

Norwich Union: consolidating RACF security databases for the whole 'Life' business

Goals of the consolidation project

- To consolidate Norwich Union's four RACF security databases.
- To develop a single, cohesive RACF security database for the entire 'Life' business.
- To resolve conflicts and duplications arising from the consolidation.
- To improve the quality of data - and thus the quality of service offered to customers.
- To optimise database security.

Executive Summary

Norwich Union is the UK brand of the international Aviva group, and was formed by the merger of CGU and Norwich Union in 2000, following the merger of Commercial Union and General Accident in 1998. Its 'Life' division offers life insurance, mortgage cover, critical illness cover and income protection.

The way that the company had been formed meant that Norwich Union was running several different security databases on its z/OS mainframe, making maintenance cumbersome and time-consuming and posing a potential threat to the company's commitment to high levels of customer service.

As part of its mainframe strategic vision, the company wanted to merge these databases and create a single security database using IBM Security Server to control access to its z/OS mainframe. Part of IBM's z/OS Security Server solution, RACF (Resource Access Control Facility), ensures that only authorised employees and agents can access important company data such as customer information through a secure logon process.

After a thorough investigation and the development of a detailed work plan for the project, Norwich Union identified that it needed short-term access to highly experienced technical programming and security analysis skills to support the in-house team.

Business drivers

Following a period of multiple mergers and acquisitions, Norwich Union had been left with four different RACF security databases, potentially posing a threat to data security and to the level of service offered to customers - all now served under the Norwich Union brand. The company therefore identified that it needed to merge these four separate RACF security databases as part of a move to develop a single security server system for its z/OS operating environment.

The consolidation project was designed to contribute towards Norwich Union's service support, operational business and finance plans which encourage cost centres within the business to recommend and implement cost reductions. Norwich Union has identified a number of new business initiatives - several of which demand a robust, single RACF security database and the migration of major applications into data sharing environments. The project is also designed to improve security and resilience of the network by simplifying its RACF security administration procedures.

And, as Jamie Pease, IT Security Services Manager for Norwich Union Central Service explained, "Ultimately, implementing these solutions will mean a reduction in complexity and cost savings".

Technical objectives

Norwich Union's consolidation project has been designed to merge its four disparate RACF security databases into a single Sysplex-capable unit to enable it to develop its Sysplex capabilities further for the future. The security server currently operates in a z/OS 1.4 environment, which will be upgraded to z/OS 1.6 as part of overall IT improvements.

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In parallel, the company is also consolidating the two networks that had belonged to the Norwich Union and CGU prior to the mergers and the accompanying session managers as part of the overall consolidation programme.

Sourcing the right skills

Norwich Union put out a tender to source consultants with a broad understanding of all IT disciplines and a specific understanding of security management and who also had experience in programming at least one of its desired languages - Assembler, REXX and SAS - to an advanced level. Norwich Union also specified that it needed the consultant to have RACF systems programming experience at an advanced level.

In addition to technical experience and skills, Norwich Union had a clear idea of the type of personal skills that it needed the candidates to bring if they were to fit in with the IT security team, namely:

- Strong decision-making abilities
- To be able to work well in a team
- To have effective communication skills
- To be able to manage relationships well
- To recommend and implement change

B & M was one of two potential suppliers considered and won the contract because, according to Jamie Pease, "It has access to such a large network of contractors with the combination of z/OS and RACF skills and found the resource we needed extremely quickly. They have also added value by keeping in touch on a regular basis."

The solution

After speaking to a number of suitable candidates proposed by B & M, Norwich Union now has a team of systems and security specialists supplied by B & M who are working on the project. The specialists selected offered Norwich Union the knowledge and skills gained in working in a wide range of architectures and products - notably Sysplex and RACF, as well as expertise in the programming languages required for the project.

Achieving results: on time and on budget

The RACF consolidation project is on schedule for completion by end of the first quarter of 2006, and is, according to Jamie Pease, to schedule and on budget. By autumn 2005, some sections of the security servers had been brought inline, with mission-critical classes now synchronised across the RACF databases. In summing up the benefits delivered by the team of contractors provided by B & M, Jamie commented, "They brought a wealth of experience in z/OS and RACF Security Services and brought with them lessons learned from exposure to other large z/OS shops and experience from these other sites".

About Norwich Union

Norwich Union is an Aviva company. Aviva is the world's sixth largest insurance group and the biggest in the UK. It is one of the leading providers of life and pensions products in Europe and has substantial businesses elsewhere around the world. Its main activities are long-term savings, fund management and general insurance. It has premium income and investment sales of £33 billion and has £291 billion assets under management. The group has 60,000 employees serving 30 million customers worldwide. For more information about Norwich Union, please visit www.norwichunion.com



About B & M

B & M has specialised in matching customers' needs and specialists' skills since 1992. We focus exclusively on providing consultancy and technical support for z/OS and Unix environments, including third-party systems software, open systems and networking connectivity. We add real value for HR and IT professionals by taking the time to understand their needs and applying best practice methods to deliver results.

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