



New Source of Power Provides Utility with Competitive Advantage

Case Study



Many CIOs are kept up at night wondering if their information technology systems will provide their companies with the competitive advantage needed in today's marketplace.

You might think this would be the case for Dwight Wilson, the CIO responsible for production and support systems at NB Power. Senior management rely on him to supply the company's 2500 employees, spread across 35 locations, with the tools necessary to keep the business up and running 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

There has never been a more critical time to remain fully operational. NB Power is taking quick steps to become more competitive in an increasingly deregulated North American energy market. Wilson knows any downtime—anywhere in the organization—will delay or impede the utility's plans.

Despite the tremendous responsibility placed on Wilson, the CIO has never lost sleep over it. Much of his peace of mind comes from his confidence in *xwave*, the utility's technology partner since 1994.

But Wilson possesses a relaxed demeanour as he discusses the complex topography of the utility's 2000 personal computers, 210 network printers, 100 servers, 154 network components, and multiple local area and wide area networks.

"Technology must play a fundamental role in our transition into a more competitive environment," says Wilson. "It needs to create value, allowing the company to be innovative in the pursuit of new opportunities, competitive in the conduct of operations and focussed on improving customer service."

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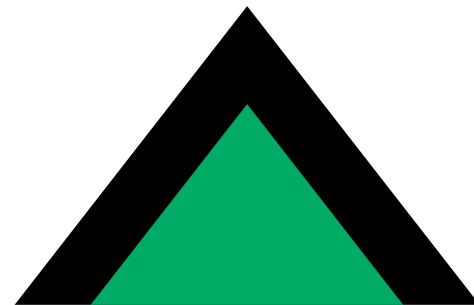
xwave assisted the Fredericton-based firm with its transition from a mainframe to a client/server environment. Wilson explains that NB Power sought out an IT partner because it did not have the in-house capabilities to develop or maintain this new environment nor the desire to increase staff to support the migration.


"We wanted a supplier who had the skills and resources to handle the complexities of the transition so that our staff could focus on developing solutions for our business units," says Wilson. "*xwave* fit the role perfectly. They allowed us to concentrate on moving the business forward."

The utility's ongoing relationship with *xwave* continues to derive similar benefits. However, as energy markets gradually deregulate, *xwave*'s role has expanded and elevated in importance. Today the IT firm has integrated significant resources into its NB Power engagement. It provides a wide range of services – 17 in all – including the staffing of its technical support centre. In total, *xwave* dedicates 30 full-time employees to the NB Power contract.

"NB Power wants to outsource any day-to-day technology needs that aren't core to its mission of enhancing customer service and preparing for competition," explains *xwave*'s Jeff McGuigan, Director of Client Service Management, "Like all of our engagements, our client's mission becomes our objective. That means being flexible to accommodate our clients' specific needs."

Take the IT infrastructure upgrade as an example. *xwave* combined existing onsite employees with additional team members to facilitate the upgrade. Among the many roles assigned to *xwave*, it created a new image for desktops that transitioned 2000 end-users from Windows 95 to Windows NT, and upgraded them from MS Office Pro to MS Office 97 Pro. The firm configured four major server sites consisting of multiple Compaq servers per site and provided 30 operational SAP servers.





The Xyplex-based frame relay switching network was also replaced by a Cisco fast Ethernet/ATM solution.

More than 50 people were involved in the upgrade that has now added significant new capabilities to the system according to Wilson. “The initiative ensures that as future business needs change every option will be available to NB Power to adapt to changes. There will be no constraints from a network perspective.”

While Wilson points out that xwave’s ability to support a multitude of IT services has been an important factor in the utility’s evolution, the firm’s overall contributions go well beyond the individual responsibilities that it manages. In other words, the sum is greater than its parts.

“The firm delivers value by providing strategic insight at the enterprise level,” says Wilson. “xwave acts much like a doctor who helps a patient minimize or avoid health risks by identifying potential problems before they arise.”

This preventative approach to systems management is exemplified through xwave’s role in the utility’s change management initiatives. The firm has a “seat at the table” when senior IT management discuss strategies that will support its leadership position in a more deregulated environment. “Proposed changes to the IT environment go through extensive planning, risk analysis and authorization procedures. Our role, in part, is to provide insight and information at each stage of the process to ensure the utility is maximizing its investments in technology by minimizing any pitfalls.”

A significant amount of the information provided by xwave comes from its day-to-day managing of NB Power’s systems. But intelligence gathered from the field goes well beyond performance reports. “Staff not only manage the IT systems and serve the immediate needs of NB Power’s employees,” explains McGuigan, “they examine how an incremental improvement in one area can provide benefits across the enterprise.”

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Dwight Wilson, CIO, NB Power



The CIO is impressed with how xwave staff integrate into the utility’s work environment and culture. In fact, internal research shows that NB Power employees are not able to distinguish between Wilson’s staff and xwave’s. Wilson believes this reflects a shared philosophy between both organizations. “NB Power embraces an ‘easy to do business with’ strategy,” explains Wilson. “Based on the way xwave relates with our organization and its employees, it’s evident that they do too.”

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xwave continues to seek ways in which to raise the bar in servicing NB Power. The firm is working closely with Wilson to evolve key metrics to measure its performance. One key initiative is a real-time data warehouse that will track 77 different facets of the engagement. "This service level agreement demonstrates our accountability to the client," says McGuigan. "But equally important, it will help identify ways in which we can enhance the overall performance of NB Power."

It's that kind of value added service that sets xwave apart from other IT firms. "Not only does xwave give us the resources we need to keep our business up and running, they provide expertise on how we can become a more competitive organization."

According to Wilson, that's a key source of power to fuel the utility's future success.

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