



Manufacturer achieves better business outcomes and efficiencies by addressing critical roadblocks

Customer

With a global network that includes 25 manufacturing & distribution locations, this manufacturing company is a leader in the traffic, safety & pavement industry.

28twelve consulting

A boutique consulting company with more than 17 years' experience in the field, 28twelve consulting specializes in Business Intelligence & Analytics using Microsoft technologies.

The Challenge

A recent Gartner study highlighted some of the most critical data & analytics team roadblocks, and our customer experienced similar challenges while working towards better business outcomes and broader adoption of their analytics platform. The most significant roadblocks to their success were identified as the following:

Lack of Relevant Skills or Staff

- A failed attempt to recruit additional team members resulted in a false start and the business losing interest.
- With a lean IT team and little expertise in reporting & analytics, it was difficult to support the ongoing internal demand for access to relevant information.

Lack of Focus

- Organizational restructuring and a lack of resources caused the focus to shift to more tactical efforts.
- There was no clear direction for the business intelligence environment still in its infancy, and every business vertical was struggling to get the information they needed.
- Regional reporting silos and varying delivery mechanisms resulted in multiple versions of sales, revenue and other reports. It was difficult to produce a unified view of the organization's data with all the different report versions in circulation.

Poor Data Literacy

- With no self-service capabilities, departments relied on manual data extracts that were prone to human error.
- Different interpretations of what the data represented caused the executive team to grow concerned about the accuracy of the manually produced reports.

The Solution

The process is more important than you think

In order to address the challenges, this manufacturing company partnered with 28twelve consulting to build a strategy and process for the future of the BI & Analytics platform. “The process becomes the implementation plan or roadmap that supports the strategy. Transforming all the strategic bits into a process that can be executed iteratively and incrementally is where the right partner brings the most value, the quickest”, says the Global IT Director.

Key focus areas of the process were the following:

- **Executive Support:** BI projects only succeed when management supports the initiative entirely. This also required some of the IT leaders to “get their hands dirty” due to the lack of resources.
- **Transparent Communication:** Priorities were communicated in a transparent way and to all the different stakeholders involved. Realistic goals were set to keep the effort focused and business users engaged.
- **Inclusivity:** Focus groups were created for each phase, with representation from local & international locations to ensure that solutions supported everyone’s needs. The same group was trained and supported throughout the effort to become the data experts.

Focus on the platform, not just the tools

“If you shift your attention away from just the (reporting) tools and focus on building a platform instead, it’s all about the end user and their needs and good things start to happen”, says Martin Schoombe the Principal Consultant at 28twelve.

In the case of this customer some business units were very familiar with Excel, required flexibility to analyze the data in an ad-hoc fashion and had no need for reports with pretty pictures. At the same time it was also necessary to keep in mind that visual reports may be required at some stage, and the platform would have to serve the different needs while being consistent irrespective of delivery mechanism.

Microsoft’s suite of Business Intelligence software was a natural selection for the platform due to existing investments, the cloud/on-premises options and the ability to integrate the individual parts of the platform seamlessly. The platform contains the following:

- **Enterprise Data Warehouse** – The back end database is hosted in SQL Server and ETL processes built with Integration Services.
- **Semantic Layer** - Developed with Analysis Services, tabular cubes serve as data source for both reports and ad-hoc analysis in Excel. It provided the consistency required for the different use-cases.
- **Interactive Reports** – Power BI is used to author interactive and/or visual reports, while paginated reports are hosted in Reporting Services.

The Result

Better business outcomes and efficiencies

Armed with timely and consistent data, analysts and business users now have the information readily at their disposal and in the format most suited to their needs.

As data literacy improves and the focus becomes centered around the analysis instead of the gathering of the data, everyone is now “speaking the same language” and there is a positive change in the data culture. Business units can respond to queries from the executive team in a more efficient manner, and the IT team have become the enablers by delivering a platform as opposed to being the bottleneck for data and reporting requests.

“We’ve seen a substantial reduction of man-hours as a direct result of our efforts. This is a direct result of creating one source of truth, negating the need for time-consuming manual manipulation, and creating a self-serviced approach that avoids back-and-forth emails. When leading an effort like this you want to surround yourself with people that can solve challenges, be flexible, and communicate effectively to all levels of the organization. 28twelve consulting has been that for us and we are excited for the road ahead.” – Global IT Director.