



Simpson Associates

Microsoft Services

Microsoft Gold Partner for Data Platform, Analytics and Cloud

Company Overview

Simpson Associates are a software and services consultancy who have been delivering new capabilities to organisations for over 25 years. As a Microsoft Gold Partner for Data Platform, Analytics and Cloud, we are practicing what we preach and we believe that we have the necessary skills and experience to help you in your quest for increased productivity.

Client Response

“We looked at some of the major consultancies but they do many things and are not necessarily subject matter experts which we knew we needed. We wanted someone that lived and breathed data.”

Alex Devlin-McGregor

IT Director
Inspired Entertainment Incorporated

Introduction

Microsoft's mission statement is to "Empower every person and organisation on the planet to achieve more". By changing the way that we use software in the work place, Microsoft is developing new ways to make business more efficient and effective, empowering employees so they can achieve more and in turn doing "things, that make a difference".

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What we do



Data Analytics & Reporting

Business Analysis and Reporting enables organisations to significantly improve their understanding of their business performance and from that understanding make better informed decisions.



Cloud

Many of our customers are now gaining the benefits of hosting applications in the Cloud. The flexibility of being able to create an environment within the hour is a compelling reason to use the Cloud as are the cost savings of on-site server space, reduced maintenance and power requirement plus the ease of access for non-office based employees, customers, suppliers or associates



Data Warehousing

Enterprise and logical data warehouse architectures and the analytical and machine intelligence software becoming available can provide organisations with an 'analytical workspace'.



Productivity

Our business productivity has been transformed by the use of Microsoft Office 365. If increasing the productivity of your employees is an objective for you then we will be delighted to share our experience of how we did it for ourselves.



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We build enterprise data warehouses for many of our customers to provide a single window on their business management information and key performance indicators that is used by them as their trusted foundation for business decision making. The emergence of larger, higher velocity and perhaps more unstructured data sources from the Internet or from the Internet of Things has meant that our customers are also engaging us to deliver an extended logical data warehouse architecture to support the data analytics software that is now emerging. The end result is that organisations may have the benefit of a centralised data repository but can also have an architecture that allows for agile discovery and analysis work to test a new idea, assimilate new data sources or perform a new analysis.

This combination of enterprise and logical data warehouse architectures and the increasingly sophisticated analytical and machine intelligence software becoming available is giving organisations an 'analytical workspace' with the emphasis leaning more to discovery and analysis and less to data harmonisation and organisation – producing the speed of delivery and speed of deployment that our customers need.

We can provide solutions on- or off-premise and can advise on whether or not an appliance approach can reduce the time to delivery and a lower total cost of ownership.





“Our relationship with Simpsons has introduced a trusted advisor to the Institution, providing a controlled and well-managed approach to our project delivery that we had not experienced with other partners in this field. Communication with the Simpson team has been very good both on site and off, which has provided a very professional service delivery experience for UCLAN. Even with more agile reporting tools, it is still important to ensure that data is in good condition, readily available and well managed.”

“We are now focusing on the delivery of requirements to ensure users can reap the benefits of the information now available to us and Simpsons are helping us to develop the skills that we need to continue to adopt the application ourselves.”

Keith Gray
Project Manager, UCLAN.

makro

“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, Makro

Case Study

Makro

Makro collaborates with Simpson Associates to implement a SQL Server data warehouse and BI application in just 7 months.

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.

Pulling together a complex environment

Simpson Associates won the project based on a SQL Server 2012 Data Warehouse using a Fast Track architecture for speed and cost advantage.

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.”

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

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



Data Analytics & Reporting

Business Analysis and Reporting enables organisations to significantly improve their understanding of their business performance and from that understanding make better informed decisions.

Data is growing exponentially: our services take your organisation's data assets, both on- and off-premise, and makes it coherent and accessible. The emergence of "Big Data" makes this service more valuable than ever. We can help you with design, build and development – we can answer your hardware, cloudware and deployment questions too.

Having common data definitions allows decision makers to deal with factual information, spend less time debating the data, values and structures and spend more time making informed decisions. Importantly, the effect of those decisions can be monitored and verified.

By way of focused dashboards, timely reports and self-service analysis on key business drivers and metrics, all users who need to can see changes as and when they happen.

We will help you to define and/or deploy your application on- or off-premise and ensure that your architecture makes sure that everyone who needs access to information has it, wherever they may want it.





“Dashboards are now being developed to cover financial sustainability, including productivity and surplus generation, business engagement and knowledge transfer, alumni relations and philanthropy and environmental issues.

Balanced scorecards which may eventually cover all levels, from University to individual staff members, are also being prototyped”

Dr Tom Loya

Director of Strategy, Planning and Performance.
The University of Nottingham



INSPIRED

“We knew Simpson Associates from a past relationship and they were able to demonstrate their experience of working with both our incumbent solution and with SQL, Microsoft BI and Sharepoint.”

