

The Big Time: Barclays Global Investors' Worldwide IT Vision

BGI takes on the daunting challenge of a complete IT overhaul with the intent of streamlining its global platform.

BY CRAIG MCGUIRE

IT overhauls are fraught with risk: replacing a single system could run—on average—anywhere from a few weeks up to a few years. ■ Now imagine not only replacing a single legacy system, but ripping out just about every major application you run, piece by piece—and you'd know what it's like behind the scenes these days at buyside powerhouse Barclay's Global Investors (BGI).

Probably the largest institutional investor in the world, ranked in the top five on every list from managing Japanese tax-exempt funds to Dutch pension monies, BGI officials know they have to put the right IT in place the first time around. And with processing volumes that dwarf most firms ten-fold, you know you're in the big time now. Just the sheer magnitude of BGI's massive operations is daunting—1,500 employees in six countries managing in excess of \$600 billion in



BGI has 1,500 employees in six countries managing in excess of \$600 billion in assets. Shown here is a scene from BGI's San Francisco headquarters.

assets managed for over 1,500 clients in 29 countries. Having each BGI location doing its own IT thing up to this point hasn't really helped matters, especially when considering the far-flung diversity of the locations. Headquartered in San Francisco, BGI has offices in Sydney, Toronto, Tokyo, Amsterdam, and London.

"We've got investment management companies in six countries around the world," says James Creighton, BGI's global chief investment officer for the Indexing Group since 1997. "Each part of the global business was using different technology, so even though we were doing the same things—whether it's indexing or managing active portfolios—

we were operating in slightly different ways and that's definitely not where we wanted to be."

Realizing BGI's fragmented IT infrastructure was becoming a problem, officials drafted an enterprise-wide, multi-year project, which was launched last year and is slated for completion some time in late 2000—though some minor fund accounting components will be added throughout the next two years.

From portfolio management and accounting to trade systems, BGI is re-evaluating, ripping out and replacing almost all of its major applications—intent on shaping a uniform global platform resting upon an SQL server-based central database.

From its launch, the BGI project