



Service giant gains new control over project performance, thanks to immediacy of Actuate e.Spreadsheets

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— *Derek Fontinelle, Senior Analyst Programmer, Atkins*

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- > **COMPANY PROFILE**
Multinational engineering and design consultancy
- > **INDUSTRY**
Professional Services
- > **LOCATIONS**
130 offices in UK; 200 worldwide
- > **CHALLENGE**
 - Automate, substantially speed up project performance reporting to finance and project managers
 - Improve productivity, profitability and customer service
 - Reduce IS monthly burden
- > **SOLUTION**
Actuate e.Report, e.Spreadsheets
- > **BENEFITS**
 - Better analysis and understanding of results
 - Less manual work for senior finance staff
 - Quicker month-end close
 - Much simpler report process
 - Anomalies identified and addressed sooner

About Atkins

Atkins is a multinational engineering and design consultancy, providing expertise to help resolve complex challenges. The firm delivers total solutions for public and private sector clients in a number of key markets. These might include the concept for a new skyscraper, the upgrade of a rail network, the modelling of a flood defense system or the improvement of a management process.

The group is based in 130 offices throughout the UK, with a further 70 offices providing consultancy services in continental Europe, the Middle East, Asia Pacific and the Americas. The business has an annual revenue of \$3.2 billion and more than 16,800 professional staff.

Driving project performance

Running a tight ship, producing accurate, efficient work for clients, and keeping them well informed throughout the lifecycle of a project are among Atkins’ chief priorities as a professional services firm with a global reputation for excellence. This is particularly the case as the services market becomes increasingly competitive, driving up client expectations.

Maintaining a close eye on the performance of projects is critical to ensuring that clients’ expectations are met and surpassed, while at the same time making sure that budgets are not exceeded, and that the business is profitable for Atkins.

This means providing key managers with ready, regular access to critical business information, which is up to the minute and in a format that’s easy to digest, aiding decision-making and averting problems before they set in.

Performance monitoring

To this end, Atkins invested in Actuate e.Report around four years ago, which Atkins' central IT team in the UK uses to provide reliable, timely, professional-looking reports for internal and external use. As well as making the business more efficient and responsive, this has enabled Atkins to add new value for its clients, keeping them up to date with the status of particular projects.

These reports can be accessed via the web. "This was one of the features that was particularly attractive to us when we bought the software," notes Derek Fontinelle, senior analyst programmer within Atkins' UK IS organization. "Giving clients easy access to reports that monitor the performance of their contracts does wonders for client satisfaction," he says.

Internally, reporting services are provided on a hosted basis to the Atkins business community, charged out based on each business division's reporting demands.

Project reporting

To derive even more value from its investment in Actuate, in 2007 Atkins expanded its capabilities to include Actuate e.Spreadsheets, to collapse the timeframes involved in pushing out end-of-month project summary reports to finance and project managers. This was driven by demand from the business, as part of a five-year strategy to enhance project performance.

Previously, there were so many stages involved in getting the required financial information to project managers that it could be mid way through the new month before the teams had complete visibility of their performance the previous month.

Dubbed Project Premier, the new initiative has sought to enhance profit recording, and speed up the delivery of accurate, complete management information relating to individual projects. Specific objectives included:

- *Improving the entry of Project Summary Report (PSR) re-forecasts*
- *Tidying up profit recognition and associated month-end processes to make these faster, more secure and more robust*
- *Making project and enquiry information available in a data warehouse accessible from the portal environment*
- *Developing a suite of standard reports, exception reports and tools to produce ad-hoc intelligence reports, including electronic methods of distribution, and*
- *Creating a platform for future potential improvement*

Automation speeds up delivery

Before deploying e.Spreadsheets, the process of getting month-end performance figures to finance managers and project managers involved extracting data from an Oracle JDE database to an MS Access database; processing data in MS Access and exporting this to a text file; importing the text file into MS Excel and processing again; distributing locked spreadsheets to senior finance staff; and, finally, senior finance staff running macros in spreadsheets and distributing PSRs to the various project managers.

