

Strategies for Effective Job Scheduler Consolidation

Strategies for overcoming obstacles to consolidation



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Executive Summary

Scheduling has become a major headache for IT. Applications have become increasingly complex, and they impact more critical aspects of the business every day. Many of these applications are connected through disparate and siloed schedulers that are scattered across the enterprise.

This current piecemeal approach to scheduling has become untenable. Fragmented tools and processes are translating into high costs, inefficiencies, lengthy mean time to repair (MTTR), and an inability to prioritize actions based on business impact.

The answer is consolidation. IT needs a single, unified scheduling solution that consolidates and streamlines enterprise workload scheduling and ensures that workloads run through to completion—consistently, reliably, and on time.

A comprehensive scheduling solution can increase efficiency and drive down costs. It can provide an enterprise-wide view

of scheduling to speed up root cause analysis and enable more effective management of service level agreements (SLAs). Furthermore, **when such a solution maps application components to business processes, it can provide the insight IT needs to prioritize actions based on business impact.**

Many IT organizations, however, hesitate to take on the consolidation effort. That's because the large number and disparate nature of schedulers combine to make consolidation a major undertaking that is fraught with obstacles.

BMC has worked with more than 2,000 customer organizations to help them consolidate multiple job definitions into a single enterprise workload scheduling solution. Through this experience, BMC has gained a solid understanding of the major obstacles blocking success. More importantly, we have learned from this experience how organizations can apply best practices and supporting technologies to overcome these obstacles and reap the rewards of enterprise workload scheduling.



MOVE FROM FRAGMENTATION TO CONSOLIDATION

Technology permeates virtually every aspect of the business environment in most industries. This pervasiveness is increasing complexity in the applications that support business processes. Most IT organizations must support numerous composite applications that comprise multiple components. Those components are scattered across the enterprise, and they include both transactional and batch components.

Application components are tied together through schedulers that sequence operations within the application. The schedulers vary widely in operation, functionality, and age. They range from in-house scripts and scheduling tools included with some applications to stand-alone scheduling solutions. Multiple schedulers require multiple licenses and a variety of teams and champions working separately, thus driving up costs.

Application components and their associated schedulers are typically siloed. This fragmentation results in gross inefficiencies and exposes the organization to risk. Each scheduler maintains the information it needs to schedule operations. In many cases, the schedulers have interdependences that require them to share information. Because the schedulers are often isolated from each other, however, information often has to be transferred manually. That's a time-consuming and error-prone process.

In addition, IT does not have an enterprise-wide view of schedulers. That makes troubleshooting problematic. IT needs to have a view that relates the schedulers to the business processes they support. With such a view, IT can prioritize scheduling-related tasks based on business impact.

By consolidating scheduling into a single enterprise solution, you can automate information transfer across application components to speed the process, eliminate errors, and reduce overall costs.

PLAN, PLAN, PLAN

As with any major project, you have to carefully plan the execution of your consolidation initiative. Keep in mind that the goal of consolidation is to move all schedulers to the single enterprise workload scheduling solution. Consolidation should be complete and not leave any gaps that could result in new silos.

That does not necessarily mean incorporating every function of every current scheduler. Rather, it means focusing on those functions that are being used. You do not need to perform all functions in exactly the same way that the current schedulers do. Instead, you may need to provide equivalent functionality. By involving business users in your planning, you can gain an understanding of what functions they use and what they need to accomplish through workload scheduling.

Above all, don't try to consolidate everything at once. Take it one step at a time. Look for ways to quickly demonstrate value that will justify additional steps. Start with internal users before expanding to applications that impact external customers. Make sure that each step is controlled and can be rolled back if problems arise. Most importantly, look for an enterprise workload scheduling solution that is robust enough to take on all the functions that you wish to have from your current schedulers.

Before you can develop an effective plan, you need to assess the current state of your requirements. That involves gathering information about scheduling needs. You need to find out how many workloads are implemented, which schedulers are associated with which workloads, how complex the schedulers are, and how heavily they are utilized. In performing the assessment, look at all scheduled work across the enterprise and determine what business processes are supported. Also search out ancillary applications that feed into and depend on current schedulers.

Some vendors provide professional services that can help you conduct your assessment. Some even provide assessment services free of charge. These services are typically based on processes and automated tools developed by the vendors. In many cases, vendors have discovered schedulers that were previously invisible to IT.

