



Peverel Group

In Brief

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In Brief

- Initial Proof of Concept up and running within 3 weeks
- Has enabled multiple performance improvement projects across the group
- ROI achieved through a single trial by enabling a more informed business decision

The Peverel Group finds that a Data Academy® enabled Data Warehouse is a group-wide Business Intelligence success story in the making.

Background

The Peverel Group of companies comprises some of the leading providers of property related services in the UK. Their services include residential property management, installation and maintenance of communication and security systems, retirement property sales and building and contents insurance. They are also a leading freeholder and manager of privately-owned residential developments with a substantial nationwide portfolio.

Challenges

To reduce costs through the launch of “Your Property On-line” website

Peverel Group’s main business driver was with a new website called “Your Property Online” which would enable residents to view their service account, billing and payment history, report maintenance issues and get information about their development. The initiative had been started by the group to improve the accessibility of their services to residents and reduce the rising costs of employing service desk personnel to field payment and information enquiries.

Peverel Group already had a trial site setup to prove the concept, but the solution was causing them some headaches. The entire payment history data was being extracted as text file reports from each property company’s management information system called ECS, which uses its own proprietary flat-file database. The data was uploaded centrally, imported and consolidated into a SQL Server database and then pushed out to the website. The solution was taking in excess of 4 hours to process one company’s dataset end-to-end. As Andy Prince, Peverel Group’s Software Development Manager explains, “Adding the data from the other six companies would have taken over 30 hours to process and could no longer be processed overnight. A new solution was required.”

To strengthen their performance reporting and data sharing initiative

The second challenge was to consolidate data from all the companies across the group, centralise reporting and help drive operational improvements by encouraging the sharing of data between the company divisions. This initiative would enable a concept they call the “Single View of The Customer”, a strategy that would enable them to capitalise on any cross-selling opportunities.

Insource

Andy Prince approached the Data Academy reseller Insource to see what could be achieved using the product. He knew that the group needed to develop a data warehouse which would give them more sophisticated tools for extracting, quality checking and transforming data, but the solution had to give them flexibility to develop the warehouse themselves to keep their costs down and would need to be easily extendable as the information needs of the business grew.

As Andy explains, “The other issue we had was that while our development team had varying levels of technical ability and experience in SQL Server, none of them had any real experience or skills on the BI side, using Integration or Analysis Services, so it was all new territory for us.”

After seeing a demo of Data Academy they were suitably impressed.

“Data Academy allows you to put together a data warehouse without actually having to have detailed knowledge of integration and analysis services”, says Andy. He continues, “Subsequently the team went on a couple of Microsoft courses on these SQL Server BI technologies and came back from them having even more respect for the product. The amount of development time it saves you is huge. I thought that our developers would want to write a Data Warehouse from scratch, but in fact it was the opposite. It has removed the bulk of the coding and enabled us to concentrate on adding value through analysis and reporting.”



Business Intelligence
Data Management Solutions
ISV/Software Solutions
SOA and Business Process

Peverel Group

Solution

"Our normal approach to projects such as Peverel's is to undertake a scope study to identify the exact nature of the requirement.." explains business development director, Hazel Markou. "However, we could see fairly quickly that this approach was not going to work for them. By combining a modest amount of Consultancy days, with an entry level Data Academy licence, we were able to put together a trial package that would help to convince the Peverel management that the data warehouse project was worth long term investment." and she continued to explain. "This was frankly only possible due to the Data Academy product, had this have been a native SQL implementation, the time frames for the trial would have been significantly greater and therefore potentially out of reach.."

Peverel undertook a fixed price trial for them to prove the concept. "All the other tools we'd looked at were significantly more expensive, so the trial was a no-brainer." says Andy.



Peverel put their developers on the 5-day Data Academy training programme and bought some initial consultancy from Insource to help them get started. Andy was impressed, "The Data Academy training has been really successful. If you go on standard Microsoft training courses you find they give you the basic skills in the product, but with Insource you get smaller class sizes and hands-on, real-world exercises which mean you get to practise the skills that you end up using. You're given plenty of time for questions and get a real foundation in the product. I've hardly had to look at the manual since."

