



Ready for Growth – BCU Financial Selects Open Solutions' ALM and Financial Planning System



Open Solutions' ancillary strategic solutions are among the most powerful tools available to the financial services industry and it's no surprise that a number of Canadian credit unions have selected some of these products to handle their financial accounting needs. One such institution is BCU Financial, a 25,000-member credit union based in North Battleford, Saskatchewan.

Business Challenge:

In response to recent growth and in anticipation of further expansion through a merger with two other credit unions, BCU Financial urgently needed to replace cumbersome budget spreadsheets with a more sophisticated, highly functional financial planning application. BCU Financial is a 25,000-member credit union based in North Battleford, Saskatchewan with \$550 million in administered assets. It serves its members through 13 branches. To adapt to the increasing complexity of budgeting across its current and future branches, BCU Financial required a flexible application that could handle diverse budget data.

Technology Solution:

BCU Financial selected Open Solutions' ALM & Financial Planning System from a short list of three potential solutions. The credit union's corporate accountant, Anita Simon explained the decision. "We knew immediately it would meet our needs," says Simon, whose main focus was – and remains – the budget planning aspect of the application. In addition to rich functionality, Simon cited ease-of-use and training as key selection criteria. She and her colleagues were also very impressed with the system's flexibility. "So many of the products we evaluated required that we make our data fit their system; Open Solutions adapted its system to accommodate our data," Simon noted. But the factor that won the selection team over, says Simon, was knowing they were dealing with people who were willing to give BCU Financial top-notch client care. "We truly felt Open Solutions would work with us and provide us with support and answers when we needed them," she says.

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Anita Simon,
Corporate Accountant
BCU Financial

BCU Financial purchased the product in October 2005 and implemented it in January 2006. The credit union's vice president for finance, Ron Inkster, controller Melanie Matweow and Simon went to Chicago for training and found it didn't take long to learn the system. It lived up to their expectation of "ease-of-use." Simon pointed out that during the three-month period between purchase and implementation, the credit union went through its fiscal year-end activities and mergers with two other credit unions. Data setup went smoothly and easily accommodated the addition of the two credit unions newly merged with BCU Financial.

Having gone through labour-intensive data mapping exercises in the past, Simon had some concerns about this aspect of the system at the outset. Her concerns proved to be unfounded. "It's very easy to map any new data on our banking system to the Financial Planning system – simply point and click," she says.

Results:

Working with Open Solutions' Financial Accounting Systems staff, the credit union is taking a phased approach to implementing budget planning, starting at the institution level, then adding branching at a later date. This has eased the transition for Simon and her colleagues, who were accustomed to institution-level budget planning when they used spreadsheets. Branching has added a whole new dimension to the budget planning process at BCU Financial. "I had never before had the ability to examine our numbers to this degree of granularity," she said, noting that it has provided her with new insights into branch dynamics and awareness of previously unseen trends at the branch level. She also has the ability to run "what-if scenarios" with her budget numbers, something that was extremely difficult to do when using spreadsheets. "I can calculate the impact of rate changes or new products on our balance sheet."

Simon has also noticed increased efficiency in reporting. In the past, she had to re-key data from the credit union's core system into various reports. Now the accounting group downloads information into the branches monthly and generates balance sheets and income statements, by both branch and consolidated. Simon expects to be able to run most reports directly from the Open Solutions product once the credit union starts using the program for full reporting purposes.

ALM & Financial Planning System has positioned BCU Financial for continued growth that will include yet another merger, expected in January 2007, with Swift Current-based Southwest Credit Union. This merger will result in an organisation roughly twice BCU Financial's current size. The good news is that the ALM & Financial Planning System has the flexibility to easily integrate budget data from all areas of the newly merged credit union.



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