



Overview

Country: South Africa

Industry: IT

Customer Profile

South African-based Customer Feedback Systems (CFS) has developed a service for tracking customer service levels. It collects data from customers and analyzes the information to detect service anomalies.

Business Situation

The success of CFS services hinges on the ability to analyze data and report back to clients. The software CFS used was too complex and expensive and could undermine plans to expand to other countries.

Solution

Microsoft® Gold Certified Partner, IS Partners consulting firm, replaced the data reporting and analysis software with Microsoft Reporting Services, an add-in for Microsoft SQL Server™ 2000.

Benefits

- Enabled expansion strategy
- Savings of 100 working days
- Expense savings of 75 per cent
- Easy-to-use and flexible
- Fast data processing

South African Firm Realises 75 Per Cent Cost Savings and Launches Expansion

"Using SAS to automatically generate monthly and weekly reports was complicated. To produce daily ad hoc reports we still had to resort to manual processes, which took a lot of time."

Craig Aiken, Director, Customer Feedback Systems

The South African company, Customer Feedback Systems, has witnessed rapid growth since it introduced a real-time service that measures customer service levels. This led to plans for overseas expansion through an international distribution network. But the company was keen to replace its existing reporting software, which was too complex and expensive to support worldwide operations. By implementing Microsoft® SQL Server™ 2000 Reporting Services, Customer Feedback Systems dramatically reduced costs, significantly cut the time spent on generating ad hoc reports, and provided a cost-effective and flexible environment that guarantees the success of its international strategy.



“Anytime we wanted to develop report structures or alter the format, we needed an SAS specialist. But these people are expensive. On top of this we also had the high cost of annual license fees.”

Craig Aiken, Director, CFS

Situation

The South African-based company, Customer Feedback Systems (CFS), provides reporting services that monitor real-time customer service levels. This service is now so popular that the company has doubled year-on-year sales turnover for each of the past three years. It now includes among its clients BMW, Afrox Healthcare, Vodacom, and major retail banks such as Nedbank and Standard Bank.

CFS's growth is based on a simple, but highly effective, service tracking device. Data is gathered on devices placed in areas where employees interact with customers. The device sits at elbow height on a counter, for example, in a bank or at an airline check-in desk. Customers answer five simple questions about how satisfied they are with the service by pressing five buttons on an electronic pad. The feedback is uploaded into the database, and detailed reports are generated.

This data acts as a barometer, reflecting levels of customer service. As a result, organisations can easily identify customer service issues. One effect of the CFS service tracker has been to make its clients' staff more aware of their performance, encouraging them to modify the way they communicate with customers.

Based on its success in South Africa, CFS is keen to expand and build a global distribution network while it still enjoys patent protection for its service tracker. It has restructured its business in preparation for overseas expansion, and appointed partners to service its South African customer base.

But to do this, it needed a cost-effective data reporting tool. Craig Aiken, Director, CFS, notes, “When we started up, customer reports were created manually. Someone would sit down, sift through the data, and then create a report. But increasing numbers

of clients meant we had to automate. We were in partnership with a research company, and it already had tools for analyzing data. We asked for help and it provided us with software and technical expertise from business intelligence vendor SAS.”

“But SAS is expensive and more suited to large data-mining operations, whereas we produce regular and relatively uncomplicated monthly and weekly reports for our clients, and a lot of daily reports. Using SAS to automatically generate monthly and weekly reports was complicated. To produce daily ad hoc reports we still had to resort to manual processes, which took a lot of time,” says Aiken.

“Anytime we wanted to develop report structures or alter the format, we needed an SAS specialist. But these people are expensive. On top of this we also had the high cost of annual license fees.”

Aiken says, “In short, SAS was too complicated and expensive for our data analysis requirements. We needed a solution that was cost effective, and easier to manage.”

