

Tom Shea, OneStream Software

‘Centralized platform for optimal control and endless possibilities’

If you could re-design a system for financial management, would you build exactly the same system like the one you are using now? Probably not. You would instead analyze all the shortcomings of your current software and fix them, while also making it optimally serve the needs of a modern finance department. That is exactly what the designers of OneStream Software did.

Building a complete suite for financial management from scratch. That was the original idea behind OneStream Software in 2010 when the company’s founders started its development. “In the typical finance department, many systems and applications are tied together”, says OneStream’s President Tom Shea. “When a company grows it will gradually add new systems and tools from different suppliers. The large software companies also do a lot of acquisitions further adding to the complexity of the IT landscape. We decided to start with a clean slate.”

OneStream is not the first software developed by Shea. He was the original founder and architect of Upstream Software in 2000. This product and its spin-offs achieved a better way to manage data quality for Hyperion products. Hyperion acquired Upstream



in 2006. Shea left the company and together with his partner Robert Powers, a former software developer of Hyperion, he founded OneStream Software. Their vision is to change the entire EPM (Enterprise Performance Management) ecosystem with a solution that combines power and flexibility with ease of use, deployment and maintenance.

“My partner had also developed software for Hyperion that was used for

financial reporting and consolidation”, says Shea. “We combined our expertise to develop OneStream Software, a complete suite for performance management. In the typical EPM ecosystem, various software solutions are combined which increases complexity in the technological landscape and financial processes, as well as the total cost of ownership. We changed that by integrating all aspects of performance management, including unified financial data quality, financial consolidation, reporting, budgeting, forecasting, planning, and dashboards. There is no longer the need to transfer data back and forth between applications, eliminating any concern that may arise about the data quality. That is one of the things that separates us from competitors.”

Customer Approach

After years of development, during which period the founders did not try to sell it, they felt that now the time had come to enter the market. “But very slowly,” says Shea. “Many technology start-ups acquire venture capital and then grow rapidly. We decided to take a very different approach. We know that successful customers are the key to our own success, so we decided to start with a single customer - a multinational with a 7 billion dollar turnover and 900 users-company with sales of seven billion dollars and 900 users - and not move on until the system there functioned perfectly. Then we moved on

with just three more customers. Every company that uses our software must become a great reference. We’d rather grow gradually – with only a few very happy customers – than fast with customers that are not completely satisfied.”

Shea used the same approach with Upstream, so he has many companies that are at least willing to talk to him about his latest product. OneStream’s focus lies mainly on the Netherlands and United Kingdom. “Because of past experience, we have a large partner network there as well as a cultural fit. Within these markets we typically focus on large multinationals with complex financial processes.”

Challenges for the CFO

Another major change achieved by OneStream is putting an end to data collection, so controllers can spend all their time analyzing the numbers. Shea: “In the old world a lot of time was lost in the consolidation process. Let’s for example take a company with a corporate head office in the Netherlands and several subsidiaries around the globe. Around the time to the deadline for financial closing is almost due, the subsidiary in Japan delivers the numbers in a slightly different format, so you might have some questions about them. But the company is in another time zone so you have to wait a day. Then they have to deliver the data again. By the time you have collected all

the data from all the subsidiaries, you will have lost days or event weeks. And you probably still have questions about the data quality. OneStream changes all that by taking the data collecting out of the equation. The workflow is the key. All the necessary quality checks are in there and the data you should be looking at is already filtered out automatically in standard reports. This adds a lot of value for the more business oriented finance people companies want nowadays.”

Another issue many CFO’s struggle with is transparency, especially companies that are very decentralized. Shea: “We believe in transparency. Therefore our software tracks the entire closing process. We feel that corporate control should always be in the driver’s seat. Every entry is saved: who did it, when and how? Centralization – and with that more control – is a major benefit of a

centralized system like ours. At decentralized companies sometimes the non-corporate people complain that they are being watched. But that should not discourage the CFO who needs to know exactly every step of the closing process.”

Shea is satisfied about the current development of his product and feedback from the market is positive as well. His ambition is to continually improve on the software’s capabilities. “Because we have an integrated system we can easily add any functionality we want, also for aspects of finance that often get less emphasis in software such as tax and treasury. We have many pre-built capabilities, but we can address any complex solution the users require. We have a special appstore where users can find all sorts of add-ons. The possibilities are endless.”