

VicUrban Adopts Standardized IT Architecture to Create Robust, Secure Information System



VicUrban
Melbourne, Australia
www.vicurban.com

Industry:

Public Sector

Annual Revenue:

US\$186 million

Employees:

Fewer than 500

Oracle Products & Services:

Oracle Financials
Oracle Fixed Assets
Oracle Project Management
Oracle Project Accounting
Oracle Business Intelligence
Oracle Discoverer
Oracle CRM On Demand
Oracle Database
Oracle BPEL Process Manager
Oracle Application Server

Oracle Partner:

ASG Group
www.asg.com.au

Red Rock Consulting
www.redrock.net.au

“In terms of processes and technology, Oracle has allowed us to take two completely different organizations, put them together, and end up with something substantially better. Just three and a half years into a five-year program, we are done.” – Sam Sangster, Finance and ICT Director, VicUrban

Formed in 2003 as a result of a merger between Victoria’s Urban Regional Land Corporation and the Docklands Authority, VicUrban is the state government’s sustainable land development agency. The agency works in partnership with the public and private sectors to build sustainable communities and create opportunities for industry development.

Following the merger, VicUrban conducted a review of the information technology infrastructure inherited from each organization. It soon became obvious that a change was needed; one organization had based its financial system on Oracle while the other on Microsoft.

Working with disparate software systems proved to be ineffective, costly, and restrictive. Following a comprehensive evaluation, VicUrban selected Oracle Database and a range of Oracle E-Business Suite applications to build its new environment. The software provided a robust and secure information system that required minimal modification. The agency also adopted Oracle CRM On Demand to make it easier for staff to access and capture customer information.

“The Financial System Project was in place 18 months ahead of schedule,” said Sam Sangster, finance and ICT director, VicUrban. “As a result, VicUrban now has a cutting-edge information system that allows our information technology team to contribute to the organization’s bottom line.”

Adopting a Standard Architecture

The VicUrban merger sought to bring together the best of the Urban Regional Land Corporation and Docklands Authority. Planning for the merger spanned information technology and its role within the combined entity.

Key Benefits:

- Standardized information across merged entity using single database platform
- Gained greater levels of system access, performance, security, and availability
- Simplified reporting system to provide faster and more accurate business analysis
- Extended reach of information system to include external business associates
- Reduced maintenance and support burden on VicUrban information technology staff
- Improved service by ensuring all customer interactions are captured and made available to sales staff

“The problem was that the two entities used different financial systems—one used an Oracle-based solution while the other used Great Plains software on the Microsoft platform,” said Sangster. “So the search was on for a holistic solution.

“In the end we decided to implement an ‘out of the box’ solution from Oracle to ensure system longevity, compatibility, and integration,” he said.

VicUrban developed a five-year strategic plan in collaboration with ASG Group, outlining a program to standardize all systems on Oracle Database, Oracle Application Server, and Oracle E-Business Suite applications.

The agency also implemented Oracle BPEL Process Manager to manage and control some of its core business processes. The technology enabled VicUrban’s Web site to easily integrate with Oracle Financials and Oracle CRM On Demand as well as present real-time information about land availability to prospective customers.

Improved Reporting, Greater Financial Control

A program this size required the execution of around 40 projects, so VicUrban assembled a high-caliber team of IT professionals to lead the implementation.

“Apart from specialized software for the management of land inventory, we were able to implement Oracle Database and modules from Oracle E-Business Suite without modification,” said Sangster.

“In terms of processes and technology, VicUrban has taken two completely different organizations, put them together, and ended up with something substantially better. The common architecture and technology in all our solutions allows business processes to initiate and execute events across the systems.”

VicUrban went live on the Oracle applications in August 2006 following a two and a half year design and deployment phase. The Oracle-based information technology infrastructure gives VicUrban a first-rate financial system and improved the productivity of the agency’s personnel. The system has eliminated the need for data warehouse development and delivered superior real-time reporting. VicUrban also enjoys improved system performance, security, and availability. In addition, the new

environment reduces the maintenance and support burden on VicUrban information technology staff.

“In terms of improved information access, we are now able to utilize Oracle Business Intelligence Enterprise Edition, which sits over the top of all our business information, to provide us with an effective query, reporting, and analysis tool,” said Sangster. “As a result we can deliver our objective of a single point of truth, maintained once—but accessed many times.”

VicUrban has reduced the time spent generating reports, allowing staff to focus on analyzing financial information for business improvement.

“As VicUrban becomes more sophisticated in its use of Oracle Business Intelligence, users will be able to generate ad-hoc analysis without relying on IT resources to generate custom reports,” said Sangster.

CRM On Demand Delivers a Single Source of Information

As part of the infrastructure upgrade, VicUrban decided to implement a modern customer relationship management (CRM) system. The agency had been relying on a combination of information systems to capture information, but the lack of integration made reporting difficult and did not allow VicUrban to build a complete history of customer interactions. The result was lost sales opportunities and escalating costs.

VicUrban opted for a hosted CRM solution from Oracle to ensure a quick deployment.

