



BIG LOTS STORES, INC.

Fortune 500 Retailer Reduces the Cost of Doing Business

With annual revenue of more than \$4 billion, Big Lots, Inc. is a publicly owned Fortune 500 company and the nation's largest broadline closeout retailer. Headquartered in Columbus, OH, Big Lots operates about 1,500 retail stores in 46 states and five regional distribution centers throughout the country and employs more than 47,000 people. Big Lots obtains brand-name products from more than 3,000 manufacturers.

To meet its published goal of being the world's best bargain place, Big Lots employs state of the art technology, including an extensive data center at its headquarters in Columbus. The IT Operations Department at Big Lots has numerous responsibilities, and the diversity of tasks and volume of data required by this organization make it necessary for Big Lots to run technology that meets all of varied needs without unacceptably high labor and administration costs. One daunting responsibility faced by the IT Department is the distribution of 12,000 reports a month to thousands of employees across the enterprise.

So, how is it done? Big Lots' transactional reports are generated through its IBM I-Series (AS/400) platform, including reports from Intrepid Systems, a merchandise management system, Lawson Financials and in-house systems for distribution and allocation processes. Kirk Smith, manager of IT Operations and Data Center Services at Big Lots has been working with this system for many years, but he also acknowledges that despite its processing power, it has shortcomings when it comes to electronic report distribution. "In the vanilla system, it's not really search-friendly," he admits, "and although today's technology can provide terabytes of storage, it has limited functionality for archival purposes."

As the business grew, Big Lots' I-Series machine simply had too many spool files. Inevitably, when system administrators would try to get the reports off the mainframe, someone would realize they needed the report for which they had authorized

deletion. Additionally, a product used for burning spool files to CD was painfully slow, and if a failure occurred at any point in the process it had to be restarted from the beginning. "An administrator could literally spend a weekend preparing month-end reports for distribution," recalls Smith.

Big Lots chose Results Engineering to help implement a content management system using OnBase, enterprise-class software that combines integrated document management, business process management and records management in a single web-enabled application. In evaluating OnBase's COLD capabilities, the retailer decided to deploy OnBase as an integrated solution for the enterprise. Results Engineering Retail Sector Specialist, Al Jameson states, "Kirk has taken total ownership of this project for the enterprise and we fully support his internal development of the OnBase platform."

Automated Report Distribution According To User Preferences

Big Lots' OnBase COLD/ERM solution supports the ability to gather, sort, index and electronically distribute reports as a "lights out" operation. Spool files from the multiple applications are sent to an internally developed report distribution system that places reports in queues based on defined selection criteria. A banner page containing all indexing information required for OnBase is automatically generated.

The reports are then processed, a spool file is packaged and a dynamic FTP request is sent to the OnBase server, which has been set up with scheduled processes to check specific directories at regular intervals. Based on the information collected in the banner page, OnBase automatically COLD processes them, sends the files to appropriate disk groups and assigns the document type.

AT A GLANCE

By automating the indexing and distribution of more than 12,000 reports a month, Big Lots has reduced labor and resources associated with the process and made it easier for employees to access and analyze critical business data. The 1,500+-location retailer is also using content management technology to streamline auditing, regulatory compliance, accounts payable, contracting and other business processes.

BENEFITS

- Drastic reductions in printing and distribution costs
- Better control of corporate data facilitates trending and data mining
- Flexible interface can accommodate user preferences
- Manual indexing is minimal
- Significant labor reductions for customer service, AP processing and other business function
- Improved ability to comply with audits, including taxing bodies and Sarbanes-Oxley compliance
- Reduced AP staff by three yet increased AP capacity by 300 stores

APPLICATIONS

- Finance
- Accounts Payable
- Inventory Control
- Merchandising

ONBASE SOFTWARE

- CD Authoring
- COLD/ERM
- Production Document Imaging
- EDM Services
- CD Export
- E-Forms
- Host Enabler
- Monarch
- Batch OCR
- Full Text Indexing
- Workflow
- CD Publishing

COMPLEMENTARY PRODUCT INTEGRATIONS

- IBM I-Series (AS/400) Mainframe
- Fujitsu and Panasonic document scanners
- Datawatch Corp. Monarch data mining software

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A workflow in OnBase is launched to populate and validate the indexing fields based on data in the banner page. The OnBase COLD auto-fill database validates data against Big Lots' report distribution database, which has information about the properties of various reports including to a distribution list. Once in OnBase, the reports can kick off an automated or manual workflow and be pushed to end users in a variety of ways. This significantly reduces costs for printing and distributing reports. Prior to implementing OnBase, the Inventory Control Department alone printed more than 100 reports a week to remote locations.