Alex MacGregor-Devlin
IT Director, INSE



Business Intelligence

Case Study

Inspired Entertainment Incorporated

Inspired Entertainment Incorporated hits the Jackpot with Microsoft Business Intelligence

Summary

INSE replaces a legacy reporting solution with Microsoft Business Intelligence (BI) thereby capitalising on their existing Microsoft investment. By doing so, INSE have: empowered their end users; improved report distribution; reduced the number of reports in production and given their IT team time to react to change.

Requirements

Following the acquisition of their legacy reporting solution by a larger vendor, INSE were faced with an unwelcome hike in their annual support costs. To add insult to injury, the ETL (Extract, Transform and Load) software was withdrawn in favour of a replacement technology that was older than the one it replaced. Rather than accept this as a 'fait accompli', INSE took the decision to go to market for a new reporting solution; Alex MacGregor-Devlin, IT Director at INSE explains;

"We had had our existing application for a long time. Once we had decided to change it we took the opportunity to have a good look at the market. We researched the whole of the Gartner BI Leaders Quadrant and established that Microsoft Business Intelligence had everything we wanted. It is clear that Microsoft are absolutely committed to the development of their software and it shows. Like many companies, we already had Microsoft SharePoint software, albeit little used, and our Enterprise Data Warehouse was built on Microsoft SQL Server. This, combined with the Microsoft Business Intelligence and ETL software, gave us the opportunity to achieve the necessary step change in our BI solutions."

Solution

The choice of Microsoft software for all of their ETL, Database, Business Intelligence and Web Portals offered the real possibility of end-to-end process efficiencies and shortened delivery time which were major project drivers.

Throughout the day INSE receive millions of transactions from their Server Based Gaming terminals worldwide; a transaction for every click in every location, resulting in an 'end of day' aggregation and summarisation process in the Data Warehouse, that, in itself, already contains billions of transactions.

A further missing ingredient that INSE required was the experience to design an application that exploited the Microsoft components to their maximum, and for that experience Alex approached Simpson Associates. They were expert in both his legacy software and with his chosen Microsoft software and a Microsoft Gold Partner in Data Analytics. Better still, they were experienced in building Data Warehouse and Business Intelligence solutions.

Despite having worked with INSE previously, Simpsons were not "a shoo-in" and as ever, INSE were thorough in their process, in Alex's words:-

"We looked at some of the major consultancies but they do many things and are not necessarily subject matter experts which we knew we needed. We wanted someone that lived and breathed data. We knew Simpson Associates from a past relationship and they were able to demonstrate their experience of working with both our incumbent solution and with SQL, Microsoft BI and Sharepoint."

Benefits

- Millions of transactions are processed in near real-time and summarised overnight to produce revenue models to their key customers.
- Cubes and reports are generated and published on-line before their customers' staff arrive each morning.
- Incoming data is transformed and securely transferred to customers to facilitate their own bespoke reporting and analysis.
- The unique relationship between Microsoft's ETL, database, reporting and analysis software has shortened the data processing window and dramatically improved the SLA compliance and customer satisfaction.



Cloud

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Building a Cloud strategy can produce a series of efficiencies for many companies. Many of our customers have benefited already – some by commissioning a server cluster in order to begin project development whilst awaiting new hardware; some by creating backup and recovery environments; some by creating SharePoint sites that are responsive to the demands of flexible business requirements. In all cases, the flexibility of the available configurations mean that it is possible to commission server power as it is needed rather than making a capital purchase that allows for future – thereby more closely aligning the costs with the benefits.

The Cloud is a valid choice for production environments too. We have customers who have their data warehouse environment built entirely in the Cloud with Business Intelligence suites providing information to all company stakeholders. For some customers, a hybrid configuration allows them to gain the maximum return on their current infrastructure; for others their requirement to see key performance indicators on tablets and smartphones has driven their migration to the Cloud.

It is projected that by next year (2019), 45% of IT Application spend will be based on Cloud deployments and that by 2020 there will be 50bn devices connected to the Cloud, reflecting the Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) nature of today's office environment. Applications like Office 365 are key drivers of this direction of travel.



“After comparing the cost of a cloud solution against procuring new on-premise infrastructure it clearly became apparent that a Microsoft Cloud solution would be most cost effective route for the University, and of course, we then have the flexibility to scale the services up and down dependant on the demands of the institution”

Michael Dunmore

Acting Deputy IT Director
The University of Leicester



Productivity

Our business productivity has been transformed by the use of Microsoft software. We no longer spend time looking for a saved document, working on the wrong document version or wading through cluttered email Inboxes.

We don't email attachments anymore, we do respond to more business opportunities than we did and we have in-house communication forums so that we know what is happening. We don't worry about access to information when we are on the road and we don't travel for meetings with each other unless we choose to. Our project teams can see what is being worked on by other members of their team and it is easy for one of us to take over where another left off and we can work on a document simultaneously wherever we may be located.

We have access to dashboards that tell us about how our business is performing and we can question that information in English to understand that performance better.

All of this comes from Microsoft Office 365 and we know that many of the companies that we meet have these capabilities but have yet to fully realise the potential that they offer to realise significant productivity gains for every type of business.

If increasing the productivity of your employees is an objective for you then we will be delighted to share our experience of how we did it for ourselves.



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