Effective Supply Chain Management

Having spent more than a decade working in IBM's Advanced Technology Group prior to his transition to the wine and spirits distribution industry, Jim Staton was looking to improve supply chain efficiency through the application of a business intelligence (BI) platform. As Vice President of Information Technology at Mutual Distributing Company (Mutual), Staton recalls, "I had looked at Cognos and then ended up choosing Dimensional Insight's BI tool, Diver, because I could see that it was going to be less expensive from a cost of ownership perspective and easier to implement. We had a very small IT group at the time and I wanted to empower management with the ability to create their own reports — something that could be readily accomplished using Diver."

Mutual's use of The Diver Solution™ (Diver) has evolved over the past nine years. Initially the product was used for ad hoc sales analysis to track product movement and volumetric-based brand performance. Diver was essential to managing the different data formats inherited from companies acquired by Mutual, combining the data to evaluate strategies for readjusting sales territories and setting up deliverables. Diver is now used at an enterprise-level with applications developed for inventory, supplier reporting, financials, and sales. Recently, Mutual's upgrade to a new version of Diver triggered a revolutionary change in both BI application and usage at Mutual. The newer version focused on the development of dashboard environments and web-based analytics to support the concept of pervasive BI. Staton and Mutual's Network Specialist, James Batchelor developed a dashboard

Quick Facts

Industry: *Wine, Beer & Non-alcoholic Beverage Distribution*

Revenue: *$370 Million*

Employees: *500+*

Company Description: *Mutual Distributing Company is North Carolina's largest beer and wine distributor with 7 offices located throughout the state. A privately owned distributor founded in 1946, Mutual strives to be an industry leader in warehousing and delivery options through its ongoing investments in automation and information technology. Mutual Distributing offers its customers a portfolio of over 1,200 brands, sourced by 300 suppliers.*

Headquarters: *Raleigh, NC*

Website: *www.mutualdistributing.com*

Solution: *The Diver Solution*

initiative for Mutual's branch managers and began the task of migrating Mutual's business reporting infrastructure to take advantage of this new functionality.

Dashboard Design

The first order of business for Mutual was to interview key users to understand their priorities and their decision-making process. Staton and Batchelor then prioritized this information to begin mapping out the creation of several dashboards to provide branch managers with sales goals, quotas and targets for cases, dollars, and product. Staton describes the benefits of providing users with dashboards: "We're simplifying the decision-making process because we are delivering information and focusing a user's attention in such a way that action can be taken immediately. In some sense I see this as being a tool that provides management direction to our employees. It allows everyone to be on the same page. We will no longer run into a situation where one manager does their analysis one way and another manager is doing their analysis differently. It helps us communicate more

Challenge

- *Make information visually intuitive and easy to understand*
- *Reduce the number of ad-hoc report requests made to IT*

Solution

- *Provide BI capabilities to branch managers in a self-service, wed-based environment*
- *Easily view sales performance against corporate goals and investigate detail data behind key metrics*
- *Create content critical to day-to-day business management*

Results

- *Enhance corporate decision-making by combining different data formats*
- *Empower key users with access to sales performance data via dashboards*
- *Strengthen supplier relationships and enhance profitability*
- *Significantly reduce time needed to produce ad-hoc reports*
- *Speed user adoption and streamline the roll out of Diver*

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effectively because the conversation starts at the same place."

Mutual had been presenting information to users in tabular format without any graphical representations of the data. In addition, many of Mutual's users were performing repetitive analysis to extract the subsets of information they needed. One of the goals of Mutual's dashboard initiative was to eliminate the time users were spending on repetitive analysis and to begin distilling that information for them automatically within a dashboard view. "[Diver] allows us to put together views of the data that are more actionable," says Staton. "We can now easily display the result that we want the user to see as opposed to providing the user with several report views that contain the various pieces of that information. Being able to display information that instantly leads the user to a conclusion is very powerful."

A Revolutionary Change

Branch managers are excited about being able to access critical goal and quota data via web-based dashboards. "When I showed the users what we had been working on they were really excited about the ability to quickly access key metrics without the need to dig around or perform additional analysis," explains Batchelor. "Our users essentially perform four or five analytical tasks involving Diver every day. So we're trying to capture those tasks and make it easy for them to just open a browser, log-in to the product, and see those items automatically. It's going to save time but an added benefit is the ease-of use: There's really no learning curve involved for new users."

Asked whether the latest version of Diver is a time-saver for him, Batchelor answers, "The interface is so intuitive that I'm going to be spending a lot less time with users doing individual coaching. This new version will most likely create a situation where my

responsibilities will shift to supporting users with the creation of different types of dashboards that house role-specific information."
Diver creates a flexible environment for administrators to quickly design and deliver role-specific data in a dashboard view. A variety of indicator types are combined with powerful administrative features such as drag-and-drop placement of page items and navigation structures to streamline the dashboard development process. Through Diver's one-click command center, administrators can customize the options available to users for each dashboard item; such as invoking Diver's advanced analytical clients, exporting to one of several supported file formats, or drilling down further into the current data view. "This is going to change the visibility level of our entire implementation," says Batchelor. "Now they will be able to quickly peruse these items in a consolidated view, within a dashboard. Our users are going to start thinking differently about the information they have access to after being able to see it presented in this way."

Suppliers also have access to a subset of Mutual's data via Diver's integrated web portal. Suppliers can log-in to Diver to view shipments and stock levels for each of their products. Staton is eager to begin adding more information to Mutual's existing supplier reporting portal and transition currently available views to dashboard-centric views. "By providing access to inventory and sales forecast data, our suppliers will have a better understanding of the number of days Mutual is keeping their product on the floor — a key piece of data to effectively manage the supply chain," Staton explains. Staton also plans to provide Mutual's intended future pricing to suppliers along with upcoming promotions and discounts for each brand. The objective is to utilize BI technology to solidify Mutual's relationship with their suppliers and simultaneously enhance profitability for both parties.

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- Jim Staton, Vice President, Information Technology

About Dimensional Insight

Dimensional Insight, Inc. is a leading provider of BI solutions with our BI platform and family of purpose-built applications. Our data integration, modeling, reporting capabilities, analytics, portals, dashboards, and applications empower users throughout the enterprise to make timely, data-driven decisions. Thousands of worldwide customers choose Dimensional Insight solutions for flexibility, ease of integration, and rapid time-to-value. Dimensional Insight consistently ranks as a top performing BI vendor in customer satisfaction.

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