

LYNDALE FOODS GROUP

COMMENTARY BY DR. TIM MURPHY,
HEAD OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY, LYNDALE FOODS GROUP

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INDUSTRY

- Food Services

BUSINESS APPLICATION

- Business Intelligence
- Data Warehousing

TECHNOLOGY

- IBM iSeries (AS/400)
- Microsoft SQL Server
- BPCS (SSA GT)



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Server™

Lyndale Foods Group (www.lyndale.co.uk) specialises in producing and selling quality sandwich, cake and bread products from its five bakeries throughout the UK. The Group supplies UK consumers through its retail network of approximately 255 shops as well as national catering chains, foodservice businesses, wholesale distributors to the independent retail sector and national retailers. The five businesses are Sayers, Peter Hunts, Hampsons, Fords and Maison Blanc and the company employs 3,500 staff. Annual sales for the company are around £100 million.

Lyndale’s IT environment is comprised of an IBM iSeries (AS/400) server running SSA GT’s BPCS enterprise resource planning (ERP) software suite, with each company within the group operating its own BPCS environment. Additionally, Microsoft SQL Server is used for a separate data warehouse, which uses Cognos’ business intelligence software to enable data analysis and reporting. DataMirror Transformation Server™ software is used to provide real-time integration between these two disparate platforms and to consolidate data between different business units.

THE PROBLEM

Operating in a fast moving and seasonal business such as the food sector, Lyndale needed to be able to get a real-time view of its business operations across its different operating companies. Additionally,

Lyndale needed to off-load data from its main IBM iSeries (AS/400) server to prevent large amounts of data impacting transaction and operational performance. In 2001 the company began a data warehousing project to meet these needs. Lyndale wanted to keep its Microsoft SQL Server data warehouse synchronised in real-time with the production iSeries environment. The company also needed a fast, reliable and easy-to-use solution for integrating data between the two databases that would require low transaction processing overhead.

“Our IT systems have to process an enormous number of transactions due to the nature of the business we’re in,” says Dr. Tim Murphy, Head of Information Technology, Lyndale Foods Group. “The average customer in our shop buys three cakes which means that we generate over one million transactions per month, putting a high load on our operational server. We need to make our business information available to our users in real-time, particularly given the seasonal variations in our business and the perishable nature of our stock. We therefore needed a solution that could transfer high volumes of data to our data warehouse, consolidate it across our divisions in real-time and ensure that it was easy to access for our managers. At the same time we wanted to reduce the load on our primary operational iSeries server.”

THE SOLUTION

Simpson Associates, a UK-based DataMirror partner, was selected by Lyndale to advise on and implement a solution because they had a strong track record in the food and drink marketplace, knew both the iSeries and SSA BPCS environments and had strong relationships with Business Intelligence industry leaders, DataMirror and Cognos. Lyndale selected DataMirror Transformation Server to capture data from the production iSeries and to flow it to the data warehouse built on its SQL Server platform. DataMirror has a strong partnership with SSA and is an SSA Alliance Partner.

DataMirror Transformation Server delivers real-time data flows to the people who need it – letting users capture, transform and flow their data in real-time between DB2 UDB, Microsoft SQL Server, Oracle, Sybase and XML across many common operating systems. Because Transformation Server is easy to implement and requires no programming changes to applications and databases, customers realise a rapid return on their software investment. Transformation Server's out-of-the-box support for leading databases makes it ideal for a range of applications including EAI, e-Business, business intelligence, CRM and a host of other distributed data applications.

By implementing DataMirror Transformation Server, Lyndale and Simpson Associates were able to bring-to-market an effective solution for data warehousing and real-time business intelligence within only 39 days. Using Simpson Associates' experience and methodology, reporting templates were quickly produced to meet Lyndale's business information needs.

"DataMirror has really proved to be the Rolls Royce solution for our needs in terms of quality and reliability but delivered at an affordable price," commented Murphy. "Not only does it provide real-time integration and transformation between our key systems, but it also requires virtually no maintenance – we check it once a day and that's all that's needed. We are planning to extend the data warehouse to more and more of the businesses

within Lyndale Foods Group and we're confident that DataMirror and Simpson Associates will meet our business needs going forward."

THE BENEFITS

Since October 2001, DataMirror Transformation Server has provided Lyndale with a fast and seamless means of integrating large volumes of operational data into the data warehouse environment. The production iSeries has been purged with data that is over 12 months old, dramatically increasing performance. "Before we implemented this project, we were worried about drowning in data," commented Murphy. "Our users needed to understand what was going on with our business and we needed to purge records from our main iSeries as the sheer volume of data stored on it was impacting day-to-day performance. Our finance and sales managers now benefit from a real-time view of our overall business, and our operational staff benefit from faster performance on the iSeries."

Since implementing DataMirror Transformation Server, Lyndale has been mirroring over one million stock movements per month in real-time between its iSeries and SQL Server data warehouse. Forty internal users and the company's management team can now get a real-time view of the business and can drill down to data on particular products, shops or regions. By consolidating data from the different operating companies into one database, it allows comparative analysis across the whole of Lyndale Foods. Sales of similar products can then be easily compared, without manual rekeying of data.

THE CONCLUSION

By using Simpson Associates and DataMirror Transformation Server, Lyndale Foods has been able to successfully implement and extend its real-time data warehouse, flowing data between its iSeries and Microsoft SQL Server environments.

Lyndale has seen a marked improvement since implementing DataMirror Transformation Server. Sales analysis is delivered 400% faster and with more confidence, as it is based on

accurate up-to-date information. Lyndale has also been able to standardise reporting across the businesses in the Group to ensure consistency and allow management to compare and contrast performance. Finally, Lyndale has been able to increase the performance of its operational iSeries computing environment without having to invest in further upgrades or increased storage.

While the data warehouse initially covered the Sayers business, it is now being extended to cover all parts of the Lyndale Foods Group. Additionally, Lyndale is increasing the amount of information captured, through a project to install EPOS machines in stores. This will allow analysts to drill down to get even more granular levels of detail, such as sales figures in time slots as small as half an hour.

The combination of DataMirror Transformation Server and Simpson Associates' consultancy has enabled Lyndale to meet its project objectives and build an IT strategy that can be extended to cover all of its business needs.

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