

KNOWING AND GROWING THE CUSTOMER, STARTING WITH BI

→ Sybase B.I. Practice prepared the field for TsoGo Sun Gaming to launch a comprehensive customer-centric strategy, starting with a powerful BI system that gave insight into business trends, divisional performance and customer analytics in a technologically disparate and distributed setting.



PROJECT AND SOLUTION ESSENTIALS

B.I. Practice first conducted a requirement analysis, which detailed TsoGo's need for business intelligence from the various systems in question, and BI's inter-operation with TsoGo's CRM system. A technical analysis of the data source systems followed, and based on that, B.I. Practice designed a source-to-target 'map', outlining the presentation of the data in the BI system.

Based on the design, the resulting solution comprised a data warehouse, built using PowerDesigner by Sybase. A data integration, data quality and metadata infrastructure was built using IBM Information Server. Thereafter, B.I. Practice built reports using Cognos. Besides representing Sybase technology, B.I. Practice is also a reseller for Cognos and IBM integration technology. Blignaut describes both vendors' tools as "a pleasure to integrate with any system – just plug it in".

BETTING ON BI

TsoGo Sun Gaming (TsoGo) is a South African gaming group with five casinos: the flagship Montecasino (Fourways, Johannesburg); Suncoast Casino and EntertainmentWorld (Durban); Hemingways Casino (East London); The Ridge Casino and Entertainment Resort (Witbank); and Emnotweni Casino (Nelspruit).

TsoGo runs distributed gaming transaction systems as well as packaged supporting systems (accounting and HR applications) at all its casinos. In 2007 the group conceptualised a wide-ranging customer relationship management initiative, but its non-integrated enterprise IT architecture presented an obstacle – the extraction of information from gaming systems and the required group-level consolidation into information that its CRM system could use was a cumbersome, manual process.

To overcome this the company invited proposals in March 2007, in a

centralised business intelligence (BI) drive covering Montecasino, Suncoast and Hemingways.

QUALITY, TIMELY RESPONSE

Noeleen Bruton, TsoGo Sun's marketing director and project sponsor, says that a BI solution was necessary to improve the availability and quality of information, eliminate guesswork within the organisation and enhance communication among divisions and casinos, all whilst continuously coordinating activities. It would also need to enable a quick response to changes in financial conditions, customer preferences and operational requirements.

Allana Barber, E Manager: Marketing, TsoGo Sun Gaming, summarises the boon of BI as follows: "BI helps us leverage the power of data mining, forecasting and other predictive analytic technologies, and coupled with the benefits of data integration, good data quality and reporting technologies, we can now place

strategic focus on improving the overall performance of the organisation."

In short, TsoGo embraced the value of BI in its ability to gather enough of the right data at the right time, convert it into a usable form to analyse it and translate it into a positive impact on business strategy and decision-making.

BI TO THE RESCUE

Peter Blignaut, business analyst at Sybase SA's B.I. Practice, says that a BI layer was introduced above TsoGo's transactional systems to automate and consolidate reports, which enable business decisions that would increase TsoGo's responsiveness and feed into the customer relationship management (CRM) system.

"Previously, casino administrative staff would manually query the transactional systems at each casino, compile reports and e-mail them to head office," he



says. "The primary benefit of Tsogo's BI system is its ability to automate and centralise data at a detailed level, freeing up many man hours and allowing detailed business-wide scrutiny of systems and their contribution to revenue flows."

How does BI do that? Instead of merely extracting reports, the BI and associated systems supplied by B.I. Practice extract transaction-level details from operational databases", Blignaut explains. "System databases had to be replicated and a purpose-built data warehouse was constructed and queried by the tools we provided."

