

Customer Profile

iWay Software's suite assembles powerful, pre-built components for enterprise-class integration scenarios – without custom code – delivering the fastest, most cost-effective, and simplest way to integrate business processes and achieve the promise of SOA: true reusability.

Food Lion

Snapshot

Organization

Food Lion, a major grocery retailer with more than 1,200 stores in 11 states.

The Challenge

Streamline mainframe-based reporting processes and reduce the time it takes to deliver financial information to the field.

The Strategy

Create a parameter-driven, self-service reporting environment that allows managers to access their choice of reports via the corporate intranet, as well as automatically schedule and distribute daily sales reports by e-mail.

The Results

Sales results and other financial data received days to weeks sooner; better analysis of weekly store promotions; the ability to quickly detect buying patterns and respond to changes in the marketplace.

Information Builders Solution

iWay enterprise application integration technology, WebFOCUS, Information Builders' Consulting.



Joanna Swiggett, financial systems analyst, Food Lion.

Food Lion Roars Ahead With Self-Service Reporting System

Online BI Environment Keeps Hundreds of Users in Touch With Daily Sales Information

Margins are slim in the retail grocery business. Market leaders succeed by squeezing every bit of efficiency out of their operations.

At Food Lion, the perpetual need for financial and operational information challenges the financial systems group to develop business intelligence (BI) systems that can collect, organize, and disseminate information quickly and efficiently. Store managers and the operations team – which consists of management in the field – need to quickly assess sales reports, profit and loss statements, and other financial data to obtain a complete picture of performance at their respective levels.

Information Builders' WebFOCUS business intelligence environment is making their jobs easier.

“The self-service environment created for the operations team is intuitive and does not require any training.”

“Our objective was to create a self-service application for financial reporting that could be used by managers throughout the grocery store chain,” says Joanna Swiggett, a financial systems analyst at Food Lion. “The project has been a great success. Almost every day we get requests to create new types of reports with WebFOCUS. The self-service environment created for the operations team is intuitive and does not require any training.”

Swiggett and other employees in Food Lion’s financial systems group develop financial reporting for corporate users and operations reporting for all 1,200 stores and the operations team. In addition to maintaining the corporate general ledger, they serve as the keepers of the financial data and support all of Food Lion’s financial systems.

“My reaction time to every business decision has been cut in half,” says Greg Finchum, director of operations for Region 1 of Food Lion’s Western Division. “I no longer wait for reports. Instead, I react to information that is delivered to me. This has been a huge victory for our organization.”

Taking Inventory

Founded in 1957 as Food Town in Salisbury, North Carolina, Food Lion LLC is a subsidiary of Delhaize America, the U.S. division of Brussels-based Delhaize Group. Today, Food Lion operates 1,211 stores and employs approximately 73,000 associates in 11 Southeast and Mid-Atlantic states.

In the past, Food Lion distributed financial information in the form of hardcopy reports generated by mainframe reporting programs. These reports had to be manually bursted and stuffed into envelopes, then mailed to store managers and the operations team in the field. Typical reports included profit and loss statements and gross profit reports.

“By the time managers received this information, it was generally more than one week old,” says Swiggett. “It was also difficult to find particular bits of information, since the reports were printed in a rigid, hardcopy format.”

The profit and loss statements were generated by a mainframe-based reporting tool. Changes to the reports had to be requested of the IT department.

“Prior to the inception of WebFOCUS, we were limited by a very labor-intensive reporting process,” admits Finchum. “Every financial report was printed at the store support center and then mailed to the store manager and field management – typically, two to three weeks after the events in question occurred. Obviously, this created large gaps in receiving the information and made it difficult to correct problems in a timely fashion.”

Comparison Shopping

Swiggett and her colleagues had used Desktop FOCUS in the past and they knew how flexible it was. When they heard about WebFOCUS, they realized they could expand what they were already doing and supplement the mainframe-generated reports.

Food Lion considered other reporting tools for the job, including the Hyperion BI Platform, dynaSight from arcplan, and CA-Easytrieve. “Adopting WebFOCUS appeared to be a fairly simple transition,” recalls Swiggett. “Because of the way Information Builders licenses its self-service users, there are no limits on the number of people who can use the applications. This makes it very affordable.”

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Food Lion was particularly attracted to WebFOCUS ReportCaster due to its advanced capabilities for scheduling, bursting, and distributing reports. “WebFOCUS has sophisticated report distribution capabilities that we can use and manage on our own,” Swiggett continues.

A Wise Purchase

In May 2002, Food Lion purchased WebFOCUS along with enterprise application integration technology from iWay Software, an Information Builders company. They engaged Information Builders’ Consulting to install the new software and help them implement the first self-service application.

The development team began by creating reporting extracts from Food Lion’s production information systems, which are stored in flat files on the mainframe. iWay converts data from DB2, VSAM, SQL Server, and DB/400 databases on several different computer platforms into a common format to simplify the reporting process.

Next, they converted existing Desktop FOCUS queries to WebFOCUS. They also used WebFOCUS to duplicate key mainframe reports, which were distributed via e-mail by ReportCaster.

Finally, they created a parameter-driven, self-service reporting environment that allows the operations team to access reports via the corporate intranet.

“We have several different reporting applications for different audiences and different uses,” says Swiggett. “The operations reporting system has had the biggest impact on the corporation. Each user can select reports based on the store, district, or region that is pertinent to their work.”

Swiggett says the transition to WebFOCUS was relatively easy. “Having Information Builders’ Consulting on site definitely helped,” she notes. “We could not have done it without them. They accomplished what they set out to accomplish, and the technical support has been very good along the way.”

A Cart Full of Reports

Information Builders’ Consulting helped propagate the new reporting application from the financial systems group to the operations team. They also created a security architecture based on user IDs to prevent store managers from seeing data from other stores.

The new reporting system, which has been in production since the end of 2002, is maintained entirely by the user community. On average, five people at each of the Food Lion stores, including the store manager and other associates, depend on WebFOCUS reports. There are an additional 1,000-plus WebFOCUS users who run reports pertaining to operations, finance, promotions, and other domains – more than 7,000 users in all.

Users of the operations reporting system can select daily, weekly, period, or quarterly reports. Drop-down boxes allow them to specify various stores, districts, and regions – and even to analyze sales from certain parts of the store, such as the deli department.

“When users run operations reports, the queries are executed very quickly, since they are reporting against presummarized information,” Swiggett explains. “For example, each week we create a weekly sales extract.”

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Daily sales reports are sent out by e-mail each morning, helping managers detect specific buying patterns and respond quickly to changes in the marketplace.

"Thanks to WebFOCUS, I can instantly review sales activity from the previous day," says Finchum. "This helps me react to issues as they arise. My team is not bogged down in manual processes. While we used to manually track daily sales and labor statistics, now we receive the information automatically. Whenever we close a period, we receive results much sooner than we did before."

Smooth Checkout

Hard benefits include a significant reduction in distribution costs for printing, handling, and mailing reports. Food Lion has also witnessed a reduction in labor costs due to quick report generation and fewer administrative requirements.

The new reporting infrastructure enabled by WebFOCUS and iWay has been recognized by senior management for its ability to analyze weekly store promotions – an essential activity that Food Lion executives depend on to keep the operation on track.

"We get a lot of positive feedback from users who have grown accustomed to having an instant view of sales performance," concludes Swiggett. "If you are familiar with a Web browser, you can use this system. That's part of its appeal – it is very powerful, yet very easy to use."



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