This long-winded process created multiple potential points of failure, and was deemed altogether too complicated. A further limitation was the 2GB file size limit on an MS Excel file.

Atkins UK IS wanted a solution that would enable the easy creation and distribution of Excel reports, replacing the old architecture, and providing better all-round support while allowing for future enhancements. Yet, at the same time, the IS organisation was keen to protect all that the end users liked about the

old process, particularly the appearance of the reports and the rich Excel output. Rather, it wanted to improve upon this, by making the reports more readily available to those that needed them, via secure Internet access and a common interface (a single login into one system).

Actuate e.Spreadsheet was the obvious solution. "We already had extensive experience of Actuate of using e.Report, which we've been extremely happy with," says Derek. "We didn't feel the need to go back out to market to try other solutions. The infrastructure was already in place and used in three business units."

Web access

The new system went live in April 2007, rolled out to 2,500 users, and has exceeded Atkins' expectations, Fontinelle says. "e.Spreadsheet is a very configurable web-based solution which delivers the right information in a full Excel experience," he notes.

To facilitate easy access to the latest reports, Atkins UK IS has now set up a dedicated site on its group portal, as the entry point into the system. "This site included key training and communication for the relevant user community, and assisted in the final roll-out," Fontinelle explains.

Now, finance managers and project team leaders benefit from a simpler, faster report process. In fact, the IS team can run e.Report overnight to pre-generate the majority of e.Spreadsheet reports. The process creates far less manual work for senior finance staff, too, who previously were responsible for feeding report summaries out to individual project managers.

Greater responsiveness

"Previously, getting the project summaries took up to four days just to get information to the finance people," Fontinelle explains. "It could be two weeks before the relevant information was fed to the individual project managers – half way through the new month! Actuate e.Spreadsheet has helped us shave at least four days off that process, while freeing up finance managers' time."

Most importantly, a faster month-end close and earlier access to management accounts means Atkins project teams are now better informed and can take proactive, pre-emptive action if performance is going off course or profitability is being eroded through poor cost management.

Reliance on temporary and vulnerable workarounds is now a thing of the past, too. Automated report and PSR distribution means that anomalies are identified and addressed sooner, while managers now benefit from better analysis and understanding of the results.

Better intelligence, better service - and bigger profits

"Easier access to high-level project data is available now, too," Fontinelle adds. "All of this adds up to better intelligence reports: managers can now quickly delve into bid activity, revenue by client, early warning of provisions, and so on, making the business much more responsive and efficient."

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Atkins' vision doesn't stop there, either. In addition to plans to move the application onto a more up to date and robust server, and an Actuate clustered environment which will optimize the systems' robustness (such is the critical nature of the e.Spreadsheet application to the business), Atkins UK IS will be looking at ways it can extend the benefits of the software to the business's client base, to further enhance the customer experience.

About Actuate

Actuate Corporation is dedicated to increasing the richness, interactivity and effectiveness of enterprise data, for everyone, everywhere. Actuate delivers the next generation RIA-ready information platform for both customer and employee-facing applications. The Actuate platform boasts unmatched scalability, high-performance, reliability and security. Its proven RIA capabilities and highly collaborative development architecture are backed by the world's largest open source information application developer community, grounded in BIRT, the Eclipse Foundations only top level Business Intelligence and reporting project.

Global 9000 organizations use Actuate to roll out RIA-enabled customer loyalty and Performance Management applications that improve customer satisfaction and employee productivity. The company has over 4,200 customers globally in a diverse range of business areas including financial services and the public sector, many of which have a long history of deploying Actuate-based solutions for dozens, or even hundreds of their mission-critical applications. Founded in 1993, Actuate has headquarters in San Mateo, California, with offices worldwide. Actuate is listed on NASDAQ under the symbol ACTU. For more information on Actuate, visit the company's web site at www.actuate.com.