

TimeXtender realizes steel manufacturer's BI vision while solving ERP migration challenge

Belgian steel manufacturer Intersig N.V. wanted to create a customer centric reporting platform guaranteeing quality and service at a competitive price per ton. The company tried to upgrade and migrate ERP within an existing BI setup using QlikView™ front-end and Microsoft ERP (Dynamics AX) source data. But no IT service providers however were experts on both fronts and the ERP upgrade would result in 80-90% of the BI system having to be reworked. TimeXtender's Data Warehouse Automation solved the challenge, easily delivering Qlikview code files and scripts while nurturing the BI system through ERP migration.

Back in 2008, quarterly figures and monthly reports to management were adequate. But with the financial crisis ending and business expanding, Intersig needed to provide these figures on a daily basis, often faster.

Intersig N.V. specializes in high quality reinforcement steel components. Product range consists of coils, bars, mesh, lattice girders, spacers and brickwork reinforcement as well as coil clamps and wire straighteners.

"In the construction industry, there is no pay-off between quality and service. You must be able to guarantee both, or face running out of business. Business Intelligence can help us deliver on those promises," says Hugo Van den Broecke, CEO of Intersig. In 2013, Intersig invested in QlikView™ software rolled out to management teams in Belgium, the Netherlands and France. The teams quickly uncovered the value of data for decision-making and became enthusiastic consumers of Qlikview's BI dashboard and reporting capabilities. Source data for management reporting came from a Microsoft ERP Dynamics AX 2009 system for the operation in Belgium.

Data backbone constantly changing

Other sources and local ERP systems existed in the organisation however, and these sources needed to be included to provide better analytics.

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Pol Lavens, Plant manager of Intersig France

"Our data backbone has been changing constantly. When your goal is to deliver on-time information, this becomes a challenge. Managing data change becomes key to delivering on-time results," says Luc Van Dessel, IT manager at Intersig.

"High-performance Business Intelligence like QlikView™ required us to rethink management information. Our BI vision is to adapt customer centric reporting, which involves an unbelievable amount of data," says Thomas Truyens, Intersig's Change Manager.

Part of this data came from ERP sources, but in order to deliver value to customers and to offer a holistic view to management, Intersig needed to be able to work with as much data as possible. Pol Lavens, Plant manager of Intersig France illustrates:

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Impossible to hire someone with both business and IT skills

Although QlikView software allowed for fast distribution of data and reports, being able to maintain the information flow underneath proved much more difficult. This became apparent in early 2014 when Intersig decided to upgrade the ERP system and add more sources to management information. The upgrade of the ERP system came with a new data structure, which threatened to force 80-90% rework on the BI system.

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Luc Van Dessel, IT manager at Intersig

"We have the business knowledge and data management skills, but the change in ERP data structure forced us to reach for outside help. Our ERP provider did not know about QlikView, and our QlikView partner had no clue about the ERP data structure," explains Luc Van Dessel

"At first, we tried finding a new IT service provider capable of helping us on both fronts, but that proved impossible. Some

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providers may have some technological knowledge, but they lacked feeling for our line of business, or vice versa. In all fairness, I believe it would be difficult for anyone to be excellent at both. Furthermore, we have learned that when you depend on such resources, they tend to get in the way of our data delivery and time-to-action objectives.”

Not a traditional Data Warehouse experience

A Data Warehouse is a best practice for handling multiple data sources. It is also the only practical method for handling historical data changes. From past BI experience Intersig already knew about the Data Warehouse, but disqualified this component for lack of business agility.

“In traditional, manually built Data Warehousing, you need to work with teams of developers, which tends to be slow and costly. When we found out about TimeXtender and Data Warehouse Automation, we immediately scheduled a demo – which looked and sounded very promising,” says Intersig’s IT manager.

Together with TimeXtender partner Ad Ultima Group, who had the knowledge and experience in manufacturing and the associated BI, as well as being a top Microsoft ERP partner in the area, Intersig set up a test implementation.

“Like most Microsoft ERP partners, Ad Ultima Group focusses BI delivery on the Microsoft portfolio, and they even had the business knowledge required. The initial TimeXtender demo showed smooth automation, easily generating QlikView code files and scripts, but we also needed to make sure this platform would be capable of nurturing our BI system during ERP migration,” says Thomas Truyens.

BI vision delivered

TimeXtender delivered. From the initial contact and demo in March of 2014, and the test implementation carried out by Ad Ultima Group early on in April, Intersig signed for a

TimeXtender license by the end of that month. By the time the company finished the ERP migration in May, they were ready to go live with BI reporting.

“Time to result has been spectacular! TimeXtender simply helped us automate the technical process, just like QlikView has helped us deliver striking visuals. We have been benefiting from Data Warehouse Automation for a year now. I can testify that TimeXtender, together with its partner Ad Ultima Group, have been true to promise; We have been able to deliver on our BI vision, which has left us with time to focus on other strategic change projects. It is reassuring to know that whatever future change may hold, our team will be ready to handle it,” says Thomas Truyens who now sees Intersig’s Data Warehouse as a central hub of continuously updated data, not only providing information to management, but also facilitating other data driven processes, such as budgeting and forecasting.

Intersig’s BI team is delivering consolidated information once every day now, or more frequently when needed. It is up to management to decide on a course of action, based on this information. Getting agile information in this manner instead of quarterly reports of course means that Intersig sometimes work with incomplete data. But as CEO of Intersig Hugo Van Den Broecke puts it:

“Better to be approximately right, than exactly wrong.”

About TimeXtender DWA

Bridge the gap between business and IT with Discovery Hub® from TimeXtender – a comprehensive end to end solution. Unlike other approaches – which rely on a mix of tools and vendors – for things like scripting, data prep, and data blending – Discovery Hub® is an integrated platform that provides the benefits of one-stop shopping. Discovery Hub® from TimeXtender leverages the power of automation and makes it easy to access, model and govern data. With 2,600 customers in 60 countries, TimeXtender is the world’s leading provider of Data Warehouse Automation for Microsoft® SQL Server®.