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Coverdell & Company

Marketing Firm Gains Precision Targeting, Competitive Edge with SQL Server

Coverdell & Company, a financial services marketing firm, needed a cost-effective solution to a perennial industry problem: eliminating duplicates in flat file lists of potential customers. To ensure they didn't contact the same person twice, Coverdell staff had to manually comb through 9 to 15 flat files for every list, a task that ate up 70 hours a week. Coverdell needed a relational database—but it had to be one that could handle up to 30 data sources and ongoing format changes without continual reprogramming. Blackstone & Cullen, Inc., a Microsoft® Certified Solution Provider, chose SQL Server™. Coverdell not only slashed operational costs, it also gained a big competitive advantage: with better information management, the company can now offer services its competitors can't.

Info Bottlenecks and Untapped Data

Coverdell & Company markets services such as life insurance or discount membership programs for banks and other institutions that already have an established customer base. To target potential customers, Coverdell uses lists from a variety of public sources. A client bank might provide the company with a list of clients who have checking accounts, for example, as well as a list of those who have credit cards through the bank. Coverdell's task is to combine these lists with other sources of information to create a final list of those most likely to respond to marketing for a specific product or service.

Coverdell had a number of sophisticated programs to assess an individual's likelihood to respond based on publicly available census factors such as income, location, age and previous purchases. But reconciling these lists with the client lists, and the client lists with each other, was a major challenge. Because of the varying sources and

Solution Overview

Microsoft Certified Solution Provider

Blackstone & Cullen, Inc.

Scenario

Business Intelligence

Industry

Financial Services

Company Profile

Atlanta, Georgia-based Coverdell & Company markets insurance and related financial products and services for banks and other institutions via phone and direct mail. Coverdell has 43 employees and has been in business for 35 years.

Situation

To target potential customers, Coverdell uses public information from 20-30 different sources. Without a relational database, staff had to eliminate duplicate contacts manually, and customer response information went uncollected, forcing staff to spend most of their time collecting data rather than thinking and using the knowledge their marketing programs had generated.

Business Solution

BAC created a Decision Support System using SQL Server with Data Transformation Services (DTS). DTS can handle all 30 different information sources as well as changing formats without extra programming.

Benefits

With the new system, Coverdell has shaved 70 hours off processing time and managers now have easy access to the business intelligence they need. The company has also gained a critical competitive edge: it can now offer new services at a cost way below what competitors charge.

formats, the company's legacy system of flat files and Microsoft Access and FoxPro databases couldn't reconcile the multiple lists automatically. Instead, staff had to go through lists manually to identify duplicates and eliminate people contacted in recent months. That process—sorting through up to 15 unique flat files per final marketable list—took about 70 hours a week, creating a serious, FTE-intensive operational bottleneck. There was also no automated way to link individuals by household. Duplicate calls, either to the same person or to another individual in the same household, were hard to avoid, frustrating sales staff, annoying potential customer s, and wasting valuable marketing resources.

Coverdell approached Blackstone & Cullen, Inc. (BAC), a Microsoft Certified Solution Provider headquartered in Atlanta, about a potential solution.

"We needed someone with relational database experience who could hit the ground running," says Jeff Johnston, Coverdell's senior vice president and chief marketing officer.

BAC agreed to create a Decision Support System (DSS) for Coverdell's Marketing Services department. At a minimum, the new system would have to easily accept multiple, disparate inputs from various sources; reconcile duplications and conflicts; identify individuals by household; and record a history of contact and sale for each household.

SQL Server: DTS Makes the Difference

To create the Data-Mart that would provide data mining and predictive modeling capabilities for Coverdell's Marketing Services staff, BAC needed a relational database—the question was which one. Initially, BAC considered both Microsoft SQL Server and Oracle 8, but SQL Server quickly won out. The cost of maintaining the database and the availability of database developers were part of the reason, but the primary factor, according to BAC developer Shashi Nittur, was the SQL Server Data Transformation Services (DTS) feature.

"The DTS feature was very critical for this application since the source information for the Data-Mart came from several outside vendors such as banks, telemarketing companies, and insurance providers," Nittur says. "In all we had about 30 different flat file layouts, as well as database files from Microsoft Access and FoxPro."

Not only does Coverdell have different sources of data, but many inputs undergo format changes from time to time. With Oracle, the whole script would have had to be rewritten every time there was a substantial format change. DTS, on the other hand, allowed for controlling 90 percent of these changes ahead of time. With SQL Server, "it's all set up in advance," Nittur says.

BAC completed the project in four months, saving the company about $420,000 over the cost of handling the project in-house, according to Johnston.

"BAC did in 120 days what would have taken us 2-1/2 years to do ourselves," Johnston says. "We definitely made the right decision to outsource this to them. Plus, their knowledge and ability with SQL Server really jumpstarted the project."

"Now, we can offer services that most of our competitors either don't offer or charge hundreds of thousands of dollars more for."

Jeff Johnston
Senior Vice President and Chief Marketing Officer
Coverdell & Company

Getting a Jump on the Competition

Coverdell's new Decision Support System tracks all relevant customer information including account transaction history, contact histor y and channel (telemarketing, direct mail, etc.), promotional disposition (responsive, non -responsive, etc.), anticipated marketing scores versus actual responses and customer product ownership.

Manual list sorting has been completely eliminated, shaving off about 70 hours of work per week. Now, staff simply flag the names of individuals who are to be contacted for a particular marketing effort, automatically putting them off limits for a specified period of time.

The system also offers rich analysis a nd reporting capabilities. Managers can easily track detailed information on customers, response trends and the attractiveness of different products, making strategic planning quicker and more accurate.

With that kind of business intelligence at its fing ertips, Coverdell is poised to leap ahead of its competition. Not only is operational efficiency greatly improved, but the company can now offer services that their competitors either can't, or must charge hundreds of thousands of dollars more for. Cover dell is already capitalizing on its new edge, with negotiations underway for substantial new client contracts based on this capability.