

REAL-TIME MONITORING MEANS REAL TIME SAVINGS IN HANDLING EMERGENCIES

Challenge

Wales & West Utilities (WWU) transports gas safely to more than 7 million people through its network of the 35,000 kms of pipelines that cover Wales and Southwest England. To enhance its rapid and reliable response to gas emergencies, WWU wanted greater visibility into its handling of more than 125,000 emergency work orders a year.

Solution

WWU can now actively monitor the precise flow of every emergency order, from the moment it arrives, by viewing its emergency process in real-time with webMethods Optimize for Process, the Business Activity Monitoring (BAM) solution. WWU can see bottlenecks as they occur to enhance its speed of response and can measure detailed Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to further improve performance.

Benefits

- Increased responsiveness to emergency calls
- Greater visibility into the flow of every emergency order
- Greater assurance of public safety—every call is responded to swiftly because WWU can see and respond to even delayed orders
- Continued performance improvements since graphical dashboards and KPIs make it easier to pinpoint and prevent problems
- Higher-quality data for dispatchers
- Rapid deployment, thanks to Optimize's out-of-the-box features
- Built on an investment in the webMethods integration platform



Wales & West Utilities (WWU), formerly part of National Grid Transco, is a regulated gas distribution business with pipelines across Wales and southwest England. Its primary role—undertaken on behalf of gas shippers—is to transport gas safely and efficiently to the gas meters of homes and businesses. Recognized as a leader in safety performance, WWU was chosen as Gas Industry Network Operator of the Year in 2008 and received the Customer Service Award in 2009.

Get There Faster.™

“We have an even faster response time to slow work orders. We can detect a slow or delayed work order faster than our customer.”

Christopher John | IT Manager | Wales & West Utilities

Keeping the public safe—priority one

WWU’s core business is running and maintaining its vast pipeline network that transports gas across an area populated by more than 7 million. Safety is of foremost concern and, as well as replacing, refurbishing and increasing capacity in its network, WWU must attend gas emergencies on streets and at businesses and homes within one or two hours.

Answering the call for better monitoring

A recognized industry leader in safety practices, WWU wanted to ensure it had an accurate picture of how it handled every emergency work order. Before, monitoring the emergency process was “a manual and labor-intensive activity,” explained Richard Jones, Performance Manager.

The display was a basic table format, according to Christopher John of WWU’s IT group. The company used a simple Comma Separated Values (CSV) user interface to a standalone system that queried databases directly. “The idea was it would be resilient in the event of a fail over,” he said. “Because it’s standalone, it wouldn’t be affected if other parts of the company’s systems failed.

“But being a bespoke solution, it had all kinds of inherent problems. It didn’t have an upgrade path. So we really wanted to move to a standardized product, something with a product life path and standard maintenance.”

Real-time Optimize makes a real difference

Now, with Optimize, WWU has real-time visibility into the emergency process the instant orders arrive. When orders come in, they’re intercepted by webMethods Broker, which sends them via the webMethods Integration Server immediately to the SAP system. There, they’re created into work

orders, registered and then assigned to localities and other resources.

“BAM picks up when we’ve received a work order,” John explained. “It’ll then monitor the time taken to get into our SAP system. From there, it’ll monitor the time coming out, and then through to our field system. We have an application for scheduling work orders for distribution to the field. The same system provides our guys with their mobile application where they actually see the work orders and then complete down the work order, and return completion details to SAP.

“So right through that process, business activity monitoring is checking the flow, and it’s set up with individual SLAs so we can make sure that things are passing from, say it was from SAP out to our field system, within an acceptable time period.”

For the first time, WWU is able to monitor detailed KPIs, including:

- Time to get an emergency order into SAP
- Time to process an order in SAP
- Time to assign an order to the field

That critical time period—from when the order arrives to its field assignment—now consistently averages 180 seconds, just three minutes. Thanks to recent infrastructure upgrades and Optimize, “we’re getting a much improved workflow, much better time-ins and work orders achieving their SLA through the system,” John said.

Jones added: “We can say that we have made a saving by making the process a fully automated activity. It will alert the users as to when there is an issue via e-mail and an auditable alert. The users don’t have to go looking for failures—the system will tell them. This, in turn, will free up the user’s time to carry out other activities.”

Better picture of performance

“Even the display that we show to our dispatch users is better,” John said of the webMethods BAM solution. “The data that they receive is improved ... the actual information with regards to the work order is enhanced.

“We can see bottlenecks, so we can see where there might be a potential system issue. That’s definitely an improvement. That’s something we couldn’t do before ... now we’re able to predict where we might get bottlenecks, which means we can try and optimize the system and its interfaces.

Overall, BAM shows WWU where to make improvements to further refine how it handles emergencies. “It means that the way that we use our webMethods interface integration layer is improved,” John said. “It means that we can start to predict where there might be problems and, therefore, we can look at improving things. If there’s a particular slowdown, we then have the BAM dashboard information to look at bottlenecks.”

It all adds up to greater confidence. “We can be even more confident in the safety of the system,” John added. “We won’t be concerned that potential system issues could add vital seconds to our rapid response, as we can proactively monitor the system, resolving potential network issues before the occur.”

