South Carolina Student Loan modernizes business intelligence capabilities with IBM DB2 Web Query for i

Overview

- ***Challenge***
  Modernize the business intelligence environment and leverage legacy query objects, to provide actionable information to stakeholders
- ***Solution***
  Implementing IBM DB2 Web Query for i to enable more robust, efficient reporting and significant performance improvements
- ***Benefits***
  Enabling powerful new forecasting and reporting capabilities while eliminating the role of IT personnel as middlemen, speeding information access from 30 days to just seconds, and reducing report maintenance by leveraging multiple views within a single report—enabling the company to retire up to five Query/400 reports for every new DB2 Web Query report

SOUTH CAROLINA Student Loan®

South Carolina Student Loan (SCSL) is a midsize, non-profit organization that originates and services postsecondary educational loans for students, parents and higher education institutions in South Carolina. SCSL has around 200 employees and has serviced over $7 billion in federal and private student loans for more than 400,000 borrowers. Their large accounts and demanding compliance requirements make a comprehensive business intelligence (BI) solution crucial to the SCSL mission.

"Many of our daily and monthly goals are regulated by the federal government, and we have to monitor those goals to maintain compliance and competitiveness in the marketplace

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>
> – *Tom Dunnigan, CIO, South Carolina Student Loan*

nationally," says Tom Dunnigan, CIO of SCSL. "Since 1992, we had leveraged BI with IBM iSeries® and had collected around 3,000 Query/400 objects. We began looking at BI solutions to help us modernize our technology and understand key metrics while still allowing us to leverage our legacy data."

Leveraging legacy data

In the financial world, regulations and goal parameters are constantly changing.

"In looking for a BI solution, it was important for us to be able to use the Query/400 objects we had already invested in," says Alan Taylor, Senior Systems Engineer at SCSL. "Rather than going through a mass conversion, we wanted to be able to leverage that legacy data and be able to do things with it that our legacy BI tools weren't able to do, like providing real-time information and reports to management on key performance indicators."

With the legacy IBM Query for iSeries tool, also known as Query/400, reports were often generated and delivered to administrators monthly. By that time, reports were often too dated to allow for timely adjustments to meet goals, so they were simply used for review. To meet the organization's need for real-time data access, SCSL chose IBM DB2® Web Query for i to help improve data query capabilities.

"No other solution allowed us to leverage our legacy query objects," says Dunnigan. "DB2 Web Query was the only one."

Preparing for business intelligence success

IBM Premier Business Partner Dynamix Group, Inc., helped SCSL convert some of their Query/400 queries to show them the capabilities of DB2 Web Query. SCSL also took advantage of the IBM DB2 Web Query for Advanced Users, Developers, and Administrators training to help them prepare for the switch.

"Dynamix provided a consultant who gave us one-on-one experience," explains Dunnigan. "The consultant helped prepare us for the IBM training and helped us immediately start to be productive once the system was in place."

The implementation took place over several months, while SCSL freed up the necessary resources and built company procedures and guidelines to allow the solution to be rolled out to a broad set of users. Dynamix helped SCSL configure their IBM Power® 550 Express™ system on IBM i before deploying the BI solution.

"We ran a pilot program where we aimed at short-term wins. That allowed us to gain experience with the tool after the training we received from IBM," says Dunnigan.

Building on short-term wins

With the new BI infrastructure, users are now able to generate reports with easy-to-use dashboards.

"Within seconds, users are getting information that they previously had to wait up to 30 days for," says Dunnigan. "Specific departments have certain goals, and they are now able to get immediate feedback on where they stand in reaching those goals. We do a much better job of maintaining compliance with DB2 Web Query because the feedback is real-time."

As an example, SCSL administers the state's guarantee agency for the Federal Family Education Loan Program (FFELP). As the administrator, SCSL handles claims against these federally insured loans.

"Through DB2 Web Query, we can now monitor recoveries of defaulted loans daily, which is a key performance and compliance metric for us," says Dunnigan.

The new software leverages IBM DB2 SQL Query Engine, an advanced query optimizer built into DB2 for i, enabling dramatic performance improvements. The solution also allows SCSL to consolidate Query/400 reports.

"When the new queries run through the SQL Query Engine, it's much faster than the Query/400 queries. Something that would take a minute to run can now run in less than 15 seconds," Taylor says. "We're also reducing the number of Query/400 reports, because when we generate a new DB2 Web Query report, we're usually retiring several Query/400 reports at the same time. I've created DB2 Web Query reports that take the place of four or five Query/400 reports."

Forecasting and assessing productivity

The new solution allows the organization to forecast funding needs, an ability they didn't have before.

"IBM DB2 Web Query allows users to input various parameters, including dates, to acquire loan volume data based on those parameters. This allows them to use past loan volumes to help forecast future loan volumes," says Taylor. "Users get exactly what they need."

Solution Components

Software

- IBM DB2® Web Query for i
- IBM Power® 550 Express™
- IBM i
- IBM DB2 Web Query Training

SCSL also has a new ability to assess productivity within specific departments, based upon visual representations of metrics for certain time periods.

"Departments have found performance problems, and intervened and retrained staff to help them become more effective at their jobs," says Dunnigan. "When you look at what DB2 Web Query can do in presenting absolute and relative metrics visually, it's a much more powerful presentation. And these metrics are affecting our departments' decisions every day."

Active reporting

"One of the things our end users like the most is the active report feature, where they can manually manipulate data and then visualize it. We couldn't do that before," says Taylor.

"The way we're using this software is empowering the end user," Dunnigan adds. "We're allowing them to input their own parameters, and that takes our information systems personnel out of the loop. We're no longer the middlemen. This model allows us to keep our IT people focused on critical functions instead of ad hoc requests for reporting."

Expanding capabilities

SCSL has about 60 end users that utilize DB2 Web Query. In the future, the organization plans to begin using automated report distribution features and on-line analytical processing (OLAP) capabilities available with DB2 Web Query.

"DB2 Web Query was part of the move to modernize business intelligence capabilities here at SCSL. We have forecasting capabilities that were nonexistent two years ago," says Dunnigan. "We're planning to exploit IBM DB2 Web Query to its fullest."

For more information

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For more information about South Carolina Student Loan, visit:
http://www.scstudentloan.org

For more information about Dynamix Group, Inc., visit:
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