



Dollond & Aitchison The Opticians

Using ProClarity to focus on customers, profits & market share



Dollond & Aitchison The Opticians is using ProClarity as an operational tool to increase productivity and reduce costs, with the aim of utilizing the application for strategic purposes.

Established more than 250 years ago, Dollond & Aitchison The Opticians (D&A) is the oldest retail chain on the British high street. It provides clinical eye-care services, aftercare, spectacles and contact lenses to over four million customers, and has treated such renowned clients as Charles Darwin and Charles Dickens. Its 376 outlets (of which 37 percent are franchises and the rest company owned) employ 2,300 people.

Recognizing that consumers always have a choice in where they go for their eye care and eyewear, D&A provides them with outstanding value for money. For example, it offers a range of deals to suit its customers' budgets and individual requirements. Referrals and repeat customers are important sources of revenue, "which puts customer service and satisfaction high on our priority list," reports Keith Dowall, Management Accounts Manager.

Such business factors have influenced D&A's IT strategy and its decision to make business intelligence (BI)

central to supporting all aspects of the business and especially the customer.

Slow and cumbersome

"We already had a BI roadmap in place and were using a BI application for querying and reporting. However, analysis was slow and cumbersome taking days to weeks to develop new reports. Furthermore, users were dependent on our Information Services (IS) department for more complicated reports and analyses," says Robert Hopkins, Central Systems Development Manager.

Not surprisingly, "We decided we needed an On-Line Analytical Processing (OLAP) tool to give us a more rapid and detailed insight into our business and customers' activity. Having selected Microsoft SQL Server with Analysis Services as our preferred decision-support system (DSS) platform, we moved our BI application and data to SQL Server as a first step. This brought instant performance gains," Mr Hopkins explains.

Fast, easy and off the shelf

The next step was to find the right BI analytical application. This had to provide quicker query response times, and analyze rather than just report on data. Business analysts



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Robert Hopkins, Central Systems Development Manager for D&A

and managers also wanted a tool to easily track key performance indicators (KPIs), and distribute this information through something like Dashboard to the regional team.

“Now, ProClarity seemed to be the most-mentioned vendor in the BI press of front-end BI applications deploying SQL Server,” says Mr Hopkins. “They were invited together with other third-party OLAP-application vendors to demonstrate their offerings.”

The ProClarity solution was chosen ultimately for several reasons.

“The ProClarity reseller Rockport Software understood the kinds of issues we were facing and realized—in less than two weeks—our business needs in a very professional demo. This was based on four business scenarios (which we were most keen on improving) and relevant data we provided. The ProClarity demo showed that all this could be done quickly, easily and with instant, off-the-shelf deliverables. It also confirmed our BI strategy and choice of DSS platform,” explains Mr Hopkins.

Equally important, “ProClarity allowed us to deliver analysis and reporting over the Web. Its purchase was justified by showing the time it would save analysts (days per month) and users (weeks per month in not having to refresh bespoke systems), and illustrating a more secure, flexible and interactive DSS portal in the form of Dashboard,” says Mr Hopkins.

Fast-growing user base

D&A’s ProClarity solution—which currently uses ProClarity Desktop Professional working in conjunction with Microsoft SQL Server 2000 Analysis Services—has been in operation for under nine months.

On the operational side, the initial number of users has since doubled in size. Users vary from D&A’s Managing

Director to Area and Regional Managers and Analysts, and come from such diverse areas as IT, Finance, Commercial, Trading Board, Franchise and Operations.

Daily data warehouse input stands at 100 GB, and comes from various application systems. There are two OLAP cubes currently in use; three are in development; and five more are planned. ProClarity users have access to 50 views and details on such KPIs as Average Spectacle Order Value, Total Sales, Sight Test Volume and Dispensing Percentages.

ProClarity is not demanding, when it comes to user support and maintenance: “D&A developed the first cube in partnership with Rockport analysts. Since then, we have continued our development and implementation work with limited external assistance,” says Mr Hopkins.

Almost instantaneous

Time is of the essence. “The speed of response between the two systems is incomparable: ProClarity returns users’ results almost instantaneously. In addition, we will save two weeks to a month in generating Margin analysis alone. The regional personnel save days per month by having the Branch Visit pages and Dashboard,” says Mr Dowall.

So is functionality. “Our old BI application only provided reports with static ‘what-is’ facts. Thanks to ProClarity and OLAP, we now receive daily updates with drill-downs that help us better understand the facts. We can drill from group annual sales to individual daily store-level transactions, stock keeping units (SKUs) etc. within a few clicks. It is, above and beyond multidimensional analysis capability, a new much more powerful way to deliver information. And it comes with simple, intuitive navigation,” says Mr Hopkins.

ProClarity also offers financial rewards. The more efficient and effective analysis and decision-making business tool translates into greater productivity. The solution also offers a lower total cost of ownership (TCO) through reduced maintenance, IT support and license costs.

Single platform

Mr Hopkins describes future plans for ProClarity: "Once it is available, we would like to use ProClarity to access Microsoft's Reporting Services (once we have migrated to SQL Server 2005). We hope to do this in the easy and user-friendly fashion we currently use to access Analysis Services. Hopefully, we can then dispense with our legacy BI application completely. Moving to a single platform will further reduce license, development and support costs and resources."

"We would also like to extend the number of sites to include each of our stores, once a new wide-area network is in place, and bring in the supply-chain departments as well," he adds.

And D&A has several good reasons for this. "The ProClarity-based BI solution will help us with both strategic and day-to-day operational decisions in what is becoming an increasingly competitive marketplace. We also use it to make high quality data available to all colleagues who need it, giving them the tools to increase their own productivity. We have used it to automate many previously manual processes, saving money in both time and resources," concludes Robert Hopkins.

ProClarity implementation at a glance

Applicable Industry Sectors:

- Retail

Application Areas:

- IT
- Finance
- Commercial
- Trading Board
- Franchise and Operations

Typical Users:

- Managing Director
- Trading Board
- Area Managers
- Regional Managers
- Accountants
- Analysts and Developers

Typical KPIs:

- Average Spectacle Order Value
- Margin by Product (SKU level), Day and Outlet
- Total Sales
- Sight Test Volume
- Dispensing Percentages
- Forward Appointments

Revenue per Test Cubes:

10 (live, in development and planned)

Views:

- 50+

Daily Data Input:

- 100GB from various applications

For more information

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