“Oracle CRM On Demand, from an ICT point of view, substantially reduced the amount of infrastructure we needed to deploy to make it available to our staff,” said Sangster. “We already have an excellent internet and network facility and a good standard operating environment on the desktop. We simply worked through all the contractual mechanisms and switched the software on.

“The speedy implementation and early delivery of business benefits was a deciding factor to go with CRM On Demand as opposed to a traditional, full service, internally run solution,” he said.

Information across a range of customer touch points, such as walk-in customer visits, phone calls, and enquiries from the Web site, now goes directly into the CRM system.

“Before we had the CRM solution, we didn’t capture all the customers that walked into a sales center,” said Kirsten Rappolt, general manager of business development and marketing at VicUrban. “Now we do. We know who they are, where they come from, and what they want to purchase.

“We also looked at our sales processes, refined them, and retrained the sales force—and now we can offer a better customer experience,” she added. “However the customer contacts us, they know that their enquiry will be responded to by the appropriate person. The sales person knows when the customer has contacted us, they can see recordings of all the times they’ve interacted with the customer, and check if the sale has been closed. After sales, they can make sure the customer experience continues to be a good one.”

“We’re delighted with our return on investment so far,” said Sangster. “Our marketing campaigns have been more targeted. We’ve been much more effective and are spending marketing funds in the places they need to be spent. Rather than just managing customer contacts we now have a tool that gives us confidence we are capturing all interactions and working through the sales process efficiently to qualify leads. We also have a better understanding of product demand, so we can deliver what our customers want.”

A Sustainable Future

Over the next 25 years, the population of Melbourne is expected to increase by up to one million people, requiring the establishment of another 620,000 households. One of VicUrban’s tasks is to deliver residential housing developments to help meet this need, while promoting sustainable development. Oracle technology will help the agency fulfill this goal by providing streamlined reporting systems and processes.

“VicUrban seeks to innovate in the property industry in Australia. That innovation is not just in our customer product set but extends all the way to the back office,” said Sangster.

“Oracle was selected because it was able to deliver a future-proof solution that met all of our major business requirements,” he added. “The foundation for future development has been established.

“VicUrban’s IT restructuring has significantly helped us prepare to support our business into the future and we are happy with our decision to go with Oracle.”

Why Oracle?

VicUrban carefully examined products from Microsoft and Oracle and eventually chose to go with Oracle Financials.

“We found that Oracle as a Tier 1 product versus Great Plains as a Tier 2 product provides greater flexibility in defining how the product is used, without programming changes,” said Sangster. “We’re fortunate to have a Tier 1 solution operating across each of the business applications. Many of those are Oracle solutions.”

Oracle’s market-leading position also meant there are more accounting and information technology staff in the market with skills in its products.

“Oracle’s architecture also enables users to access our systems over the internet or via an intranet using a range of devices, such as personal digital assistants, mobile phones, laptops, and desktops,” said Sangster. “This reduces the maintenance and support costs that would be incurred if our information technology staff had to load application software onto individual PCs.”

VicUrban chose Oracle CRM On Demand for its functionality and integration benefits, according to Sangster.

“The flexibility and capabilities of the software integrated tightly with the rest of our solutions. This was important as it allowed us to implement the solution in a very short period of time and deliver the benefits in a staged process without high upfront costs,” he said.

Implementation Process

VicUrban worked with Oracle Certified Advantage Partners ASG Group and Red Rock Consulting, both proven integrators in the marketplace, to deploy and integrate Oracle Financials, Oracle CRM On Demand, Oracle BPEL Process Manager, and Oracle Business Intelligence.

“We chose them because of their strengths in project management methodology and their experience in designing information systems using Oracle technology,” said Sangster. “For example, ASG developed a land sales and settlement module to generate and record sales contracts and process sales revenue. Red Rock integrated our Web site and call center to Oracle CRM On Demand using Oracle BPEL Process Manager.”

VicUrban’s Financial System Project was delivered in three phases:

- Phase 1: February 2005 to May 2005—solution design and implementation planning
- Phase 2: June 2005 to July 2005—provision of consolidation functionality
- Phase 3: August 2005 to August 2006—implementation of the finance system.

The project encompassed the development of detailed business requirements and mapping of those to Oracle functionality.

VicUrban upgraded its Oracle environment from Oracle E-Business Suite 11.5.4 to 11.5.10 and standardized on Oracle Database 10g. This process entailed detailed system configuration work and user acceptance testing. With the upgrade finalized, VicUrban migrated data from the legacy Great Plains systems into Oracle, thus creating its single financial management system.

VicUrban and its implementation partners also worked on standardizing and streamlining the business processes of the two legacy organizations, as well as combining their respective finance teams. The Oracle finance system went live in August 2006.

After a 12-week deployment phase, VicUrban went live on the Oracle CRM system in September 2007. Around 20% of the agency’s 200 staff use the system on a daily basis.

Established in 2003, VicUrban is the Victorian State Government’s sustainable development agency. The agency works in partnership with the public and private sectors to encourage the development of prosperous and successful communities across the state. VicUrban is one of Victoria’s largest land developers with a diverse portfolio of projects, including Melbourne Docklands.