BMC provides conversion tools that will take your workloads that are designed to run on products from various vendors and consolidate them on the Control-M enterprise workload automation solution. You can use the tools that come with Control-M to simplify the process, as well as to reduce the need for, and in some cases even eliminate, consulting services to help with consolidation. Consulting services are more commonly brought in at the conversion phase.

ADDRESS THE FEAR FACTOR

One of the most common obstacles is fear. It's not uncommon for people to worry that if they move to a new implementation they will lose some of their current capabilities or data. You can allay these fears by assuring your staff that no needed functionality will be lost in the transition. You also need to assure IT staff that all their data will be migrated completely and accurately.

People also fear the unfamiliar. It's important, therefore, to offer instruction on the new implementation. In your initial training, focus on how to perform the features people are using in the current scheduler. Don't overwhelm them with the many additional features and advantages of the new implementation. You can educate them on additional capabilities later, when they are ready to absorb more information.

The situation is analogous to converting all smartphone users to the Apple iPhone. For example, you have to assure Blackberry and Android users that their calendars, contacts, and other data will be on the iPhone as soon as they make the switch. Moreover, in training, you would focus on the tasks people do most frequently on their current smartphone and show them how to perform those same tasks on the iPhone. Once they are comfortable with doing their everyday tasks, you can pitch the added capabilities of the iPhone, such as the touch screen and the thousands of useful apps.

WIN OVER THE STATUS QUO ADVOCATES

Many of the application components and associated schedulers are compartmentalized into different silos. Within each silo, there are business people consuming scheduling services and IT people supporting the schedulers. Both groups (users and IT) may have a narrower point of view regarding the application—a view that does not extend beyond their particular silo. They may not be interested in the benefits of standardization to the enterprise. Some may already be pushing for change due to problems with a vendor, for example. Many, however, may want to maintain the status quo. Here's the argument they typically pose: "If the particular application component we are using is doing what we need it to do, why change the scheduler?" Some people who want to maintain the status quo will actively resist the change.

How can you get everyone on board, including those business users and IT people who want change — and those who don't? By clearly conveying the value of consolidation. Be sure to communicate the benefits not only for the organization but also for these people personally.

In consolidating your schedulers, you create a tremendous amount of synergy by transforming previously fragmented scheduling silos into a single, holistic scheduling environment.

The value to the organization is significant. Through consolidation, IT increases the service quality of applications while driving down costs. Consolidation also permits the IT organization to align more closely with the business.

For application users, consolidation reduces the risk of outages and speeds MTTR. That means greater application availability.

For IT staff, enterprise workload scheduling automates many mundane, time-consuming, manual functions that characterize current schedulers. Consequently, it frees up time that IT people can now spend on more interesting, more strategic, and more career enhancing activities.

DON'T LOSE DATA IN THE MOVE

Just as a smartphone user needs all data moved to a new phone, business and IT people need all scheduler data migrated to the new enterprise workload scheduling solution. Migrating that data is not an easy task. Data is scattered across many different schedulers and is stored in a multitude of formats. First you have to find it and then you have to move it. That requires detailed knowledge of the current scheduler's logic and data format.

Doing this manually is not practical. Moreover, it introduces the risk of errors that could disrupt application operation. For example, a payroll application scheduler may contain calendar information that specifies when each employee receives a payroll check. Errors in converting and transferring this information would disrupt the delivery of employee paychecks.

It's important, therefore, to look for a solution that offers an automatic data conversion tool to help with your consolidation efforts. The right tool can automatically convert the vast majority of data accurately in minutes, leaving only a small portion of data to be converted manually.

Automatic conversion dramatically shrinks the time, effort, cost, and risk of moving data to the new scheduler. When evaluating automated tools, be sure that the tool is part of the product and doesn't require the participation of vendor consultants. A tool without these capabilities would drive up the cost and stretch the conversion time.

BUILD ON THE SYNERGY

In consolidating your schedulers, you create a tremendous amount of synergy by transforming previously fragmented scheduling silos into a single, holistic scheduling environment. This environment delivers significant benefits, including higher-quality service delivery, lower costs, and closer alignment with the business.

And that's not all. The unified scheduling environment provides a strong foundation for the future. For example, if your company merges with another, you can consolidate the merged company's schedulers into your enterprise-scheduling environment and extend the resulting benefits to the merged company's users. Even more important, you can leverage this foundation to facilitate the building of new applications that innovate and transform your business to give your company a strong competitive edge.

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