OnBase also makes it easier for Big Lots to create monthly report CDs for 12 regional offices across the United States, as well as the General Office. The OnBase CD/DVD Publishing module allows Big Lots to quickly create a CD with a read-only, self-contained mini OnBase system. The data can be searched and retrieved based on keywords "We used to spend lots of time organizing report data to create the CDs," says Smith. "Now it's done automatically."

Big Lots' OnBase COLD system also makes it easier for the company to quickly view data in ways that are relevant for them. For instance, Mark Supino, application administrator for Big Lots' IT Operations, Data Center Services, explains that executives creating year-end reports may need to choose from as many as 1,600 reports. Using OnBase, users can simply scan the list and grab the reports they need.

OnBase is also flexible enough to allow organizations to present OnBase tools in ways that match a user's preference and job function. For some employees in Big Lots' Finance Department, this meant presenting data according to a "foldering" system. Instead of using the OnBase interface, some users are more comfortable with a system that presents a hierarchical view of the documents. For instance, a "folder" may be labeled 2004 and within it have sub-folders for each quarter.

"Foldering was critical to gaining acceptance among certain users," says Supino. "I only had to set up the folders and the auto-naming and the rest was automatic. The users were all happy they could find information in the way they were used to viewing it."

With data about everything from time cards to merchandise monitoring to inventory control and receiving reports, an easily searchable report archive can make it easier to use them to generate corporate intelligence. For instance, the Payroll Department can leverage full text indexing to research time card trends about an employee or a location. Not only has this COLD solution saved time, better access to information increases efficiency and costs in other ways. As an example, Big Lots once had employee W-2 forms created by a third-party vendor. On average, about 50% of those forms have to re-printed, perhaps because of a name change, outdated address or loss. Using an outsourcer, Big Lots would have to order and be charged for each replacement. Now a Payroll Department employee can correct the information and generate a new one immediately from the appropriate report.

Another creative solution developed by Big Lots is a method for archiving historical database files from the I-Series platform. Through an in-house system called "Dyno-Purge" (Dynamic Purging Process), historical data from database files is scrutinized based on a predetermined set of data life rules, extracted from the database files, flattened out and sent to the OnBase server via dynamic FTP requests. At the server, the flat files are then imported into the OnBase environment via a COLD process. Through use of the OnBase Monarch Interface module, users can perform comprehensive data mining by using Monarch business intelligence software from Datawatch Corp. "This has allowed us to strategically move data from expensive, high performance disk to a cheaper solution and keep our transactional systems running at peak performance," states Smith. "At the same time, we add value to the process by incorporating an easy to use querying tool to gain real time access to historical data that would otherwise be stored on tape."

Faster Document Access Speeds Information Gathering

While OnBase offers a powerful COLD solution, the repository can accommodate documents from practically any source and cross-reference them to each other as well as specific report fields. Big Lots' decision to implement OnBase COLD was based in part on the success it had had with OnBase Document Imaging, which originally had been implemented to replace a system that had gone out of business.

The AP and Inventory Control departments scan documents using Fujitsu and Panasonic scanners equipped with Adrenaline scanner controllers from Kofax Image Products, Inc. Adrenaline supports barcode recognition, which is used to automatically index images. Remote sites can generate barcodes from Lawson software or transactional screens and send them to the headquarters in Columbus with the pages to be scanned and other reports.

Making documents immediately available to multiple users facilitates the research processes inherent in many departments. A cross referencing linkage was set up so that scanned images would correspond to key information located in COLD documents. By simply clicking on amounts, location numbers or invoice numbers in the reports, relevant images are displayed.

Post-payment recovery and customer service require less labor and can be accomplished faster since the OnBase implementation. In fact, despite adding 300 additional stores to its system, the AP Department found it didn't have to replace the three employees lost through attrition. Whether for external auditors such as taxing bodies or internal audits necessary for Sarbanes-Oxley (SOX) compliance, Big Lots can simply have employees pull requested files immediately from OnBase instead of having to locate and retrieve paper documents.

OnBase is not only being used as a repository for these critical documents, but Big Lots' associates are leveraging the powerful search engine to scan and find exceptions in the contents of the documents to ensure that SOX controls are being followed. "OnBase has been a lifesaver as far as SOX is concerned," states Smith. "We have been able to automatically capture and process numerous documents relating to the completion of key processes through the use of COLD. This in turn has enabled us to easily clear the ongoing SOX testing requirements.

"These projects have proven to the organization that technology can save money and increase efficiency and that OnBase was a suitable choice," comments Smith. "We've set the groundwork for new initiatives involving automated workflows that will deliver even more returns."