34-91-596-9900, Sweden +46-8-631-10-00, Switzerland-German 41-1-908-90-00; French 41-22-999-0444, Taiwan +886-2-8732-9933, Thailand +662-344-6888, Turkey +90-212-335-22-00, United Arab Emirates +9714-3366333, United Kingdom +44-1-276-20444, United States +1-800-555-9SUN or +1-650-960-1300, Venezuela +58-2-905-3800

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