



Rethink automation.

## UC4 Automates Exchange of Information at Lafarge

### The Company

Using its famous brand name of Blue Circle, Lafarge Cement UK, the UK cement operation of the Lafarge Group, the world's leading building materials group, is the largest cement producer in the UK. Employing approximately 1,500 staff--mostly located at its eight cement works across the UK--the company relies upon a 24x7 operation to produce over 6 million tons of cement for the domestic market annually.

### The Situation

Manufacturing and distributing such quantities of bulk and packed products in prime condition in a hostile/heavy-duty environment presents Lafarge Cement UK with some unique challenges. Works' machinery needs to operate at maximum efficiency around the clock. Customer orders require rapid turnaround. Products need to be delivered reliably and in good order.

Information technology supports Lafarge Cement UK in managing these key business processes. With the UC4 platform, Lafarge has been able to bridge many of the gaps between the enterprise applications that support their business operations.

An ex-IBM Mainframe user, Lafarge Cement was aware of the importance of scheduling jobs to manage back-ups and other housekeeping tasks. Something needed to be done to curb the lengthening periods back-ups were taking to complete. Steve Pollard, IT Technical Manager at Lafarge Cement UK takes up the story, "On the mainframe there weren't any cross platform issues. We now have around 100 servers running a mixture of HP-UX, Linux and Windows Server platforms. With distributed systems, you can provide greater flexibility and save on application, software and hardware costs but other issues arise. Your data is spread across applications running on servers with different operating systems and databases. Commands that work for one system won't necessarily work on another."



*"We run with disparate platforms on disparate servers. It's a complex environment that needed tying together. It would be very difficult to manage this environment without UC4."*

Steve Pollard,  
IT Technical Manager

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Lafarge UK

Business/Industry: Manufacturing

Main Office UK: Birmingham

Technical Environment: Oracle e-Business Suite

UC4 Customer: Since 2001

Webpage: [www.lafargecement.co.uk](http://www.lafargecement.co.uk)

# CASE STUDY

"We did what most companies do at first: write some application specific and platform dependent scripts. It wasn't long before we hit a lot of support and operational issues. The people that wrote these scripts--developers and DBAs--weren't always around to look at them when things went wrong. Too many assumptions in our schedule were time dependent. We got into problems if a job started before the previous job completed."

## The Challenge

At this time the company was implementing Oracle E-Business Suite to support its financial accounting processes. Lafarge realised that gaps within as well as between their applications needed to be bridged. The scope for an automated scheduler was extended to include support for integrating processes within the ERP. Pollard continues, "We decided we needed something that could not only help us with our back-up requirements but also allows us to take on some of the application and data integration issues we were starting to identify. Obviously it had to be cross platform and support dependencies as well as providing us with some monitoring capability. We were also keen to have a product that would work with our Oracle applications. We found a lot of tools that could schedule scripts to run across multiple platforms. However, when it came to batch integration with Oracle and other applications, the UC4 platform appeared to offer something unique."

## The Solution

Since implementing the UC4 platform to manage their back-ups, Lafarge has also been able to make more productive use of the overnight window to run more batch workload. "Building a data warehouse using operating system tools across multiple platforms was proving to be a nightmare. Our sales management team uses Cognos Finance for sales forecasting; obviously it's important that they are working with accurate information.

The UC4 platform also helps us to manage the way we build our OLAP cubes each night. We can set different procedures to run dependent upon whether we are compiling daily, weekly or monthly data," observes Pollard. The UC4 platform is also being used to automate the exchange of information between Oracle E-Business Suite and other business systems at Lafarge.

Producing cement places heavy demands on machinery and plant. Downtime, resulting from a machine breakdown, has an immediate impact on productivity. With the UC4 platform, Lafarge ensures that accounts payable records are updated to reflect plant components ordered by production and maintenance personnel using Maximo Procurement. Lafarge works' staff benefit from the assurance that suppliers will be paid as appropriate, while financial controllers can work with up-to-date inventory and financial information.

## UC4 Benefits

As the UK subsidiary of a multi-national group headquartered in Paris but also listed on the New York stock exchange, Lafarge Cement UK is required to comply with Sarbanes-Oxley (SOX) regulations. While compliant companies need to be capable of accounting for all batch processing, out-of-the-box tools fail to keep a log of batch activity. The UC4 platform maintains an electronic record of all job activity through an audit trail. Information can be retained for long periods ensuring that historical records are available for inspection. It is possible to clearly demonstrate that a job was run once and only once. Although not included in the initial remit for a scheduling solution, the UC4 platform is supporting Lafarge in meeting its SOX compliance objectives.

The UC4 platform has become an integral component of the IT infrastructure at Lafarge Cement UK. The product was initially brought in as an IT scheduler. It is increasingly being used as an integration technology. There are future plans for its continued use including controlling end-user submitted jobs. Pollard summarises, "We run with disparate platforms on disparate servers. It's a complex environment that needed tying together. It would be very difficult to manage this environment without the UC4 platform."