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iMeta's secure online mortgage solution reduces cost through improved business process efficiencies.

Northern Rock Online

# case study

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## Northern Rock

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Northern Rock wanted to equip their intermediaries with an online mortgage point of sale and tracking system that would simplify and speed up the mortgage approval process, reduce the need for paper based applications and increase customer satisfaction.

### Background

Northern Rock is listed in the FT-SE 100 index of leading companies and is the 8th largest UK quoted bank (by market capitalisation) and the largest financial institution based in the North East of England. Northern Rock is a specialised residential mortgage lending and savings bank, which aims to deliver superior value to customers and shareholders through excellent products, efficiency and growth. The company offers a wide portfolio of products to meet changing customer needs. Its lending policies are designed to maintain high and profitable growth, whilst retaining a low risk profile. This is evident in Northern Rock's demonstrable track record of high asset and profit growth.

### The Challenge

Northern Rock operates a diverse distribution network consisting of around 80 branches, which include traditional branches, specialist mortgage branches, postal, telephone and Internet operations. A large proportion of residential mortgage business is however, sourced through the UK financial intermediary market. In response to a number of business factors including growth, cost reduction, better service and the desire to provide an improved, more efficient proposition for intermediaries, Northern Rock decided to introduce a new application to better leverage its intermediary channel - 'Northern Rock Online' - the 'NRO' system.

### The iMeta Solution

To ensure optimum utilisation, the system had to be robust, efficient, and secure, offer high performance, and provide a first class user experience. Together with their IT partners - iMeta Technologies Ltd - Northern Rock designed an innovative solution:

Enabling intermediaries to submit business directly to Northern Rock.

The business rules underpinning the system allow intermediaries to follow their natural work patterns, i.e. the system does not force the user to follow a pre-defined process.

Fast turnaround for an online Decision in Principle (DIP) – potentially a matter of minutes.

A flexible platform that is scalable and extendable to allow roll out of new products.

Automatic upgrades are installed the next time the user (intermediary) logs onto the system, which contributes to seamless operation.

The design encourages maximum take-up of the application and to date, approaching 90% of Northern Rock's indirect mortgage applications are submitted through Northern Rock Online.

**“Because of its comprehensive feature-set, in-built efficiencies and user-friendly interface, the solution provided by iMeta delivers clear value to our intermediaries, which, ultimately filters through to our end customers.”**

Peter Atkinson  
Assistant Director  
Business Systems  
Development  
**Northern Rock.**



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The software client is a Microsoft .NET Smart Client app which allows the users to work offline – a prerequisite for the intermediary – fill out application forms, validate the quality of data entry, and track the progress of submitted cases.

A sophisticated security model protects the client's data. A web-based Administration portal allows Northern Rock to easily administer users, generate single-use passwords, and track auditing information.

The technologies employed to deliver this solution revolved around the .NET Windows Smart Client working over HTTPS connections, communicating with .NET SOAP Web Services. The main challenge lay in ensuring accurate and performance-oriented communication throughout all tiers of the architecture, but particularly with the clustered J2EE Application Servers and Oracle database server which in turn moved data to Northern Rock's core mortgage processing platform through MSMQ. The integrity of the data messages and the timely delivery and retrieval of those messages (some 5,000 per day) was and still is, paramount.

The initial project team size was 7 persons - 4 from iMeta and 3 from Northern Rock. This expanded in line with an increase in complexity and scope to an average of 20, not including senior management. The team was composed of a number of technical developers, several project managers, both technical and business-focused testers and several business analysts. Intra - team relationships and communication were key factors of success, especially in view of the geographical distance between the two parts of the teams. Northern Rock and iMeta worked hard at getting the processes right.

### The Results

The project went into a pilot release phase in May 2005 and then into full release in August 2005. There have subsequently been an additional 10 phased releases and more are planned. From a project execution perspective, NR got it right by adopting a phased approach, which limits 'errors' usually as a result of ambiguity or 'unknown facts' and allows reflection between phases.

The success of this system is highlighted by the fact that it is now Northern Rock's primary distribution channel for new business. The system enables Northern Rock to control costs and exchange high quality information in a timely manner, which ultimately benefits the consumer and its stakeholders including intermediaries, shareholders, and employees.

## Find Out More

Please visit [www.imeta.co.uk](http://www.imeta.co.uk) or contact us via the information below

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