# EVERYDAY BUSINESS INSIGHT

*In seeking to derive greater business insight from its organisational data to provide enhanced service levels to the corporates for which it administers medical schemes, Metropolitan Health Group turned to the BI Practice. Using the groundbreaking Sybase IQ solution, it has not only realised faster, more efficient data management and enhanced reporting and analytics, but has done so with the lowest total cost of ownership possible.*

## ▶ The BI Practice approach

The BI Practice, a Sybase company, specialises in the design and deployment of the world's most trusted business intelligence solutions together with high level expertise, experience and understanding, to help South African organisations to transform the quality and intelligence of their business information and achieve optimal business performance. It achieves this by focusing on three key disciplines:

- *Integration:* Integration of data across multiple systems provides an enterprise-wide view of a business. The BI Practice offers solutions and expertise to integrate and consolidate data from diverse and disparate sources, stored and managed centrally for fast and easy access.
- *Data quality:* Data quality is a growing concern for most organisations. The BI Practice delivers solutions that ensure that information intensive applications such as BI, ERP and CRM can achieve trusted results from data that is reliable, complete and accurate.
- *Business insight:* The BI Practice develops business intelligence solutions that ensure a business's target users gain faster, more flexible access to information they need, when they need it, in the format that they need it, in order to make better business decisions faster.

Leading clients of the BI Practice include: Telkom, Standard Bank, Shoprite, Liberty, Volkswagen, Investec, Pick 'n Pay, Santam, Harmony Gold, FNB and the Department of Health.

## MANAGING MODERN HEALTHCARE

Employee medical schemes have gone through turbulent times, with many experiencing spiralling medical and administrative costs that have pushed funds to the brink of ruin. With employers now spending between 10-15% of payroll costs on employee healthcare, against 1% twenty years ago, the long-term viability of medical schemes clearly relies on their ability to manage risk and control costs effectively.

Enter Metropolitan Health Group (MHG), specialising in providing full healthcare administration services for corporates such as BP, Engen, Pick 'n Pay, Sappi and Wooltru, as well as the country's civil servants and their families through the Government Employees' Medical Scheme (GEMS). With over one million lives under administration, MHG is the leader in service provision to employers country-wide.

## MEETING SPECIFIC NEEDS

MHG has built a strong reputation for matching its proven operational methodologies with cutting-edge technologies. "Our ability to provide the most comprehensive business solutions relies on constantly evolving new and innovative technologies to enhance our operational efficiency," says Pierre Robertson, head of decision support systems at MHG. "At the heart of this is our approach to information management. The rapid growth of our business has seen claims records grow nearly 500% in five years, and our ability to manage this data effectively and drill down into it for greater business insight links directly to risk management, cost containment and enhanced quality of service."

MHG requires greater business insight in two distinct areas:

- *Administrative processes:* This involves the management of membership information as well as claims receipt and payment. The former requires high level reporting on key membership trends; the latter requires operational reporting on variables such as financials, turnaround times, etc.
- *Managed healthcare:* Through its Qualsa subsidiary, MHG provides disease and wellness programmes that focus on health risk and benefit management. This requires a higher level of insight that is typically provided to management level at MHG, and focuses on issues like risk mitigation, disease management, healthcare utilisation patterns and fraud detection.

## RAISING LEVELS OF INTELLIGENCE

In the late 1990s, MHG's legacy systems dictated that the organisation had only the most basic of reporting, and turnaround times ran to many hours, even days. With a critical requirement for more interactive reporting and faster turnaround times, MHG began evaluating Sybase IQ, a core solution of the BI Practice. Bryn Davies, regional manager for the BI Practice, remembers it well. "We did a proof of concept for MHG using Sybase IQ and their existing data, and in the case of

reporting that traditionally took 12 hours to complete, we were able to take this down to just 12 minutes. MHG decided at once that Sybase IQ would be the foundation of their data warehouse."

For MHG, a distinct advantage of Sybase IQ is that it is based on a column-based instead of a traditional row-based approach of other data environments. This meant that specialised indexes could deliver enhanced query performance for low cardinality data, textual analysis and real-time comparisons for Web applications, whilst Sybase IQ's Bit-Wise indexing allows aggregations to be done 'on the fly', driving further efficiencies by removing the need for pre-aggregation of data in ETL.

"But perhaps the biggest attraction is that its column-based approach makes data compression far easier to implement than traditional methods," says Robertson. "Whereas conventional data warehouse approaches can see the original data expand by up to six times, Sybase IQ delivers data compression of 50-70%. For MHG, this not only means a significant reduction in the hardware required to support our business intelligence and delivers major storage advantages in meeting the data compliance demands of our industry."

## DELIVERING ENHANCED REPORTING

Sybase IQ has not only been the bedrock for MHG's data warehousing, but has evolved to deliver increasingly functional business intelligence tools. It is the primary engine for all scheduled administrative and managed healthcare reports, which are run automatically and e-mailed to pre-determined recipients and published to a central repository. It also underpins all ad hoc reporting, delivering reliable, complete and accurate data to the Cognos tools that users use to interrogate the data warehouse.

Sybase IQ's biggest challenge has been dealing with its own success, as Davies explains: "A common Sybase IQ experience is that the more available and accessible it makes the data, the greater the demand, and MHG was no exception. We did in-depth studies around the peak demand times and data of highest need, and restructured accordingly to optimise drill-down times and schedule report runs in low traffic periods. This meant 'splitting' the data warehouse into a 'live' side for scheduled reports, and a 'development' side that streams only the most critical data from the 'live' side, and is extremely flexible and responsive."

## PROVIDING ONGOING BENEFITS

MHG's use of Sybase IQ has realised a number of benefits:

- **Fast, efficient data management:** Sybase IQ delivers the best speed performance for MHG's data demands, whilst its compression efficiencies allow MHG to store far more data.
- **Complete and reliable information:** Being able to store larger amounts of data has enabled far greater depth in backwards statistical analysis and risk prediction, ensuring that MHG's managers have the most complete and reliable information possible.

- **Advanced risk tools:** Sybase IQ has facilitated MHG's development of a number of tools to mitigate risk – for example, risk marts have been developed in which the organisation's risk models are matched to current data, and risk 'triggers' identify high risk scenarios.
- **Effective compliance and auditing:** Greater storage facilitates easy online archiving of 5-7 years of data within Sybase IQ for compliance purposes, and scheme auditing now even takes place on the data warehouse, reducing time and cost.
- **Lowest TCO:** Higher storage, faster speeds and the associated reduction in hardware demands all add up to the lowest total cost of ownership possible for MHG's data warehouse needs.

For Robertson the future of the MHG-BI Practice relationship is bright indeed. "We will increasingly be feeding information from the data warehouse back into the operational system, so that for example, the risk management profile generated of a patient can be accessed real time by the managed healthcare team, and better inform decisions on hospital admissions, authorisations of medicines and so on," he concludes. "We have entered a cycle of continuous improvement in our management and use of information, and are truly realising the vision of enhanced business insight everyday."

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