

DECISION TRACK: All Data and No Information: What To Do

- **Issue:** Nine Disparate Legacy Mainframes Inhibiting Consolidated Reporting
 - **Solution:** Custom Access Front End on a SQL SVR DataMart
 - **Project Savings:** \$7mil First Year
 - **Project Duration:** 6 Months
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Abstract: Re-aligning IT resources to meet immediate and long term business information needs and to reduce costs by developing a custom Access application and supporting SQL SVR data mart to support over 600 users.

The Problem: Client operates over 2,500 stores in eleven retail banners, with over 1,500 price zones and more than 50,000 active UPCs. They must look up one UPC at a time in a price zone in a banner, in each of nine disparate main frame legacy systems, to determine what price is set for a UPC in a price zone in a banner. This individual UPC look up process is time intensive and inefficient. Due to this inefficiency, it is extremely difficult to execute a price zone strategy that is essential to maintain competitiveness in the marketplace. It also requires significant payroll expenditure to maintain the arcane UPC look up process to attempt to operate at the speed of business.

Additional problems are endemic in the information systems environment available to business decision makers: Business decision makers cannot readily see:

- Competitor data, although it is purchased by the client
- Vendor cost of the UPCs and alternate suppliers and their costs
- Promotional prices of the UPCs in a Banner within its price zones
- Sales dollars and volume for a UPC in a banner within a price zone

All of this information is equally difficult to access in a timely manner due to the disparate legacy main frame systems.

An additional problem was that an Oracle conversion project had no end in sight, was years behind schedule, over budget, and consuming cash without delivering any benefit to the business, starving business decision makers of resources.

Client's IT environment does not meet business information needs to be competitive in the marketplace, thus inhibiting profits. It is highly inefficient to access the information required to make business decisions in a timely manner, causing the swelling of payroll dollars to deal with these deficiencies, which is no more than an expensive, weak mitigation.

The Need: The client has an immediate business need to quickly view the individual UPC prices, costs, promotions, sales and competitor data across the banners in each price zone, by store in aggregate, on a single screen. Solving this business information need will greatly reduce payroll commitments (cutting payroll costs), and significantly increase their ability to adjust the price zone strategies at the speed of business in the marketplace thus enhancing competitiveness and growing their revenues.

The Solution: Centralize the data from the nine disparate legacy main frame systems in a database with standardized record structures and hierarchies accessible to business decision makers in real time through the utilization of cost effective Windows based applications.

Deliverable: MS Access application (VBA/SQL) front end for an 8 terabyte SQL SVR 2008 database

The Application: Over 600 autonomous installations across the enterprise of a flexible, user friendly MS Access application, including security, with a five year life featuring menus for building dynamic queries on the fly for user defined selections and user defined lists, automatic menu refresh, point and click information delivery displaying in bulk, current and historical, individual UPC pricing in price zones, for each store, for banners with related sales dollars and volume, supplier and costs, promotional pricing, and competitor pricing.

(A functioning prototype supporting 300 users was released in week eight during development of the final state deployment).

The Database: Deployed an 8 terabyte SQL Server 2008 database receiving 80 automated data feeds from the nine legacy mainframe systems, standardizing record structures and hierarchies, maintaining two years of history of UPC pricing by banner by price zone, sales dollars and volume, promotional pricing, suppliers and costs, and competitor pricing.

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Direct Benefits: Immediate visibility, in bulk, of UPC pricing, promotions, sales, suppliers, costs and competitor pricing across the company. Relieved 156,000 annual payroll hours (the equivalent of 75 FTEs). Centralized, standardized UPC data is now available for analysis and action by business decision makers to drive increases in market share and revenues.

Indirect Benefits: Client was able to abandon an Oracle conversion project reducing an additional 1,500 FTEs and related expenditures, generating significant cost savings.