Solution

CSF contacted Microsoft® Gold Certified Partner, IS Partners, to find an alternative. Aiken specified several key criteria that any new solution would need to meet:

- Fast data processing
- Inexpensive software and services
- Easy to use at many locations worldwide
- Capability for multiple report types
- Automated reports
- Flexible enough for report development

IS Partners immediately identified Microsoft SQL Server™ 2000 database and the

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Craig Aiken, Director, CFS

Reporting Services add-in, a comprehensive server-based reporting solution. Companies can use Reporting Services to create, manage, and deliver both traditional, paper-oriented reports and interactive, Web-based reports.

But the real advantage of Reporting Services is that it combines the data management capabilities of SQL Server 2000 database and Microsoft Windows Server System™ integrated server software with familiar and powerful Microsoft Office System applications, to deliver real-time information to support daily operations and drive decisions.

Ryan Jamieson, Head of Business Intelligence for IS Partners, explains, "We had previously worked with the beta version of Microsoft Reporting Services which is part of Microsoft SQL Server 2000. If you are already using SQL Server there are no additional licence fees.

"We showed CFS how Reporting Services can be used to generate regular monthly and weekly reports, and also automatically generate ad hoc reports. It is simple to use, and does not have the complexity associated with other reporting tools."

The data was housed in a SQL Server data warehouse and accessed through Analysis Service. An administrator programs the report server engine, at the heart of Reporting Services, to accept report definitions, including the timeframe for the reports. The engine then locates the corresponding data and produces the reports. Users interact with the engine through a Web-based report manager.

A subscription mechanism is conveniently built into Reporting Services. A user can set up new subscriptions to deliver fresh copies

of reports automatically by e-mail or file sharing.

It also features a role-based security scheme in which designated users or groups are defined according to their roles. This is useful for CFS account managers who manage many client relationships and need to guarantee confidentiality of data.

A user can also produce new copies of the report according to a pre-defined schedule. Data-driven subscriptions are also programmed by using information from the report itself to decide who should receive copies.

Benefits

Supporting Worldwide Growth

CFS chose Microsoft Reporting Services to support its ambitious plans for global expansion. Aitken says: "We have distributors in the United Kingdom, Europe, Africa, Australia, and South East Asia. Rather than reinvent the process for each different region we now have a uniform data capture and analysis platform with favourable capital outlay terms for each distributor. We can now deliver on a wide scale and enjoy much greater control of data presentation and report publication," says Aiken.

Cost Savings of 75 Per Cent

CFS measured the cost of working with Microsoft Reporting Services and developers from IS Partners. This exercise showed that Reporting Services was 75 per cent cheaper than SAS.

Aiken explains, "For the most complicated reports, which require extra development, each report costs about 5,000 Rand (U.S.\$760) with Reporting Services. But with SAS, it was costing between 20,000 Rand (U.S.\$3,040) and 25,000 Rand (U.S.\$3,800)."

For More Information

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www.microsoft.com

For more information about CFS products and services, visit the Web site at:

www.cfs-southafrica.com

For more information about IS Partners products and services, visit the Web site at:

www.ispartners.co.za

Ease of Use

Reporting Services provides extremely flexible ways to make data available to end users. Aiken continues, "We tended to limit the changes we made to the SAS reports because of the cost. You also have to be quite careful about getting it all correct. Reporting Services has given us the flexibility to be more creative. We can design better reports at less expense."

"Microsoft Reporting Services has given us a whole new dimension. We can evolve our reports much more quickly than before, so that we can provide customers with a fresh and better service. We now have the opportunity to work like this consistently, rather than say, 'Let's wait until we have more budget.' "

Yearly Savings of 100 Full-Time Employee Days

Previously, 20 hours a week was spent compiling data for ad-hoc and exceptional reports. The use of Reporting Services reduced this to three hours a week, saving two full-time employee days a week or approximately 100 days a year. This, in turn, has enabled employee time to be used more efficiently in other areas of the business.

Microsoft Windows Server System

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Software and Services

■ Products

- Microsoft SQL Server 2000

- Microsoft Windows Server 2003 Standard Edition

■ Services

- Reporting Services

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