

Delivering a Technical Upgrade to the Habitat Reporting Solution

Background

In January 2005 Yves Gauguier, Group IT Director of Habitat, invited Retail Acumen to perform a review of their buying, merchandising and supply chain reporting solution. Following an initial 3 day analysis of the existing systems and processes the outcome was a 30 day assignment with two objectives:

1. To improve speed and reliability of the system by replacing the Microsoft Access™ back end.
2. To verify and correct where necessary the output in line with the defined business KPIs

From the business' perspective it was critical to ensure that the existing platform remained live whilst the new solution was being implemented such that, once approved for performance, accuracy and reliability, the new system would be able to be delivered using a turnkey approach. Also since daily updates often took place it was important to ensure that all available historical data was migrated.

In essence the process performed by the system was to take data from SAP IS Retail (Habitat's core ERP) and transform it using a number of complex rules to derive the defined report data.

System Selection

The criteria for the system selection were to provide a solution that:

1. Would have a minimum 18 month lifespan as at the end of that time an SAP core upgrade, including BW and Business Intelligence, was expected to have been delivered.
2. Would deliver a minimum 5 fold improvement in the performance of the weekly data refresh
3. Required least possible end user training through minimal change to the Access front end
4. Remove as much manual work as possible from the refresh process such that the IT department time could be released to work on the SAP project

Microsoft SQL Server™ 2000 was selected for reasons of compatibility with Access, ease of data migration, improved data processing capabilities and existing license availability. This approach also provided a rapid, low cost upgrade path should the SAP BW implementation not be given board approval through use of SQL Server 2005 Integration and Reporting Services (SSIS and SSRS).

Delivering Results

Retail Acumen ensured that the project was on time, to budget, delivered greater performance improvements than planned and also implemented a number of process control improvements. The additional speed was delivered through Retail Acumen's technical skill in SQL optimisation and reduced the manual weekly refresh that had been taking up to 8 hours to a 30 minute automated routine.

This enabled the business to have key reports in time to make a difference to the purchase order cycle. Retail Acumen also identified a £2 million stock opportunity cost saving.

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Comment from the Project Sponsor

Yves Gauguier said of Retail Acumen "Retail Acumen has delivered significant improvements in the reporting process in terms of performance, accuracy and future system capabilities. End-users understanding of and trust in the information generated has been improved significantly as a result. In particular performance improvements delivered by the upgraded system have been far better than expected."

Yves added "Retail Acumen's mix of business and technical knowledge has helped the business re-define a number of the rules and calculations that the system uses; this should guarantee a rapid return on investment. We are extremely pleased with Retail Acumen's flexibility, and the quality of work provided to Habitat, so are likely to continue to use Retail Acumen's services going forward."

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