Market share analysis, proof of concept

Retirement Home Search (RHS) is a division of the group which acts as an online estate agency for marketing retirement properties across the UK. They wanted to understand, within each property development managed by the group, what percentage market share they had for sales rolled up to region and company level. As Andy Prince explains, "Sales data for all the companies sat within ECS, while data for RHS sat in their own database. The task was to pull the data from both systems and match up the sales. It was certainly a real challenge. People over the years had tried it with spreadsheets and exports, but found it too cumbersome to do on a regular basis. With Data Academy we were able to create the extracts and data transformations we needed and then schedule the whole thing to run overnight."

"It was a real eye opener, it's allowed RHS to see where they had lost market share and why. The marketing communications department now understands where to focus their effort."

The Market Share pilot was presented to their IT Steering Group which consists of the Managing Directors of all of the companies within the group. Andy continues, "We gave them an understanding of what we'd done and our strategy moving forward to get the buy-in at top level. It was very successful. They gave us the go ahead to purchase a full enterprise license of Data Academy on the basis that we could see so many opportunities for it in the future."

Results

As Andy explains, "Data Academy has meant that our developers have been able to bring new data sources into the Data Warehouse very quickly, enabling us to extend its functionality as we find new business uses. Because Data Academy is an open tool that builds SQL Server components for you, we don't have the problem of vendor lock-in. As the team have improved their SQL Server skills over time we have been able to do some interesting projects like sending emails out to prompt the fix data quality issues, that's all straightforward SQL Server capability."

Clean Data is Good Data

Andy Prince explains, "One of the biggest wins, something that we weren't expecting, was the ability to clean up a lot of dirty data. We knew that there would be some data quality issues, but more than we thought. One particular case is on the property resale system in Retirement Home Search (RHS). When someone calls up to enquire about a property we ask them where they heard about us, i.e. the source of enquiry.

The Sales Negotiators have a pre-configured list of these codes, i.e. which newspaper, website or magazine had led to the enquiry. We quickly realised that the system enabled them to overtype these descriptions, so when we looked at the data, rather than having about 40 source of enquiry codes we ended up with over 1600. Through data cleansing, we narrowed it down to 28. The data warehouse now checks that data using the Data Academy JAIL-it module to jail any source of enquiry codes that don't match our master set. We are able to catch any employee that breaches the business data rules and send a notification email to them to correct the data, enabling us to track and fix the dirty data at source."

Averting a potential business disaster

We advertise on a number of property portal websites and due to this source-of-enquiry problem we were about to drop one well known site because the cost of advertising on it was significantly greater than the others. When we cleansed the data we found that this website was one of our biggest referrers. Our incredibly lucky timing diverted a potentially catastrophic business mistake. This is the sort of success story that is going around the organisation. I estimate that this one success alone has paid for the cost of Data Academy already.

The RHS trial has led us to setup a new project to check our data quality in other areas of the business. We are developing a Data Dictionary of business rules for all our systems and will use Data Academy JAIL-it functionality to correct data, pushing quality issues back to the source.

Peverel Building Technologies (PBT)

Andy Prince has had similar success stories in other divisions of the group. As he explains, "In Peverel Building Technologies we use Microsoft's Dynamics NAV. All of the SQL Reporting Services reports are running off the one live server and depending on who has written those reports, the queries can be a bit complex. We've had instances where it's brought the server to a grinding halt.

What we've done is use Data Academy to bring that information in and transform it to create the report datasets overnight, we've removed the need for that complex query each time the report is run. We've moved some of PBT's reports to the Data Warehouse to show them the benefits. The results have been amazing; we had one report that took nearly 20 minutes to render now it takes just seconds. It just works."

Summary

- Initial Proof of Concept up and running within 3 weeks
- Has enabled multiple performance improvement projects across the group
- Return-On-Investment achieved through a single trial by enabling a more informed business decision

About The Data Academy® Solution

Data Academy is a data warehouse builder which leverages the functionality of Microsoft SQL Server 2005. Data Academy builds robust, reliable and expandable data warehouses and data marts in a fraction of the time it takes when using conventional native SQL. Data Academy is a powerful application with an intuitive .NET web-based interface and a full administrative console. Data warehouses built using Data Academy are built to standards encouraged through the Data Academy development interface, a transparent tool that is readily maintainable by trained Data Academy data warehouse development technicians. This reduces the dependency on individuals involved in the original development.