Xtract IS

Knauf banks on data integration with Xtract IS

„With Xtract IS we can now reliably plan data retrieval through direct access to SAP information."

Ralph Hahn, project manager at Knauf Information Services GmbH

Company

As an internal service provider, Knauf Information Services GmbH is responsible for IT and telecommunication issues within the Knauf group of companies. One of their core tasks is the reliable generation and provision of data from the various systems to the end user.

Challenges

The Business Intelligence Suite DeltaMaster by Bissantz is used in sales by one of the subsidiaries. The data required for the analyses and reports had previously been extracted per SAP BW from the SAP Business Suite as comma-separated CSV data, written to an AS/400 data disk and further processed in SQL Server Integration Services.

"The process had not proved to be successful in practice, as it was too unreliable,"

explains Ralph Hahn, project manager at Knauf Information Services GmbH. "The data output in SAP BW did not always work, meaning that the data we used were not always up-to-date. That also falsified the results of the analyses. There were also problems with the connection to the AS/400 drive, which was interrupted at times. As a result, the ongoing job had to be restarted from the beginning, which in turn cost time."

For analyses and reports specific to controlling, data from the SAP ERP module CO-PA were loaded, processed in the MS SQL Server and then visualized via the SAP BO frontend. Extraction of the data through direct access to the underlaid DB2 database proved to be out of the question from an administrative viewpoint alone.

Solution

As a result alternative tools for data extraction from SAP were sought. Due to the very good price/performance ratio compared to other solutions, the decision was made in favor of Xtract IS from Theobald Software GmbH. The Component Suite offers a total of nine different extraction components for improving the performant modeling of data flow between SAP ERP systems or respectively SAP BW systems and the SQL Server Integration Services.

Overview of solutions

Company

Knauf Information Services GmbH, founded in 2001, is the central IT service provider within the Knauf group of companies, one of the leading brands in the building material industry. Approximately 115 employees at the company headquarters in Iphofen, Germany, provide services in the areas of consultation, organization, IT and telecommunication for subsidiary companies at over 100 Knauf sites worldwide. Moreover, their range of tasks includes the operation of SAP and non-SAP systems as well as the corresponding development activities.

Challenges

Parallel use of SAP BW, SAP ERP, MS SQL Server and Bissantz DeltaMaster as well as SAP BO as frontends.
No suitable SAP tool to connect the systems.
Unreliable and error-prone extraction process between SAP, SAP BW and SSIS.

Solution

SAP-interface Xtract IS with the Table, BAPI and DeltaQ components for the integration of SAP BW, SAP ERP (CO-PA) and MS SQL Server.

Advantages

- Direct access to SAP data
- Secure workflow planning
- Reliable analyses on the basis of up-to-date data

Data source

SAP BW, SAP ERP (CO-PA)

Time to Value
Implementation
including customiza-
tion of the database
within a few weeks

Implementation & Advantages

Knauf first started with the Xtract IS Table component that makes it possible to extract mass data directly from SAP tables. To avoid runtime problems, it was first necessary to carry out specific customizations to the Table component. Here Theobald Software not only showed impressive technological skills, but also impressive service. "Our individual customization requests were directly incorporated and professionally implemented," confirms Hahn. "We were also very impressed with their high level of willingness towards continuous product development, which also proved that we had found the right product for growing future requirements." Any concerns about safety in relation to direct data access to SAP ERP were able to be cleared up by means of access control developed by Knauf in SAP that prevents the loading of non-authorized information. Over time more and more requirements for the extraction options were added, such as access to BAPIs: The external sales force enters orders into the MS SQL Server and from there they are created in SAP ERP. The actual status of the respective orders must then, in turn, be made availa-ble to the external sales force. Due to their positive experience with the basic version of Xtract IS, Knauf made the decision to introduce other components of the product suite: With the Xtract IS BAPI component, BAPIs or RFC function modules can be called up directly from the SSIS data flow. This allows the component to be used as a source, transformation or target. As a change was made within the IT strategy requiring that no direct access to SAP ERP was to be allo-wed to take place for analyses and reporting requirements, the data had to first be extracted in SAP BW and from there transferred to MS SQL Ser-ver, where subsystems such as Delta-Master could then access it. This type of architecture is most often used by small and medium-sized enterpri-ses for reasons of data security and load sharing. The basic idea is to use SAP BW as the enterprise data warehouse, while the MS SQL Ser-ver serves purely as a data mart that then is served by the data warehouse. SAP does not offer its customers any suitable tool for the transfer of data from the SAP BW to the MS SQL Server. Xtract IS was also able to offer a solution for this application: With the help of the DeltaQ compo-nent, the Extractor API in SAP ERP can be addressed and therefore make use of the functionality with which BW systems also secure their data supply from the production system. The result is real transaction-secure delta transfer of data. No installation in SAP is required. All business content is available immediately and no application-specific knowledge (e.g. about the tables' structure) is required. "We started off with the Table component and with Xtract IS BAPI and the DeltaQ version, which has been customized to our requirements, we now already use three components – this is clear proof of the quality of the solution suite," Hahn concluded.

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"Previously the data were not available or they were faulty. Today we can now deliver information fast and reliably."

Ralph Hahn, project manager at Knauf Information Services GmbH

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