DON'T BRING ME DOWN

The group-wide value of BI, as explained by Blignaut, is a clear winner for any company that has to work long and hard to get a clean, uniform view of its business data. But before BI could even set about matching and surpassing a job that previously took days – now available at the click of a button – a challenge cropped up: "The solution could not have a limiting impact on transactional systems," says Blignaut. "It would have harmed Tsogo significantly if gaming systems were to go down during the loading of data." In addition, the gaming industry's use of wide-area networks (WANs) is heavily constrained by regulation, so the BI system had to work its magic with the least possible impact on the network too.

The solution to both constraints was simple and elegant. "Using a database replication solution, data was 'trickled' non-intrusively and in real time from target gaming systems to a staging area, where a full copy was stored in a data warehouse built for BI purposes," says Blignaut. "This solution would have the least possible disruption."

CONFORMED DIMENSIONS

In its first-time BI venture, Tsogo approached several suppliers with a request for proposals. B.I. Practice was chosen as the primary contractor to supply, implement and maintain a core BI system. B.I. Practice subscribes to a number of best-in-class data warehouse (DWH) design methodologies, principally the renowned Kimball method.

Blignaut says B.I. Practice's promise of data conformity through its use of the

Kimball method was the deal clincher. "The inter-relationship between BI and CRM for the purposes of one-to-one marketing is very important to us. The Kimball method of conformed dimensions stores all data about a customer, wherever it may be located, in exactly the same way, so as to be analysable across the business."

Blignaut confirms that the Kimball method is a strong differentiator for B.I. Practice, but notes that the company will assist customers to select an appropriate design approach for each situation.

START TO FINISH

The project kicked off in March 2007, and was due to finish in August the same year. The scope was, however, soon extended. "Tsogo also wanted to work cost metrics into the BI system," says Blignaut. "Since only revenue was measured by the gaming systems, the scope has to be increased to include accounting support systems." Tsogo also requested the addition of 'footfall' metrics – the number of gamers entering the casino and their movements – as a source system to the BI system.

"They basically wanted to consolidate information beyond existing processes, within the BI system." Blignaut notes that while project communication with stakeholders within the group was comprehensive, project extensions were perceived as a delay by some users, and managing user expectations became a challenge.

Other challenges came in the form of limited local expertise on the gaming system database structures, but Blignaut says this was neatly circumvented with the use of the PowerDesigner tool from Sybase, which allows BI implementers to reverse-engineer the structure of databases and query its contents. "The reverse-engineering part of the project was simplified significantly," he says laughingly. In the end the project was signed off in February 2008.

WELL RECEIVED

Tsogo's Bruton says the main benefits of the BI system is in its enablement of Tsogo's CRM strategy. "It gives us the power to transform data into information with powerful, easy-to-use analytic tools, and automated monthly executive report

and business packs. It gives us the ability to view combined information through user-friendly dashboards, executive-level reporting from the desktop, 'drag-and-drop' functionality and drill-down reporting.

A historical data store allows monitoring of variances and business evolution, providing Tsogo with the ability to do trend analysis and advanced data mining across gaming and non-gaming areas of the business. This further enables tracking and monitoring of performance across regions and by patron. Information is provided on an hourly, weekly, monthly, yearly or year-to-date basis, focusing on tables, slots, patrons, loyalty, CRM, footfall and financials. Impressively, all information is available within 24 hours of the gaming day-end.

Blignaut adds that the system's most notable difference is in the speed of reporting. "Before they would spend days on reports, now they are available at the click of a button. It basically frees up one day in the life of every senior BI user per month."

FUTURE DERIVATIVES

Although Montecasino is the test site for the more advanced features, Tsogo anticipates a group-wide roll-out. Blignaut says B.I. Practice is already back on site, adding the Gamesmart transaction system as a data source for the Mpumalanga-based Tsogo Sun casinos. "The pleasing thing for them is that they are effectively running that project themselves – we are only providing development skills," says Blignaut.

This is perhaps the most eloquent assessment of the value created by B.I. Practice, other than the system itself. A good solution provider creates not just good solutions, but sustainability too. 



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