



Makro

Cash and carry company gets high performing SQL Server 2012 data warehouse in double-quick time



Company Overview

Makro has 30 sites across the UK and turns over in the region of £780 million. It has around 25,000 active product lines and a database of 1.2 million customers. Early in 2012, it was acquired by Booker from its German parent company.

The demerger process included splitting away all of the business systems. To avoid IT services costs, Makro set a timeline of just 7 months to scope, architect and build a new business-critical data warehouse

Key Benefits

- Design and build completed in just 7 months.
- 40% reduction in time taken to pull data from Oracle.
- 65% reduction in time required to produce redesigned Board reports.
- Increased reporting speed and availability.
- Integration with Excel for self-serve reporting.
- Reduced complexity.
- Reduced hardware and licence costs with Fast Track solution.

Company Overview

When cash and carry company, Makro, was acquired by Booker in 2012, it had to move fast to build a new data platform for the demerged business, to comply with legislation and avoid IT costs running into the millions. Simpson Associates showed “flexibility, drive and commitment to design and build a SQL Server 2012 Fast Track Data Warehouse, managing a complex project within tight timescales.”

Data warehouse a top priority

As a wholesaler, Makro operates with very thin margins and relies on the information from the data warehouse to maintain profitability. Dev Shah, Head of IT, Makro says: “Our data warehouse provides all of the management reporting for our business. With 300 stores and 25,000 product lines, not having this information would be like trying to walk through a maze in the dark.”

The Marketing department also relies entirely on the data warehouse for critical customer profiling data and for measuring the success of promotional campaigns which form the cornerstone of the business:

“Our mailing costs are in excess of £10 million. Promotions change every 2 weeks with an average of 6 promotional campaigns running at any one time, each of which breaks down into hundreds of individual promotions. We rely on reports from the data warehouse to find out which promotions are working and which customers we should be targeting. Without this data, we would be wasting millions of pounds of marketing spend.”

Looking for speed and simplicity

The new data warehouse needed to provide all of the information that Makro was getting from the old system, but this was also the perfect opportunity to make things simpler and quicker.

Makro went out to tender to select a specialist business intelligence company that could scope, architect and build the new data warehouse. It set a timeline of just 7 months. Simpson Associates won the project based on a SQL Server 2012 Data Warehouse using a Fast Track architecture for speed and cost advantage.

The major benefit of the Fast Track solution is that the hardware arrives fully built and configured. In this case, the hardware arrived on a Friday and there were production reports running by the following Wednesday.

“We wanted an equivalent data warehouse, but one that was much simpler, much better and easier to control and that’s what Simpson Associates delivered.”

Dev Shah, Head of IT

Pulling together a complex environment

Simpson Associates built the new data warehouse from the ground up, providing all of the data available from the old system, but with added performance enhancements. It had to pull in historic data and build the capability to pull data from transactional systems.

The data warehouse also integrates with Excel on the desktop, enabling people to self-serve reports. Shah says: "It's a lot easier to integrate the data into Microsoft Excel to manipulate it with pivot tables. With the old system we had to go through intermediate steps whereas now we can get the data straight in."

When designing the data warehouse, Simpson Associates had to consider and build in the flexibility for future reporting requirements. At the same time, it needed to work within very tight timelines to deliver a fully functioning, integrated data warehouse that would enable Makro to comply with legislation and avoid heavy costs.

Andrew Finney, DW Project Manager, Makro says: "This was a complex project. They've had to learn back end systems very quickly and understand the data structures around that before defining the data warehouse going forward. They had the architectural skills to do that. They also had to work with the users to understand the reporting requirements and build the data warehouse around that."

Built for speed and performance

As well as the implementation speed gained from using a Fast Track solution, two specific features in SQL Server 2012, XVelocityColumn Store Index and Attunity connectors, provided significant business benefit for Makro.

The XVelocityColumn Store Index, a new feature in SQL Server 2012, provides superb query performance and high speed delivery of reports.

The Attunity connectors, bundled with SQL Server 2012, were used by Simpson Associates to extract data very quickly from the underlying Oracle business system. These were used extensively and represented a significant cost saving for Makro in not having to go out and acquire additional third party connectors.

This speed of data loading and reporting is resulting in vastly improved data availability. Shah says: "The key reports that we need are being produced much faster. Everybody is saying that the batch loads are faster and the key reports faster to produce. The redesigned Board report that we produce now takes 5 minutes as opposed to 15-20 minutes."



Performance = business efficiency

Makro stores have an 8:30 am huddle where they plan the day's activity based on the previous day's trading. Previously, the reports needed couldn't be guaranteed ready for the meeting. With the speed improvements achieved by moving to SQL Server 2012, these reports are now reliably available.

Shah says: "There is no waiting around for the extract process to finish. As soon as they get in in the morning they are able to query the database. They need the reports there and sometimes we were missing those in the past. They can understand the previous day's trading and optimise space and activity to leverage this information to increase sales."

Firm foundation for future business intelligence projects

In building the data warehouse, Simpson Associates has helped Makro to avoid massive IT service costs and given it the critical reports needed to run the business. With these foundations now firmly in place, Makro can start to add further business intelligence functionality, including PowerPivot and PowerView to deliver even more insight and performance improvements.

"The world's our oyster now. With the critical reports up and running, we can start to look at other opportunities. We've got Microsoft products all talking to each other without this complexity in the middle."

Dev Shah Head of IT

Contact us

Should you have any questions or require any further information, the team at Simpson Associates will be happy to help you with your request.

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