CASE STUDY

Swiss Colony Integrates Web Data Using Pentaho

Swiss Colony Gains Valuable Insights into Customers through Integrating Web Data with Other Customer Data with Pentaho Data Integration

About

Founded in 1926 by Ray Kubly, The Swiss Colony is one of the world's largest and most successful multi-title catalog companies. Today, customers can purchase just about anything from The Swiss Colony's line of catalogs: jewelry, furniture, cookware, small appliances, bedding, electronics, and decorative items.

QUICK FACTS

- Industry: Retail
- Headquarters: Nashville, Tennessee
- Website: swisscolony.com
- Products/Services: Pentaho Business Analytics reporting and Pentaho Data Integration

Challenges

As could be expected, the company has developed a strong infrastructure to capture and report information generated by its catalog business. However, as e-commerce grew as a channel, a whole new series of analytical requirements emerged. "We were doing a lot of our own analysis and building a lot of reports using SQL statements and then dumping data to Excel," said Mark Douma, Director of Internet Marketing and Operations. Moreover, the company was not fully satisfied with the data produced by its Web analytics applications. "The Web analytics data was intriguing, but it stopped short of being truly actionable, unless you can really integrate it with your customer data warehouse," Douma said. That kind of integration was not a core competency for most Web analytics vendors, he added.

Solutions

About two years ago, the team began to explore how to better integrate its Web data with its other customer data. "As the first step, one of the technical analysts in Douma's group developed an extraction, transformation and load application using PERL to parse Web logs. That effort gave the team confidence that they could integrate data from their different channels. For reporting for the proof-of-concept effort, The Swiss Colony decided to use the reporting module from Pentaho Corporation. Pentaho provides a commercial open source alternative to proprietary

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business intelligence and is the most widely deployed open source BI suite. Pentaho BI Suite Enterprise Edition provides comprehensive reporting, OLAP analysis, dashboards, data integration, data mining and a BI platform. Pentaho's products have been downloaded more than five million times, with production deployments at companies ranging from small organizations to the Global 2000.

The Swiss Colony turned to Pentaho Reporting initially because it didn't want to invest in a commercial reporting product for a proof-of-concept project. But as the team got more involved in the development process, it decided to use the Pentaho Data Integration module as well. "As we got more into the reporting, we realized that we wanted to tweak some of the data. We could have rewritten the ETL process in Perl, but it made more sense to use Pentaho," Douma said. For the project, The Swiss Colony partnered with OpenBI, a business intelligence consulting company and Pentaho partner that specializes in open source technology. "OpenBI has been a key partner in our project. Their experience and expertise helped us to find new ways to leverage the Pentaho Platform." Douma said.

Results

Douma felt very comfortable opting for a commercial open source solution. "Our goals aligned very well," he said. "They sell support. They have a lot of incentive to provide great support. And they do. We are very happy with it. We are pleased with Pentaho and have a great technical resource in OpenBI, so we felt this is the right way to move forward." The company has integrated nearly 400 GB of data from its 12 e-commerce Web sites with the 1+ terabyte corporate datawarehouse and the application is in the process of being rolled out. Currently, the system is used by approximately 25 users. The flexibility of the reporting and the ability for users to generate their own reports is critical. "With the Web, there is a big difference between what is trackable and what is measurable," Douma said. "You have to determine what problem you are trying to solve and then solve it. For example, we can now look into our search data in ways that was not possible with any other tool. Our use of Pentaho has opened up new areas of analytics for us."

Summary

As the project matures, The Swiss Colony anticipates using additional Pentaho modules. "With OpenBI and Pentaho, we can use exactly what we need and they provide support. And the turnaround time for support requests and feature enhancements, is faster than I have experienced with commercial vendors," Douma said. "It is community-driven and customer-driven. You have a tool where the development cycle is based on what the people using it want and need." In the final analysis, the Pentaho implementation has allowed The Swiss Colony to move to the next level in its business intelligence and analytics capacity. "With OpenBI and Pentaho we have ramped up faster than we ever could have by ourselves," Douma said.

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