

Standard Life Improves Information Sharing while Cutting Application Development Time by 70%



Standard Life
Edinburgh, Scotland
www.standardlife.com

Industry:

Financial Services

Annual Revenue:

US\$88 billion (GBP108 billion)

Employees:

12,000

Oracle Products & Services:

Oracle Database
Oracle Application Express

Key Benefits:

- Created prototype in two days
- Built enterprise-wide application in two weeks
- Cut application development time by 70%
- Saved US\$174,000 (GBP100,000) in licensing costs
- Consolidated fragmented data into single, enterprise-wide document
- Gained simultaneous, multi-user access to information
- Ensured real-time data sharing while retaining centralized control
- Improved user productivity with easy-to-use solution

“Oracle Application Express lets us consolidate previously fragmented contact management information into a single enterprise-wide document and allow multi-user access without sacrificing centralized control.” — Russell Irwin, Head of Group Technical Direction, Standard Life

Standard Life, a leading UK provider of insurance, savings, investment, and pension products, has saved US\$174,000 (GBP100,000) by using Oracle Application Express to build a customized, Web-enabled contact and diary management solution. The solution gives Standard Life a consolidated, up-to-date view of the engagements carried out by its key people. Details of meetings are all entered into a single, centrally managed, web-enabled document, accessible by senior executives and support staff.

With more than 7 million customers worldwide, Standard Life manages global assets of US\$188 billion (GBP108 billion) from its Edinburgh headquarters. The company’s new contact and diary management tool replaces a large number of individual and departmental contact lists that used to be held in Lotus Notes, Word documents, Excel spreadsheets or Access desktop databases. Standard Life wanted to consolidate this fragmented information and convert it into a single, universally accessible contact management solution that was easy to use and could be deployed over the Web.

As an existing Oracle Database customer, Standard Life was able to download Oracle Application Express free of charge from Oracle Technology Network (OTN). The solution was installed by Standard Life’s IT team in a few minutes. Browser-based, intuitive, wizard-driven tools enabled developers to create a prototype contact management solution for user approval in only two days, cutting an estimated 70% off the time it would have taken using alternative tools. Users adapted quickly to the new solution, which has reduced time spent updating information about their activities and eliminated the need to circulate details to other executives. Standard Life is now using Oracle Application

Express to manage the information sharing needs of other parts of the business and enable real-time collaboration between dispersed teams while improving data management and security.

Web-Oriented Tools Support Rapid Application Development

Oracle Application Express is an easy-to-use, functionality-rich browser-based tool, integrated with Oracle Database, that provides advanced Web application development capabilities out of the box. It allows developers, or anyone with limited SQL programming skills, to create scalable Web applications and deploy them quickly to multiple users. Applications reside within the Oracle Database, ensuring optimal performance and security. Using the SQL workshop and application builder, Standard Life's developers were able to extract data from the multiple contact management documents in use across the company to create the new solution only two weeks after the prototype had been approved.

“Oracle Application Express enabled us to build a high-quality solution that leverages the performance, reliability, and scalability of our Oracle Database,” said Graeme Wilson, senior designer, Standard Life. “It supports our strategy to move to a rapid application development environment to streamline the creation of new applications and enhance business agility. Using Oracle Application Express our developers were able to create a professional-looking application that is both fast and secure and make it available to everyone who needs it within a very tight timeframe.”

Managing and Sharing Data in Real Time

Senior managers can now access details of activities undertaken by their peers and read about them at their desktop. Executives also update details of their own activities directly on to contact management document. Sharing real-time information across the company helps executives coordinate their activities to optimize Standard Life's business contacts. “Oracle Application Express enabled us to develop a contact and diary management solution that generates immediate and significant value to end users,” said Russell Irwin, head of group technical direction, Standard Life.

Improving Business Visibility and Control

Standard Life is now using Oracle Application Express to develop a number of other enterprise-wide applications. Regional business contingency plans, that used to be held locally, are being consolidated into a single, centrally managed document that will enable Standard Life to assess and update disaster recovery plans UK-wide. The company is also developing a consolidated sales target management system that encompasses all products, regions, and levels of staff. Making this information available centrally will give sales directors and business analysts a real-time overview of performance against plan and enable them to respond quickly to address deviations.

Standard Life is also using Oracle Application Express to help simplify auditing and facilitate compliance with the Financial Services Authority regulations and the Sarbanes-Oxley Act. Individual balance sheets for each business area and product, currently held on Excel spreadsheets, will be consolidated to create a centrally operated multi-user balance sheet control system. Tighter management of balance sheet information will allow discrepancies to be identified faster, enable monthly close to be completed sooner, and ensure data can be accessed more quickly for compliant reporting.

Developing Departmental Web-Based Applications

The flexibility of Oracle Application Express means that non-IT staff members at Standard Life with little SQL programming knowledge could build quick and easy database applications, without needing input from the company's IT experts. This would reduce reliance on desktop databases and spreadsheets and eliminate time spent emailing updated versions of documents to colleagues. Built-in version control and security passwords would guard against unauthorized viewing or editing. Using Oracle Application Express instead of traditional tools to build smaller applications would also avoid the need to distribute business logic onto each user's desktop.

"Currently our developers are the only ones using Oracle Application Express and they are using it to build complex, enterprise-wide solutions," said Wilson. "We do however recognize the potential for creating smaller, lightweight applications to manage less business-critical information needs such as departmental staff lists and planning tools. Oracle

Application Express would enable employees of all disciplines to create running Web-based applications and share them with team members just by sending them a URL.”

Enhancing Innovation and Value

As a no-cost option available to all Oracle Database customers, Oracle Application Express helps Standard Life enhance its business by optimizing its investment in Oracle technology. “Oracle Application Express enables the IT team to initiate business improvements by using our existing assets to drive innovation and business value,” said Irwin.

Why Oracle?

An Oracle Database customer for 15 years, Standard Life runs all its non-mainframe business-critical applications on Oracle Database and was keen to expand its use of Oracle tools. Presentations from Oracle’s pre-sales team demonstrated how Oracle Application Express could be used to build a database-centric, Web-enabled content and diary management tool with minimal development effort. Standard Life did evaluate third party, off-the-shelf solutions but Oracle Application Express offered the most flexible, secure, and cost-effective option.

“Purchasing a ready-made solution would have increased our outgoings by £100,000 in additional licensing costs, while providing neither the functionality we needed, nor the security and stability of the Oracle Database,” said Wilson. “Choosing Oracle Application Express enabled us to re-use our existing infrastructure, skills sets, and resources and avoided the need to train our developers in new methodologies.”

Implementation Process

Standard Life’s own IT team downloaded Oracle Application Express from OTN and worked with the company’s business process owners to design a contact and diary management solution that met their needs. Oracle’s SQL workshop and Data workshop tools speeded up data extraction and the Application Builder tool was used to build pages containing reports, forms, and charts. Following the creation of a prototype in two days, the new solution was completed and went live after only two weeks.

“Development wizards in Oracle Application Express eliminated much of the routine work involved in developing Web-enabled

applications,” said Wilson. “This enabled our team to focus on building applications that addressed the business issues while cutting development time by 70%.”

Standard Life offers a comprehensive range of insurance, savings, investment and pension products. Its product range is designed to meet the changing needs of customers throughout their lives.