



Kevin Hilder, Director, Information Management

ComSuper turns to SAS® for quality-assured business intelligence

ComSuper – an Australian Commonwealth Government Agency – implemented its SAS® software-based management information platform to deliver quality-assured business intelligence to vastly accelerate deadlines plus lay the foundation for a more complete view of its service delivery to clients.

Industry

Government

Business Issue

ComSuper, an organization with a large array of reporting obligations/requirements both internal and external, was reliant on a manual, distributed process to provide this information. The generation of information through this process was labour intensive and often dependent on the availability of specific subject matter expertise. This situation led ComSuper executive to the decision to modernize and consolidate ComSuper's Information Management.

Solution

ComSuper selected SAS for an end-to-end solution and BI framework to integrate all its data and create a sustainable business intelligence reporting system – which includes the SAS® Data Quality Solution, SAS® Enterprise BI Server and SAS® Data Integration Server – with the added benefit of having a centrally managed metadata repository that sits at the core of the SAS architecture.

Benefits

ComSuper is now able to view its data in context, irrespective of its source – a single source of the truth. Managers now have access to current, accurate and relevant information and have greater confidence in their reports.

The implementation was accomplished in what the organization's Director of Information Management, Kevin Hilder, said was a very fast time frame, particularly considering the size and complexity of the project.

ComSuper, in Australia's capital city of Canberra, is responsible for administering a number of superannuation schemes (retirement benefit funds) for public service employees and Australian Defence Force personnel. The organization is subject to both rigorous government audit requirements and the same strict compliance rules that apply to commercial banks and insurance companies.

Unsustainable spreadsheets

Before SAS, ComSuper created its reports in a variety of spreadsheets and databases. Hilder explained that, "These came from all around the organization and, whilst meeting requirements, were not managed in a consistent nor sustainable way. Even the definition of data was dealt with differently by various subject matter experts and report authors."

Given ComSuper's highly information-sensitive and labor-intensive environment, this situation was clearly unsustainable and led to the decision to modernize the data management and reporting processes. Thus, implementing the business intelligence platform and supporting processes was essentially a "green field" exercise.

ComSuper issued two separate tenders: one inviting proposals for the supply of a data integration product and the other for a business intelligence toolset. While the company was well aware that SAS and others promoted integrated solutions, the aim was to acquire

the best-of-breed software for each component, accepting that ComSuper could potentially be working with different vendors.

A single solution

"SAS won both the data integration and business intelligence tenders on their independent merits as we found that each of their proposals represented a best-fit solution for ComSuper. A single end-to-end solution has had additional benefits due to the savings in effort through utilizing the SAS common metadata repository, which sits at the core of the SAS architecture," said Hilder.

Installing the new platform was indeed fast. Only seven months after exchanging contracts with SAS, ComSuper had implemented a fully automated delivery of information from seven subject areas through its data warehouse, including:

- Human resources.
- Contact centre metrics.
- Member demographics.
- Benefits processing metrics (for four separate superannuation schemes).
- Anti-money laundering.

The subject areas implemented in the data warehouse draw and integrate data from a wide range of applications and technologies, including DB2 UDB, Oracle, SQL Server, Avaya, Microsoft Access and Excel spreadsheets. The ability to draw disparate data sources together has also enabled ComSuper to identify and analyze a number of data quality issues as part of its ongoing data quality improvement process.

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Director, Information Management, ComSuper

Single source of the truth

Summarizing results after those first seven months, Hilder said, “Now, for the first time, we are able to view our data in context, irrespective of its source.

Our environment doesn’t lend itself to a single source of the truth, but by having a consolidated reporting platform, we now have that. The old process for producing reports was onerous and inefficient, with the information produced only being made available to a small portion of the organization. As more content becomes available, managers will be increasingly enabled through access to current, accurate information relevant to their responsibilities.”

Reaction within ComSuper has been very positive. Hilder says that managers who have a wide range of external reporting obligations are now also talking of a “single source of the truth” and have greater confidence in what they see as information that has been “quality-assured.”

He also pointed out that those managers are now enjoying “the timely delivery of information. Previously, the latency of the information they were getting was a cause for concern. Now, by contrast, our delivery of reports is on time – daily, weekly, monthly – depending on the report type.”

Training and support key to success

Hilder identified three main contributions to the success of the implementation. First, “We were very fortunate in having the strong support for the project by

the ComSuper executive team. The emphasis has been on using business intelligence as a way of supporting and enhancing a facts-based decision-making culture at ComSuper.”

Hilder also identified good system design as absolutely critical to the project’s success, particularly with respect to aligning the platform architecture and data modelling to the requirements of the business users.

While recognizing that no major project is without its pressures, Hilder said, “A close and ongoing relationship with SAS has worked well for us, particularly given that this was ComSuper’s first introduction to SAS technology. Installation of SAS Enterprise DI Server and SAS Enterprise BI server into a production and two lower environments was completed by SAS consultants in six weeks – an exceptionally quick turnaround, easing time and cost pressures on the overall project. Our own technical staff were quickly brought up to speed through local training courses and on-site visits by consultants from the SAS office here in Canberra. And for all issues that we have encountered along the way, we have received rapid response from SAS support personnel. These factors have enabled our project to deliver benefits quickly and maintain the confidence of ComSuper business teams in the initiative.”

Improved customer service

Canberra, like Washington, DC, is very much a government town with a high degree of job mobility due to its small geographic size. Public servants tend to move between government sector employers frequently and therefore ComSuper needed to track a raft of membership variations across the schemes it administers.

In the past, one person with multiple scheme memberships would tend to be categorized by his or her specific scheme membership, rather than as an individual who potentially has multiple memberships in different schemes. Hilder says the potential for improved customer service is significant once this single view of the client is achieved.

The information structure currently being developed will enable ComSuper to apply customer behavior analysis to gain a client view of its member superannuants rather than – as is currently the case – only a scheme membership view. A better understanding of the life cycle and information needs of its members will allow ComSuper to formulate a more efficient and effective member communication strategy.

Well-pleased with what business intelligence has delivered for the organization thus far, ComSuper’s executive team knows that the best is yet to come.



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