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Company Background

WH Smith is one of the UK's leading retail groups, incorporating market-leading companies in retail and news distribution. Its online division, WH Smith Direct, is the UK's leading multi-channel retailer, offering a range of over 2.1 million products online including every British book in print (currently 1.6 million), plus 250,000 entertainment products and a growing range of stationery and magazine titles.

Lack of Detailed Information Created a Challenge

Without a reliable reporting system in place, the company was operating with extremely limited management information, which rarely provided relevant data. All reporting was based on SQL queries, which were hard coded and totally inflexible. Management reporting required accessing and cross-referencing different databases, which was both time-consuming and frustrating due to the absence of valuable information. Details such as the value or content of orders could not be interpreted and even 'top seller' items were not being identified. As a result, business was suffering from a widespread inability to plan or stock efficiently or to realise the full potential of its customer base with effective marketing campaigns.

Information Revelation

An independent consultant was brought into the company to identify the specific reporting needs of the business and to ensure that vital management information was revealed. In analysing the existing system, it became evident that the whole management reporting process was completely disintegrated.

Following an impressive website demonstration and the consultant's recommendation, it was quickly evident that QlikView could offer high level summary reporting for senior management – with the flexibility to drill down very easily into specific detailed information as required. Speed of implementation, flexibility, interaction and ease of use were the key deciding factors to QlikView being chosen over other management information reporting solutions.

WH Smith purchased 15 licenses of QlikView and a new server, which were installed and implemented within a month. The system was embraced quickly by the whole company and immediately became a natural part of the business. “In the first week of implementation, we were interrogating areas of statistics within the business that we had never done before.” explained Stuart Rivett, WH Smith Direct

Case study in brief

Company

WH Smith Direct

Industry

Retail

Challenge

To uncover and consolidate valuable information from numerous databases and produce quality management information with which to improve trading decisions.

Solution

QlikView has become a daily tool used by most departments to cross-reference different data to measure and monitor sales, order processing and marketing campaigns.

Benefits

- Limitless capabilities
- User-friendly: – no specialist training needed
- Excellent analysis and reporting information available throughout the company
- 'Delivery to promise' improved by almost 18%

Operations Director. “Every department now uses the system to capture management information, from financial reports to operational data.”

The implementation of QlikView did not require any formal training, but users have had great input into what information is required. This flexibility has enabled the data model to be changed without incurring large “cube rebuild” times, thereby allowing the development team to deliver reports quickly and add information with little or no overhead. Its ability to adapt to the needs of different users, with limitless filtering and complete visibility, has proved invaluable. The incorporation of any changes or new requests to management reporting can now be done in hours or minutes – rather than days.

“The flexibility and availability of information it provides is amazing – it is all there in front of you in just one click. Plus, it doesn’t take years to learn how to use it. If you can use a computer, you can use QlikView.”

Rob Havis, WH Smith Direct Trading Manager, Entertainment Products

A Surprising Scope of Visibility

The unexpected benefits of QlikView’s implementation have been “too many to document”, according to Stuart Rivett. Original expectations were only for sales analysis and management reporting to replace and improve existing systems, but QlikView has provided visibility into other departments as well. As a result, the company now has extremely valuable customer knowledge, with the ability to identify underperforming products, uncover data problems such as wrong prices, and measure the effectiveness of promotions.

Before, the website was merchandised according to very little and unreliable information. Details such as the value and number of items in each order, customer preferences, as well as historic and present identification of the best-selling products, were unknown. Now, QlikView provides fast reporting on weekly sales across different product groups, as well as order comparisons of store vs. website sales, promotional redemptions, and more – giving WH Smith a significant competitive advantage over other large retailers.

With 1.6m books in the online catalogue, availability changes daily. QlikView has also proved extremely useful to pre-empt order and inventory glitches by enabling 100% checks on all data. Its ability to import massive inventory files from suppliers and compare this with the company’s new database has made it easier to identify any problems. QlikView captures changes in delivery and availability and provides an automated order process status, which helps customer services sort out any orders trapped in the system.

Making A Measurable Difference

Before the implementation of QlikView, 'delivery-to-promise' at WH Smith Direct was at 79%. Now, more than 93% of parcels are delivered within the leadtime stated to customers when orders are placed.

“Operationally, we now have the ability to measure our delivery-to-promise to our customers, which is something we were unable to do accurately previously. The ‘now’ is used as a key measure for managing service level agreements with our drop-ship suppliers.”

Stuart Rivett, WH Smith Direct Operations Director

QlikView has given WH Smith Direct the reporting information to manage its business more efficiently, highlighting areas that require more focus and attention. It is easily configurable and maintainable and offers all levels of staff information from the same screen, either at a high level, or down to line level detail.

“QlikView is an incredible facility. It has been absolutely instrumental in helping all departments to understand the shape of the business,” says Management Consultant, Philip Doyne. “Weekly trading meetings are now discussed with complete knowledge. Before, there was no detail to discuss.”

“Business is only as good as its reporting,” added Rob Havis. “We’ve already forgotten how bad our reporting systems were before – we now have a ‘new norm’ whose capabilities and scalability are seemingly limitless.”

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