



# SONY PICTURES

Streamlining Production Operations with BEA WebLogic Portal

# ENTERTAINMENT

## HIGHLIGHTS

### SOLUTION:

Process Portal

### PRODUCT:

BEA WebLogic Portal™ 8.1,  
BEA WebLogic Workshop™ 8.1

### INDUSTRY:

Communications/Media

## PROBLEM

The movie production process was often cumbersome and overly manual. Staff on-location lacked access to most systems; corporate personnel had to re-key data and manually track changes to documents.

## SOLUTION

SPE launched Production Portal, a dashboard that consolidates and launches a set of Web-enabled applications using the Internet. It provides key production executives with production-related applications, customizable information, data and search functions, and entree to other Sony systems.

## RESULTS

The Production Portal on the BEA platform has driven substantial savings of executives' time, increased accuracy of production budget items, and more timely availability of budget data with which to make production decisions. On-location staff members now have online tools to facilitate their tasks and communicate efficiently with the studio.

## CUSTOMER BRIEF

Sony Pictures Entertainment is a leading creator and distributor of entertainment products, services and technology. Global operations include motion picture production and distribution, operation of studio facilities, television programming and syndication, home video acquisition and distribution, development of new entertainment technologies, and distribution of filmed entertainment.

## BUSINESS PROCESS CHALLENGES

Sony Pictures Entertainment (SPE) produces more than a dozen major movies every year. The majority of the production crew—from the director and actors, to the film technicians, staging crew, and caterers—are not Sony employees. They play a critical role in producing the movie on-time and on-budget, however. The production staff must file regular reports of expense variances for cost management purposes. They must regularly refer to and comply with the Production Manual, a 300+ page, frequently-changing collection of forms and contracts, required procedures, details of casting, scheduling, product placement, budgeting, even parking procedures. And they need to be able to contact SPE personnel for any number of reasons. Since the production staffs are located remotely from corporate facilities and because most are not SPE employees, they have limited access to the corporate IT network and business systems.

“Low tech” was an apt description for the performance of many typical motion picture

production activities. The budget reporting process, for example, was a prime candidate for streamlining and automation. Budget updates were prepared on location, and then faxed to Corporate, where the data was re-keyed into the accounting system.

The Production Manual update and distribution process was another highly visible area that needed revamping. The manual had always been printed, copied, and assembled in 3-ring binders. Every time SPE made a change to any page, someone had to communicate that change to everyone who had a binder. They made some notifications by email, others by fax, postal mail, or intra-company delivery; this notification process was quite prone to errors. It was a challenge to keep track of which people needed to be reached, which people had been reached, and the recipient had the challenge to acknowledge and take action on the change. As a result, at any given time, multiple versions of the Production Manual were in use. This was risky, as incorrect forms or out-of-date contracts could cause delays and introduce legal liability issues.

#### SOLUTION

SPE stepped up to deploy portal technology to streamline and simplify production operations. In November 2003, they launched Production Portal, a Web-based solution that enables production staff to be more efficient, responsive, and adaptable in the fast-paced motion picture production environment. SPE deployed an additional significant release in April 2004.

Production Portal is deployed on BEA WebLogic Portal 8.1. It provides authorized personnel with con-

solidated online access to industry news and information, and a set of production-related applications. It offers users a customizable portal with personalized content, links into applications, access to data and search functions, and entree to other Sony systems.

In Production Portal, there is a portlet to the online Production Manual. Corporate personnel can make changes to its content electronically. So the current version is always available, obviating the need for notification and distribution, as well as the need for moving, storing, and safeguarding the bulky binders.

Another application, one that the motion pictures production team refers to as a “killer app,” is Variance Entry. Accountants use this application while out on a production set to update and submit expense data and variances from the approved budget. Before Production Portal, location accountants created and maintained spreadsheets to track production expenses. After emailing or faxing these spreadsheets back to production executives for review, the executive had to re-type the spreadsheet entries by hand into the accounting system. Not only was this susceptible to keying mistakes, it was not the best use of executives’ time.

Production Portal has a portlet for the Variance Entry function. Location accountants use an online form, complete with dropdown choice boxes to properly categorize expenses. They submit the completed variance form electronically to the appropriate executive, who then approves or rejects the variances. This application alone has resulted in substantial cost savings. Production executives no longer have to re-key data; the accountant’s entries pass directly through the application. Management can view the budget status on their productions in real-time and make timely management decisions based on that data. The reporting and approval process for budget variances is now automated and documented, creating an audit trail. And production staff can share timely and accurate financial results with senior SPE executives.

SPE took an innovative approach to the design and deployment of Production Portal. The Studio Systems Group (SSG), which provides IT services to the Motion

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*“We’re excited about the results that our BEA WebLogic Portal projects are giving not only our line of business customers, but also our Sony Pictures IT community as a whole.”*

*Frank Sinton, Executive Director, Enterprise Architecture Services, Sony Pictures Entertainment*

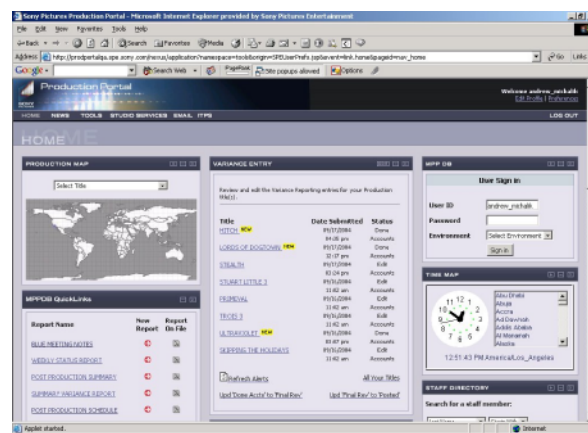
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Pictures line of business at Sony, and the Enterprise Architecture Services (EAS) group, a centralized IT services group at SPE, teamed up to design and deploy the business-specific solution on a new Sony-specific portal foundation. SSG accommodated the specific business process requirements of motion picture production, and built the new portal using EAS' gallery of reusable portlets and application integration components. This portal foundation, built on BEA WebLogic Portal, also sets up future SPE portal development project teams to reap the benefits of faster development time and reduced testing time, just as SSG did.