How has the business responded to BAM? “It’s really well-received and it’s nice to put something into the business that’s gone down so well and is seen as a success,” John said. As a result, WWU is investigating other ways it can use BAM across the business.

Building on a webMethods investment

WWU became a webMethods customer in 2005, when WWU was launched. It was formerly part of National Grid Transco. Martin Malin of WWU recalls the company had just 18 months to implement a new IT infrastructure to run its distribution network. The company decided on SAP and then began “looking at other suitable products to complement it,” Malin said.

“So webMethods quickly became a logical choice. It had a history. We went through some good references, and we knew that for the scale of the organization, for what we were trying to achieve, it ultimately became the best choice.”

What WWU likes best about the webMethods integration platform was “robustness, flexibility and scalability,” Malin said. “And when I say flexibility it’s just its ability to integrate with so many products. It’s a well-known industry product so we were able to find resources to work with it ... being a big player and using the industry XML standard meant it could be implemented on time.”

The webMethods integration platform was implemented faster than expected, three months ahead of schedule before winter when demands rise.

WWU has deployed 122 different interfaces to the webMethods Integration Server, Malin explained, and sharp increases in transactions are no problem. On average, it handles about 400 emergency calls a day. During a recent cold spell, calls more than doubled to 1,000 a day “and we saw no degradation in performance from webMethods,” Malin said.

As the U.K. moves toward a Smart Grid, replacing existing meters with smart meters, Malin said

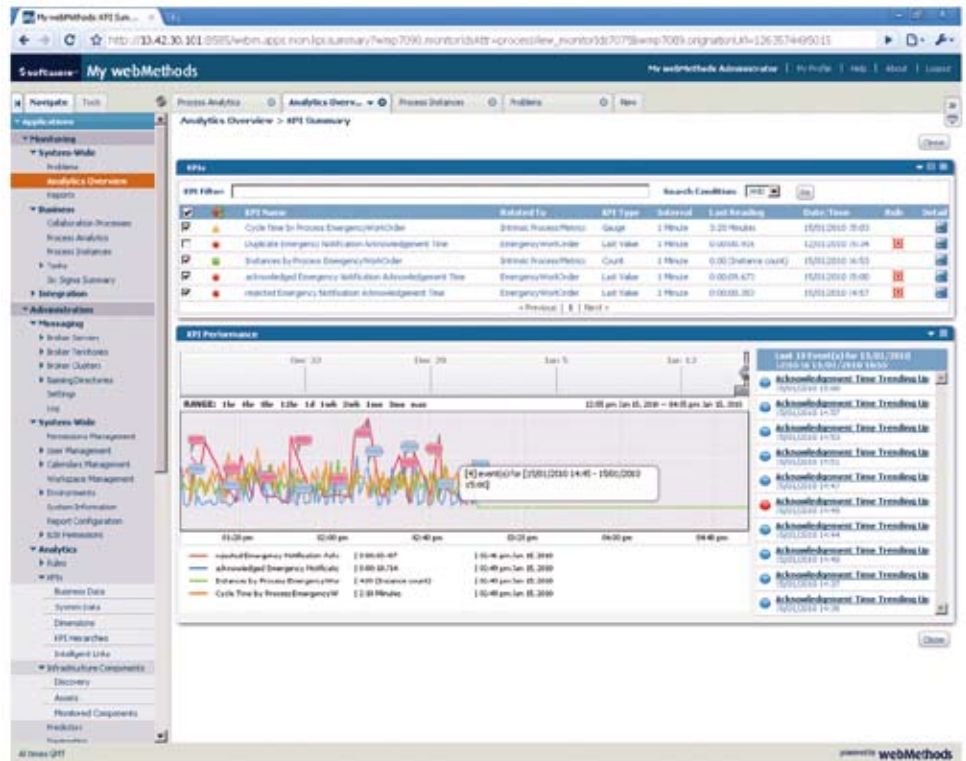
WWU will be ready for the challenge. That’s because, with webMethods, WWU can build a scalable, resilient, standards-based Smart Grid architecture.

KEY COMPONENTS

webMethods Optimize for Process is BAM software that provides real-time process monitoring, enabling WWU to continually optimize performance.

webMethods Broker provides a high-speed, high-performance backbone for messaging.

webMethods Integration Server allows WWU to get data reliably in and out of virtually any system, including SAP.



Using webMethods for Optimize, WWU can drill down to analyze events and overlay KPIs for an even more complete view of its handling of emergency calls. This helps WWU make the best, most accurate decisions to improve safety and performance.

ABOUT SOFTWARE AG

Software AG is the global leader in Business Process Excellence. Our 40 years of innovation include the invention of the first high-performance transactional database, Adabas; the first business process analysis platform, ARIS; the first B2B server and SOA-based integration platform, webMethods. We are unique in offering the world's only end-to-end — and easiest to use — business process management (BPM) solutions, with the lowest Total-Cost-of-Ownership.

Our industry-leading brands, ARIS, webMethods, Adabas, Natural and IDS Scheer Consulting, represent a unique portfolio for; process strategy, design, integration and control, SOA-based integration and data management, process-driven SAP implementation, and strategic process consulting and services. Our comprehensive software and services solutions allow companies to continuously achieve their business results faster.

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