



Retail Experts

Industry tips and tricks from leaders in the bookstore business

Featuring:

Vaughn Durfee

Associate Director at The University of Utah



Retail Experts:

Vaughn Durfee Sees Big Savings with Big Data

See how the University of Utah Campus Store's Associate Director was able to save time and money with better Business Intelligence



With nearly 30 years of experience in the industry, the University of Utah College Store's Associate Director Vaughn Durfee is an expert at running college stores. One of his chief responsibilities: making sure the other experts around him at the state's flagship university

bookstore have the information they need to do their jobs effectively. His most useful tool? Business Intelligence (BI) — the practice of studying a business' data to make informed decisions, and the applications used to do so.

With the help of the right tool, Durfee is able to produce interactive reports at the drop of a hat, helping administrators make stocking decisions, shift leaders build the schedule and sales associates get recognition for their work.

How it Began

Before adding MBS Systems Dashboard, Campus Store's administrators were no strangers to business intelligence tools. For years, they used an in-store system. During that time, Durfee and Store Manager Dan Archer utilized a third-party business intelligence solution for its data reporting needs.

"We've relied on BI tools since the '80s, back in the day when we were dealing with green screens using file query language," Archer said.

"If stores aren't using BI, then they are just hopelessly lost."

The reports Durfee would build helped the Campus Store's various bookstore managers and administrators make decisions on everything from staffing to inventory management, but the process was inefficient and the static reports it created restricted analyzing data further.

While that was a problem, the information it could gather still worked, so Durfee didn't immediately see a need for improvement. That changed when the store began the transition to a hosted system through MBS in late 2014.

"Our biggest concern, from an IT standpoint, on doing the conversion was losing the ability to have those queries," Durfee said. "With what we were using, we could access that data and provide it on a report for a user if they so desired. We had a lot of reports; there were probably upwards of 50 active queries that were being utilized by customers within the store.

"So when we were going through conversion to the hosted environment, I would have had difficulty pulling the trigger to do that *prior* to the MBS Dashboard solution."

After getting a hands-on demo, Vaughn implemented a test period in late 2014 before going fully live with MBS Systems Dashboard at the Campus Store Feb. 2, 2015.

Durfee says the upgrade has made all the difference, and the store has seen a major increase in staff efficiency, better insight into product performance and inventory needs and other big profitability improvements.

The BI Difference

Right away, Durfee saw an improvement in the level of reporting he was able to do with MBS Systems Dashboard. By being able to more quickly and efficiently drill down the information the store needs, staff is able to make "smarter buying and operational decisions," he says.

"We're able to run an hourly interactive sales report where you can see transactions, sales, units, and drill

Vaughn Durfee Sees Big Savings with Big Data

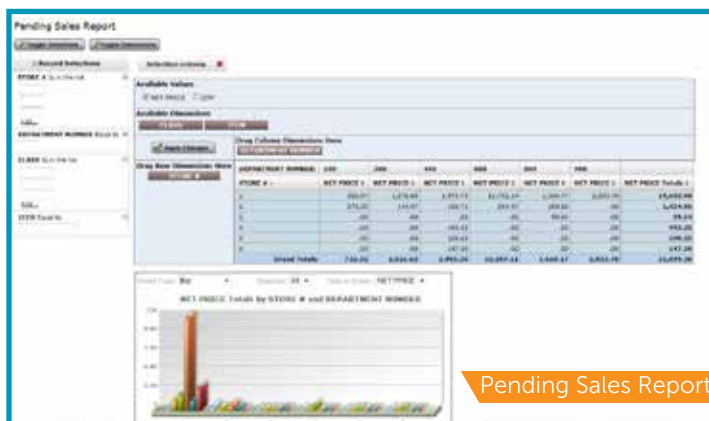
it down to see on a graph so they know when they need to schedule more people, or where they need to spend dollars to cover need," he said. "There's a tremendous amount of data and information that can be provided to everyone who needs it on a timely basis, so they can make decisions on when to increase inventory volume for customer satisfaction, for example."

The transition wasn't without a learning period, and by his own admission, it took Durfee a little bit longer to get used to the new interface than he expected. Once he got accustomed with Dashboard Developer's Edition's custom report-building tools, however, he was able to create what his staff needed in a fraction of the time it took in the Campus Store's previous toolset, further saving staff time.

"It has increased our efficiency tremendously," he explained. "One of the applications that I recently completed was a process that used to take a fair amount of time. Basically I'd extract data via three canned reports and would stick that into Excel using an old text file, formatting and cleaning it up as I went.

"Then I'd pull off the few columns of data I needed to produce a final, workable report that managers could use to sort by last received date, so they could see old product they could clear off the shelf by putting on a promotion and increase returns in that class.

The process of creating reports for each class level and then manually drilling the information down to a SKU level for everyone in his department was incredibly time consuming. That's all changed now.



"I've written an app now where they just go into Dashboard, select a class and bingo, they have that data, just like that, within seconds."

"It would take at least half an hour dedicated time per class previously, but here they can view the data, hand it to an associate to pull items they need to," he said.

Durfee said it has increased profitability by class, brought in a higher profit and gross margin for the store and freed up shelf space from product that wasn't turning.

But inventory and administrator time aren't the only areas in which he's seen improvement at the Campus Store. Shift managers are able to see what they did in sales on the same date last year so they can better anticipate how well the store should be staffed at any given hour, and MBS Systems Dashboard has made sending automatic reports to third-party vendors on merchandise performance "a breeze." He's even been able to think outside the box at Dan Archer's request and look at some fine-tuned aspects of the store's operations.



"Anything I'm looking to track and put into real-time use, he's able to come up with," Archer said. "We have a new program to collect money for scholarships, food banks and other charitable areas, and I wanted people to see what we were collecting in change on a daily basis. I also wanted to see it by time and by cashier so we can have contests or give recognition.

Vaughn Durfee Sees Big Savings with Big Data

"Within a very short period of time, I had that report. You have to have someone like a Vaughn who's able to take that idea around and produce it for me."

In the college retail industry, it's never too late to adapt to the times. Even retail experts like Vaughn Durfee can learn new things to better understand and improve their business.

“Because of the tools that Dashboard has given me, I am able to make much better reports,” Durfee said. “It provides the results in a much better, more readable format, and it gives users the ability to interact with the data.”

