

◊ Hallis Hudson finds business intelligence solution meets demanding corporate objectives

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Thomas R. Cutler reports on the successful implementation of the Visibility Business Intelligence Reporting and Analysis Technology solution.

Hallis Hudson is one of the UK's leading organisations supplying the soft furnishing trade with curtain hardware, accessories and workroom products. Hallis Hudson was founded in the early 1990's and has steadily grown from the latest fashion curtain poles, track innovations, beautiful fabrics and trimmings. With a turnover in excess of £25m, the strength of their service is based on a wide range of branded products supported by next day delivery from a central warehouse, which imports its stock from all over the world. By establishing partnerships for products from suppliers in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and the Far East, the company needed to actively meet the changing demands of the continually evolving fashions in the soft furnishings industry, while offering the most practical and cost-effective solutions.

The business has a number of distinct areas of activity including overseas purchasing operations, two sales based business units (internal call centre and external sales representatives), and a manufacturing operation. Recently the company implemented the Visibility Business Intelligence Reporting and Analysis Technology solution; previously the company could only monitor business performance on a product-by-product basis. This former time-consuming process made month-end reporting slow, inadequate, and slightly inaccurate.

Simultaneously the company management wanted each of the sales divisions to be accountable and entirely responsible for autonomous profitability and sales growth. This new technology delineation gave the divisional sales managers the freedom to analyse their own data; enabled them to target specific customers whose sales have reduced over time. It also provided these managers the capacity to view those customers who had not been contacted recently and offer a free analysis of purchasing patterns.

The objectives of Hallis Hudson included maximising overall profitability, ensuring full utilisation of resources, introducing an element of competition into the company allowing each of the sales divisions to focus on their core competencies.

What provoked the new technology decision rested with the limitations of the previous system including the inability to analyse divisional performance, product by area, or product by attribute (colour, cloth, style); management reporting to support Hallis Hudson's new company objectives could not be provided without effective business intelligence tools.

Finding the Best Business Intelligence Technology Solutions

With an analysis of reporting requirements driving Hallis Hudson's business, Visibility designed a system that retrieved information already captured in the firms business systems (Lotus Notes & Movex).

Particular focus was paid to the data represented in Sales, Invoicing, and CRM (Customer Relationship Management) across multiple business entities.

Hallis Hudson had considered an upgrade of their Movex Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system (running on an IBM AS400) but realised that a Visibility Business Intelligence implementation would be much more cost-effective (without the need to upgrade their ERP system.) The direct benefits from a reporting and analysis solution at a fraction of the upgrade cost was a decision supported by their Independent Manufacturing Consultant, Steve Fern, who had previously seen a Visibility Business Intelligence implementation at another customer site (E H Taylor Ltd.).

Once the foundations of the system were in place (Sales Data Warehouse) Visibility implemented an online operational report that incorporated a customer search field for the call centre operatives. This report allowed the call centre team to recall customer purchasing patterns over the last three years with graphical representations and drill through to detail capability, while analysing when the customer was last contacted and by method. This has allowed for cross-selling, providing better customer service, and maintaining the brand image of Hallis Hudson as a quality supplier.

Alastair Soper, Hallis Hudson Operations Director noted, "With this system, we can give our customers a much improved level of service now that our sales teams have comprehensive information at their finger tips, without having to access a number of different systems."

This report also allowed the call centre team to keep customer contact details current with a link, allowing the user to access the Lotus Notes CRM system and edit the details of the customer.

For the external sales team an offline OLAP (On Line Analytical Processing) cube is emailed daily with the most up-to-date details, allowing the field sales people to analyse customer data when required. This OLAP cube is made available online to all Hallis Hudson management for a summary view of information and KPI (key performance indicators) analysis. Soper suggested, "The Business Intelligence solution modernised the way we analyse our performance for both our Internal and External sales teams."

According to Mark Thornton, General Manager, Visibility Europe Ltd., "With the implementation of the sales data mart and the reporting solution Visibility also created a web-based online document management system that allowed reports and other files to be held centrally. This technology resulted in the server carrying the burden of processing rather than the client; it also avoided a software installation requirement, thus making the solution virtually zero footprint.

Soper commented, "The Visibility solution will allow us to remove a number of inefficient and resource hungry systems from our organisation. We can now save considerable management time by bringing accurate information straight into meaningful, preformatted spreadsheets, updateable in seconds."

Solution benefits

Business intelligence and analysis reporting solutions must allow firms such as Hallis Hudson to:

- Collate their data from disparate data sources.
- Reduce the amount of time required to affect proactive changes to business processes and monitor the improvements against KPI's.
- Effectively share sales data across the entire enterprise.
- Deliver both decentralised performance reporting and consolidated Management Information on demand.

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