MKS

RWE Reduces Implementation Time by 80% Using MKS Integrity

"Since the implementation of MKS Integrity, we have experienced near-perfect release management of changes to mission critical business applications, which has resulted in increased efficiency of our internal resources, improved productivity and delivered cost savings"

Jim Relton, RWE IT UK

Company Overview

RWE npower is an integrated energy business, generating electricity and supplying gas, and related services to customers across the UK. RWE npower operates and manages flexible, low-cost coal, oil and gas-fired power stations - generating over 10.3 GW of electricity. RWE npower serves around 6.9 million customer accounts and produces more than 10% of the electricity used in England and Wales. In 2007, the company turnover was £5.9 billion.

The Challenge

RWE npower's success is highly dependent on the quality of delivery, both in terms of their power products and the front-line service interactions with customers through their online billing portal and customer care centres. RWE npower's IT team, RWE IT UK, consists of more than 1,000 people, who have the responsibility for the ongoing support and maintenance of RWE npower's IT hardware and software infrastructure.

Amongst the supported systems are the mission critical residential billing applications, including the company's online billing Web site which, coupled with their residential contact centres, handles more than 12 million calls annually, 14,000 daily bill payments and is the interface for enquiries on new products and services. At the heart of their customer service operations is RWE npower's Customer Integrated Billing (CIB) Suite, supporting online account enquiries, residential contact centres call intake, as well as bill generation and payment services. In recent years, RWE IT UK has invested in technologies to streamline and improve their application development lifecycle, but their CIB application release management process remained completely manual, dependant upon a limited set of individuals to deliver these changes during the day and outside of normal working hours. Binary deployment rules were mainly undocumented, leading to an inconsistent execution of the release management process and the potential of implementation failures.

Recognizing the benefi ts of using MKS Integrity as an automated release management solution, RWE IT UK set its sights on bringing enforced process repeatability to deliver greater predictability and confidence to this critical area of the application development lifecycle.

Case Study

RWE npower

The Solution

RWE IT UK initially set out to deploy application releases within a half-hour window when the customer applications were closed, but prior to the start of processing. MKS Integrity was chosen as the platform to manage the release of new and updated application code binaries because of its automated capability to accurately and very rapidly deliver application changes to a widely dispersed network of servers, and across all platforms; Windows, Unix and Mainframe.

Since the initial project began in February 2008 and with the confidence in the MKS Integrity release management capabilities, RWE IT UK was able to automate and enforce repeatable processes and rules relating to the scheduling of application releases. Customer facing applications are now updated to a defined set of rules which has facilitated the 30 minute release window to be removed and benefit the overnight batch run.

Should any error occur during the release process, MKS Integrity's advanced restore feature provides peace of mind that the previous functionality can be restored instantaneously while the issues are resolved. Autonomous rollback capabilities guarantee the transactional release and also prevent partial or incomplete deployments from being released.

With the success of the initial project, RWE IT UK is now considering an expansion of the MKS Integrity platform to support other applications throughout their organization. The implementation at RWE IT UK consists of the MKS Integrity Server repository which is running on an Oracle 10g Database. This repository is responsible for the secure storage and baselining of all binary artefacts that make up a given application release.

A release request lifecycle was defined (Figure 1) and implemented in MKS Integrity's drag and drop workflow engine, allowing for approvals by release management staff before the release actions are undertaken. Groups of release requests can be selected and deployed together in a batch, optimising the efficiency of releases. Rollback and restore options have also been configured for both individual and batched deployments, ensuring complete coordination of changes.

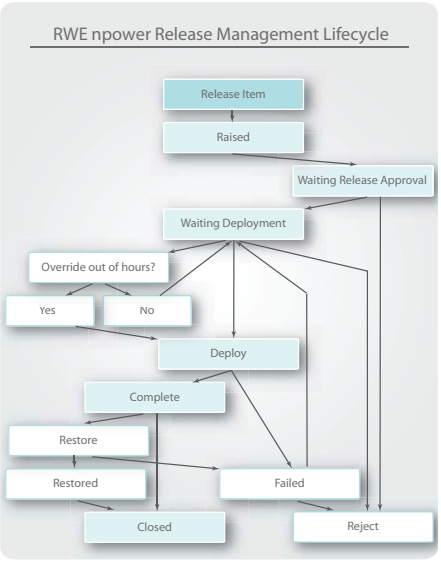

Figure 1

The Results

Overall, this solution enables RWE IT UK to automate the transition of built application components from the application development stage to the application delivery stage. The solution's architecture is implemented through an automated workflow-driven process which takes the application components under configuration management control, transferring them to the MKS Integrity Server repository where MKS Integrity takes responsibility for storing and baselining the components.

Each component is linked directly to an appropriate release management request item, with full history and traceability for auditing purposes. Once an approval is received electronically through the MKS Integrity digital signature capabilities, the release request initiates the deployment process, transferring the components to the defined target staging server where the MKS Integrity Release Agent software has been installed.

The MKS Integrity Release Agent (Figure 2) ensures successful delivery of the components and handles any restore and rollback operations as needed. Email notifications are configured to ensure that successes or failures are communicated to the appropriate individuals across the IT organization.

With MKS Integrity, RWE IT UK has achieved significant technical and business benefits which have been seen throughout the organization, including:

> The release management process now only takes 20% of the time of previous manual processes. For example, for what would have been a very complex release, MKS Integrity batched 71 binaries into the target production servers within just 15 minutes; a task which would have previously taken approximately 2 hours to achieve and validate manually.

> MKS Integrity has allowed RWE IT UK to capture years of staff knowledge and experience into the workflow-driven process engine. As a result, RWE IT UK has been able to eliminate the dependency on limited resources and to use these freed resources to focus on other tasks and projects.

> RWE IT UK has realized a daily saving of 2 hours per day within their System Administration team on supporting code implementation tasks.

> The introduction of MKS Integrity has removed the risks associated with documentation mistakes where file names or locations were incorrect. An added confidence throughout the organization in the integrity of releases now exists. The release management work can now be performed by an appropriate allocation of resources.

> The release into MKS Integrity is linked with current automated promotion processes to extend the level of automation in the end-to-end lifecycle.

> A consistent delivery and management reporting structure has been achieved.

> Full traceability and auditability of the entire release and deployment process have improved IT governance and security.

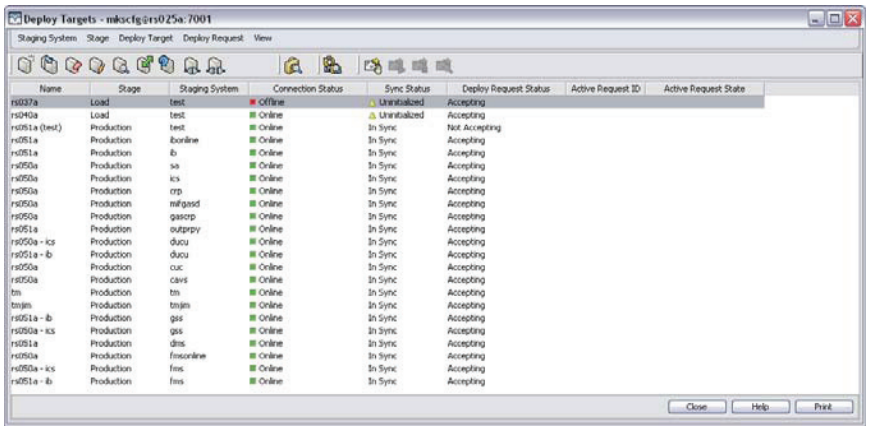

Figure 2

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