B.I.PRACTICE™

A SYBASE COMPANY

PREDICTABLE REPORTING EXCELLENCE FROM SYBASE IQ

→ **When insurance giant Santam wanted to overhaul its analytical processing system,it turned to leading BI solutions provider B.I.Practice for Sybase IQ to create a stable environment and deliver significantly faster, improved query results.**

THRIVING IN A COMPETITIVE ENVIRONMENT

The global economic downturn has had a significant impact on enterprises of all sizes, across all sectors and the insurance industry is no different. Despite the downturn, South Africa's long-and-short-term insurance markets are still expected to grow at CAGRs of almost 12 and 17% respectively between 2007-2012, underlining the fact that the local insurance sector is not only highly developed but ranks among the most sophisticated sectors globally.

Santam, one of South Africa's most recognisable brands and the country's biggest short-term insurer is poised to take full advantage of this growth opportunity in troubled times by leveraging the very best that Business Intelligence has to offer to gain new insights into existing and potential client bases while enhancing current processes to the maximum.

FACING CHALLENGES

Although already running a full BI environment, Santam was experiencing problems with the stability of the existing system, and was looking to replace the database technology for their online analytical processing (OLAP) environment. The run times were unpredictable, and to make matters worse, the vendor was unable to provide Santam with the local skills and experience needed to support and deal with these problems.

Ken Newby, Warehouse Architect at Santam, explains: "We specifically needed to improve the analytical side of things – we do no transactional processes here – so we wanted a true analytical database, and started looking around for the right solution."

Santam put out a comprehensive RFP, and invited all the major database

vendors to respond. After an exhaustive RFP process, they opted for Sybase IQ from B.I.Practice.

Sybase IQ is a highly optimised analytics server designed specifically to deliver faster results for mission-critical business intelligence, data warehouse and reporting solutions on any standard hardware and operating system. Sybase IQ works with diverse data – including unstructured data – and sources to deliver unsurpassed query performance at the lowest price/performance available.

TICKING ALL THE BOXES

Newby says that the decision to choose Sybase IQ was based on four criteria: "Cost; expert, local product support; the results of the proof of concept reports; and savings in respect of processing power and disk space."

Sybase IQ ticked all the boxes.

"Obviously, if you want to replace an existing system with something new, you need strong motivation for this, so it was important that costs were contained as much as possible during the implementation and conversion phase" says Newby. Another issue was user disruption – and keeping that to a minimum. "We needed an approach that would:

1. Cause as little disruption to users as possible;
2. Provide the same answers on a repeatable basis;
3. Guarantee the accuracy of the conversions which lead to the decision to run the old and new system in parallel for a period of time;

This approach enabled us to do the conversion with no downtime and ensure that all our queries balanced."

"We had limited disk space available and didn't want to purchase more for the implementation stage, as we knew we

MAXIMISE SYBASE IQ	
Faster	**Waiting Hours for Queries to Process?** Sybase IQ turns queries that take hours or days into queries that take seconds or minutes.
Lower TCO	**Data Explosion Blowing Away Your Budget?** Sybase IQ compresses data up to 70%; traditional databases explode data by 150-500%.
Easier	**Tuning and Optimising taking All Day?** Sybase IQ doesn't require time- and resource-intensive tuning to obtain excellent performance.
More Scalable	**More Users Demanding Access to More and More Data?** Sybase IQ delivers faster results with thousands of users and terabytes of data.
Right-Time BI	**Reporting Dragging Down Operational Performance?** Sybase IQ accelerates reporting without burdening operational systems.

> "Sybase IQ really is a phenomenal solution; it blows your mind when you see it in action and realise just what it's capable of."

would have spare capacity once Sybase IQ was installed," says Newby. "This meant that we had to do the full implementation using existing disk space. We had the old system running in parallel and had to keep it running as we fed the information into the new one."

The project required some delicate management of data too, and Newby explains how they ended up putting all superfluous data onto tape, and then putting it back as needed. "Sybase IQ's compression rates are spectacular, which really helped."

ROLLING-OUT THE BENEFITS

The entire project – from RFQ to completion – took around eight months, and was rolled-out in a phased approach. Once completed, the benefits soon became obvious.

"The biggest win was the stability of the environment," says Newby, relating how, before the Sybase IQ installation, jobs could take 30 minutes to run in one month, and five hours the next, for no apparent reason. "Because Sybase IQ is so consistent and quick, the jobs are much more manageable and run much faster. The query times are phenomenal, and because the way Sybase IQ is architected, it's easy to understand and see exactly how the runtimes are reduced and compression is obtained."

The benefits did not stop at these improved efficiencies, however – there were financial benefits too, as Newby explains: "We would pay for Sybase IQ within four years, without costing-in any of the soft issues (better response time, more stable environment, etc.). This was based on reducing one database administrator, no longer requiring a full-time query optimiser resource, and reducing the queries on IT."

Significant savings on storage space were also achieved, with production moving from 2.5 Terabytes to 750 Gigabytes due to compression and the optimisation of specific queries. Where previously eight CPU machines had been used, this was cut by 50% to just four.

Overall use of the information being processed has also improved, says Newby. "Business can now use available information on a more strategic basis. Although the information was always there, the fact that it can now be accessed so much more quickly means that users can make better business decisions."

FREEING UP IT

Probably the biggest benefit in the future will be the fact that IT will no longer have to be so involved in the query process, as the users are now more willing to make use of it by themselves and ask different questions, which in turn enables IT to deliver more data into the system. "We have in effect created the ability to enable the business to leverage its current BI information for its own strategic benefit. This means that IT now has the ability to make more information available by better-utilising resources to deliver data to business instead of trying to tune the query for the users."

"Sybase IQ really is a phenomenal solution; it blows your mind when you see it in action and realise just what it's capable of," concludes Newby.