



The Australian Football League

Background

The Australian Football League (AFL) is one of Australia's largest organised sporting leagues. It reaches a large and diverse audience of participants, spectators and stakeholders, from varied demographics, in a number of ways, via several mediums. It reaches into the lives of many Australians stretched across the nation, and has a growing international following. It is *the* quintessential Australian Game.

But for an organisation that has committed to grow strategically in a competitive sporting arena, keeping across the information that facilitates, manages and monitors that growth was a challenge the AFL wanted keep abreast of. The AFL partnered with Tridant to create a solution specific to their unique needs, to facilitate their growth well into the future.

The project undertaking

The AFL's original business information management solutions were becoming outdated with the increased complexity and requirements of the organisation. Aussie Rules is a game based on skill, speed and accuracy, and the AFL needed the technology and processes to support its fast-paced on-field achievements.

An enormous volume of data is collected around all aspects of the AFL's activities Australia-wide, and especially during the playing season. This information needs to be accessed, reports generated and decisions made as soon as the results of the weekly fixtures come in.

The AFL wanted to access key statistical data, based upon a more pragmatic approach to monitoring their core upstream drivers of performance. The AFL Executive Team identified game attendance, television ratings, participation via Auskick (junior league) and memberships (both Club & AFL) as the four key pillars of performance for specific monitoring.

With those four key indicators in mind, the AFL needed a solution that would provide a framework for financial performance management, particularly a KPI dashboard, business analytics, budgeting and forecasting capabilities.

The bigger strategic vision for the AFL was to provide a much improved information flow-through and innovative services to their clubs and stakeholders well into the future. This also required data to be delivered outside of the club with security and assurance.

The Need

The AFL's original business information management solutions were becoming outdated due to increased data complexity and volume. Keeping track of information and managing flow of data to make key business decisions was becoming more difficult.

The Solution

Using IBM's Cognos solutions, the AFL now has a single solution that combines their non-financial leading indicators in the context to help make investment decisions about the preservation and overall growth of 'The Game'.

The Benefit

Previously the AFL had their information disseminated in various locations. With a Cognos solution tailored by Tridant they now are able to provide their Executive Team an array of capabilities to analyse their data in a way never been possible before.

Solution components

- Cognos BI
- Cognos TM1
- Websphere Portal
- Tivoli Access Manager (extranet access)

"We have never been able to go to one place for our information..... Now we have a portal providing our Executive Team with a weekly update on leading KPI's of our business, our Management Team with an Interactive Dashboard to review and drill into key KPIs....."

Bill Tsiakos, AFL Finance & Shared Services Manager

The challenge

Like many growing organisations, keeping track of information and managing the flow of data can be difficult, often just by the sheer volume of it. The AFL were faced with two main challenges with their data; firstly, it was being supplied to the AFL in a range of ways, mostly by third party sources, so valuable (often unbudgeted) time was consumed by manually processing and inputting the data. Employing more people for more administrative tasks wasn't a viable or sustainable option.

Secondly, the information collected and supplied was indeed important and relevant, but not always consistent. Businesses and organisations need defined data parameters or standardised metrics for accurate recording - even the smallest deviation can give a false reading, affecting reporting and forecasting downstream.

The AFL Executive Team, needed reliable information to improve decision making of the overall long-term strategy of the AFL, as well as manage the challenge of short-term (weekly) information needs, especially during the football season that runs from March to September. It is important the team providing this information are able to deliver this service with confidence and speed without having to perform a lot of manual work, resulting in delays and mistakes.

The solution

Tridant were able to offer an integrated solution to deliver greater efficiency to the AFL in their data and information management. Mr Willem Boshoff, Technical Director, Tridant said, "The AFL is not unlike many organisations who outgrow their technology and processes which are unable to keep pace with their expansion. Through an agile consultative approach, we were able to offer the AFL a specific, integrated solution that addressed their current needs, and one that is easily extendible to carry them into the future, which is currently in progress."

"Two of the biggest challenges were to streamline the data, especially external data, and standardise the meaning of metrics across the AFL departments. It was a process of interpreting current KPI's, identifying how they were used and agreeing upon clear metric parameters that align with the four important pillars on how the AFL measure their performance," said Mr Boshoff.

He went on to say, "Once the data was standardised and the processes implemented ensured greater accuracy, the data then had to be centralised in a single repository. It meant that access to the data, and reporting from the data could be done much more quickly, smoothly and efficiently."

Tridant implemented a suite of Cognos BI tools that addressed the AFL's leading financial and non-financial indicators. The Executive Dashboard

allowed for clear visibility of key non-financial drivers, which primarily addressed attendance forecasting and analysis, television ratings, membership and ratings.

- Attendance Forecasting: This enabled the upcoming season's fixture to be finalised and to perform accurate year-on-year analysis.
- Attendance Analysis: The ability to have a broad overview of such things as clubs' or venues' performance, and individual games that are affected by external factors as varied as the time of the day or the day of the week.
- Television Ratings: This is the pre-eminent media medium for the game, and access into this data allows for a greater insight to improve overall broadcasting of the game.
- Membership and Participation: Statistics on the status of the AFL support base indicate the health of the AFL, indicating the growth in numbers of supporters, nationwide, or at a club specific level.

Key financial drivers which could be accessed to monitor performance were in the areas of financial reporting, cash flow forecasting and payroll budgeting. Such visibility to management meant cash flow forecasting could take into account the complexities of individual contract conditions and key factors such as FTE based salaries and oncost planning were accessible in payrolls budgeting.

"By implementing a complementary suite of tools for an 'AFL-specific' solution, we were able to meet the needs of various types of stakeholders, internal and external, who were able to access and consume information much more effectively via a common portal and secure web interface", said Mr Boshoff. "The visibility the AFL now has of its organisation is vastly different, and we are very proud to have partnered with them to reach those goals."

The outcomes

The implementation of a tailored solution by Tridant, gave the AFL a solution designed to meet their unique needs, which is a common challenge for most sport administration bodies as objectives differ from businesses charged to return profits to shareholders. The AFL now have a single solution that combines their non-financial leading indicators in the context of their financial results (lagging indicator) to help make investment decisions about the preservation and overall growth of 'The Game'.

Mr Bill Tsiakos, AFL Finance and Shared Services Manager said, "We have never been able to go to one place for our information. It has always been a time consuming exercise to collect data for analysis. Now we have a portal providing our Executive Team with a weekly update on leading KPI's of our business, our Management Team with an Interactive Dashboard to review and drill into key KPI's and an array of capabilities to allow our Business Analysts to analyse our data in a way never been possible before."

Tridant was recognised with the IBM Innovation Award 2010 for its highly successful implementation of the crafted, integrated solution for the AFL.

About The Australian Football League

The Australian Football League (AFL) is the governing body of the game, Australian Rules Football. Headquartered in AFL House in Melbourne, the AFL oversees the development of the game across all ages, amateur and professional levels, clubs and membership.

The AFL and the game of football has undergone many years of evolution to reach the professional game it is today, and is widely regarded as a uniquely Australian game.

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About Tridant

Tridant is a leading technology and solution provider serving clients throughout Australia. We are experts in designing and implementing applications optimised for the management processes of planning, reporting, analysing, profiling and risk management. We help our clients leverage their data assets to improve performance, increase revenue, reduce risk and make their businesses more responsive to market opportunities and threats.

Since our inception we have delivered successful data-driven technology solutions to public, private and government organisations and can rightfully claim to work with six out of the ten largest companies in Australia.

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