"We knew EAS was on to something," said Marc McNeil, director of the Studio Systems Group. "The Sony portal foundation gives business-side IT teams like ours a great head start and enabled us to accomplish big things with a very small team."

Frank Sinton, executive director of Enterprise Architecture Services, explained that EAS wanted to share this technology and his team's experience with their SPE IT colleagues so they could focus on business requirements and processes, a place where they really add value. "The Sony portal foundation allows the LOBs to focus on business challenges rather than technical problems like complex integrations into internal applications. Using the portal foundation to create Production Portal saved SSG from re-doing work that's already been done, tested, and proven."

They used BEA WebLogic Workshop, a full-featured Java development environment that enables SPE developers to visually build and assemble the enterprise-scale portlets, applications, and Web services. "We are able to develop portal functionality very quickly with BEA WebLogic Workshop," said Lisa Grundy, technical project manager. "Members of our team became proficient with the tool almost immediately, substantially decreasing project development cost structure. It is intuitive and fits neatly within the set of Best Practices that SPE IT teams follow to ensure enterprise-class development and high developer productivity."



Production Portal Home Page

Some of the elements in Production Portal are:

- > Secure login window to the Motion Pictures production database
- > Lotus Notes email and calendar
- > Accounting and weekly status reports
- > Visual map showing production locations and dates for in-progress productions
- > Time Zone, a clock showing the current local time in any chosen set location
- > SPE staff directory and InsideSPE intranet
- > Application for staff to order equipment
- > News feeds and customizable "MyLinks"

SPE has also designed its portal architecture and infrastructure to support a Service-Oriented Architecture (SOA). They envision future delivery of all functionality via modular services to maximize new business opportunities and provide a highly personalized user experience.

## RESULTS

Production Portal went live on BEA WebLogic Portal in November 2003. The entire project took the Production Application Systems team about five months. EAS had promised SSG that using the portal foundation to build Production Portal would be faster, result in higher quality deliverables, and be less costly than building a new portal from scratch. Andrew Michalik,



technical project manager, got exactly what he hoped for. "Not only did Sony Portal Foundation give us a head start, we simply couldn't have accomplished our goals if we had chosen to do it on our own. The foundation was already in place, and Production Portal took full advantage of that."

With Production Portal, the SPE motion picture production process is quicker, easier, and more accurate for production staff and executives alike. It gives them a single view and real-time visibility into production-related information and applications.

Production Portal has enabled substantial savings of production executives' time, increased accuracy of production budgets, and made available more timely budget data with which to make production decisions. On-location staff members now have more tools to facilitate their tasks and communicate efficiently with the studio. While specific quantification of reduced expenses is difficult to pinpoint, the sphere of influence is clear: with SPE producing a dozen-plus major movies per year, more than \$1 billion in "spend" transactions will go through Production Portal annually. Even a fractional percentage of savings is significant.

From the start, Greg Manson, senior executive vice president for SPE Production Finance, experienced firsthand dramatic time savings. Shortly after Production Portal went live, Greg called Lisa Grundy to thank her and share his experience. "With the Variance Entry application," he said, "I've already saved eight hours this week." He had already saved a full day, and the week wasn't over yet!

Beyond savings, there is also upside revenue potential, as Production Portal opens up incremental "rental" opportunities for Sony Pictures Studios. They now have a much greater ability to display and promote Studio assets and services; for example, stage rentals,

media and courier services, equipment, and other facilities. External users now have visibility through Production Portal into the breadth of Studio offerings and an easy way to order them for their production.

With the BEA WebLogic Workshop development environment in place, SPE discovered that providing personalized portal functionality to new groups of users is quick and easy. The television production accountants heard what the movie production accountants had gained with Production Portal, and they asked for their own portal. It took only one hour to administer, and less than a day to deploy the new television production site on BEA WebLogic Portal. They used the BEA WebLogic Portal administration tools to simply add a new group of users, add a new group portal associated with the new group of users, and add the relevant portlets. It took just three more hours to replicate the work in each environment: development, QA, staging, and finally, production. The project team marveled at its ability to serve internal customers so simply.

"One of the first and most obvious benefits we noticed was the ability to reuse code," said Sinton. "With a growing gallery of software components, each project becomes easier and faster than the last. Our IT community has been very impressed by the BEA platform."

#### ABOUT BEA

BEA Systems, Inc. (Nasdaq: BEAS) is a world leader in enterprise infrastructure software, helping enable companies to improve business responsiveness through Service-Oriented Architecture (SOA), a software design approach that more closely aligns IT with business objectives. With 15,000 customers worldwide including the majority of the Fortune Global 500, BEA and its WebLogic® and Tuxedo® brands are among the most trusted names in business technology. Headquartered in San Jose, Calif., BEA has 75 offices in 36 countries and is on the Web at [www.bea.com](http://www.bea.com).

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