

MassHousing



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Carl Richardson, MassHousing’s BI Product Manager

MassHousing is the leading provider of affordable housing for both individuals and major developments across the state of Massachusetts. Since 1970, MassHousing has provided more than \$9.9 billion in financing for more than 88,000 units of mixed income rental housing and in excess of 55,000 loans for home owners and home buyers throughout the state. MassHousing is self-supporting, independent public authority.

Mission critical for an organization like MassHousing is quick, reliable information that helps the organization save money, serve the community better, and satisfy regulatory requirements effectively. And, that’s why they chose Cognos.

Challenges faced

In 1998, the agency embarked on an initiative to deploy an Executive Information System (EIS). “We wanted something that would give us information on how the business was running without having to get multiple answers from multiple people and then summarize it,” says Carl Richardson, MassHousing’s BI Product Manager.

With the goal of centralizing MassHousing’s data—at the time siloed in six separate business divisions: Home Ownership, Rental Development, Rental Management, Corporate, Mortgage, Insurance and MassHousing Overall—the EIS would easily allow executives to view pertinent information without having to access underlying data systems. By consolidating the data, the EIS would enhance the accuracy and integrity of MassHousing’s reporting across each of its six business segments, a key challenge given its disparate architecture. For example, if an executive wanted to know what their total loan amounts were across two business areas, they had to access the two separate databases and then combine and manually add the data.

Industry:

- Government

Geography:

- North America

Information Needs:

- Standardization of reporting criteria
- Secure executive reporting on budgeting/trending
- Compliance and diversity reporting
- Customized portals
- Mapping tools for visual presentation

Platforms:

- Microsoft Windows Server 2001, 2003
- Microsoft SQL Server 2003
- Progress 8
- Microsoft Access
- BEA Aqua Logic

Solutions:

- Cognos 8 BI

Benefits:

- Increased efficiency of business reporting, decreased response times
- Unified picture of the overall business
- Integrated portal customized for each user
- Highly-flexible, consolidated and accurate reports

Strategy followed

MassHousing searched for a reporting tool capable of generating an integrated portal reporting system for its executives. After evaluating products from the leading vendors, MassHousing selected Cognos. “The Cognos solution was much more flexible and in tune to what we needed to do and how we wanted to present information,” explains Richardson. “It was more adaptable to changes that would occur within the data, and there was less maintenance with Cognos products than the others.” Shortly following the decision, MassHousing began consolidating the data across its six



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business units and deployed Cognos across the agency during the following year.

As MassHousing's Executive Information System has matured, so too have the requests and needs of its 300 plus users. Users are now requesting a greater number of reports, and particularly, customized reports. Executives need greater security and increased visibility into the agency to better manage their business. Other departments, such as human resources and compliance and diversity, have also requested access to Cognos reports in order to meet current regulatory requirements.

To continue to meet these evolving demands, MassHousing decided to migrate to the Cognos 8 BI suite. "Until now, everything has been geared towards a particular department," says Richardson. "We want to take that up a step where the corporate manager can see an initial page that's geared towards them as individuals rather than the business as a whole."

In December 2005, MassHousing began deploying Cognos 8 BI. With supporting technology from BEA AquaLogic, MassHousing created an internal portal that the agency now refers to as My MassHousing. The portal provides employees with a centralized place to read agency news, fill out timecards, and access performance management systems.

Equally important, the portal will provide executives with easy access to budget information, and proactive highlight reports on trending and stoplight information. "Rather than having to search a number of reports to find the one that is needed, informational reports are sent directly to the executives' My MassHousing portal. With this, they can view the information the moment they get in the office," says Richardson.

From the beginning of the project, MassHousing have utilized Cognos consulting and training teams. Always on the lookout to develop its internal staff, MassHousing had its team work in tandem with Cognos developers for the added benefit of the knowledge transfer for the building of components and BI software expertise.

Now, MassHousing has a dedicated team of six people in its business intelligence and corporate reporting department, which was officially designated in 2006 and created separate from the traditional IT department. The new department, now referred to as the agency's business intelligence and corporate reporting department, act as a business intelligence competency center (BICC), is tasked with making sure that both existing and new systems do not affect the overall reporting effectiveness or the needs of the agency overall.

Benefits realized

MassHousing maintains that Cognos is the lifeblood of its agency and continues to evolve its business with Cognos business intelligence. "It's really the business that has driven this entire project. As the needs of executives continue to grow, they're pushing us to implement Cognos solutions rather than the other way around," states Richardson.

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Considered mission critical, the Cognos solution is included in the agency's disaster recovery program. "It's one of the key systems that have to be brought back up in case of a disaster, which speaks volumes," says Richardson. "MassHousing initially deployed Cognos as a subsystem, and now it's essential for business continuity."

As a result of the progress and success MassHousing has seen during the last 10 years using Cognos solutions, it now serves as an internal reference and example to its community and outside vendors. "We've had managers from other agencies actually come in to look at what we're doing within Cognos and with our systems. There are numerous people who have been pointed towards Cognos because of us," says Richardson.