



Business Solutions

Knowledge Management

Foster Parents Plan of Canada

Not-for-profit organization chooses knowledge management plan to generate business answers, maximize program dollars



Not-for-profits face the same efficiency demands that for-profit businesses do — if not more. Foster Parents Plan, one of Canada's oldest and most respected international child sponsorship agencies, turned to technology to increase its efficiency and responsiveness in attracting donors and managing contributions. Using a Microsoft-based data warehouse, Foster Parents Plan is now slicing through reams of operational data to obtain more comprehensive information to help market its programs, communicate with partners, and manage resources more effectively.

Foster Parents Plan of Canada (FPP), a leading international child-focused development organization, wanted to find a more efficient way to manage its information to accurately target prospective donors and serve them more effectively. A member of PLAN International, FPP gives Canadians the opportunity to sponsor a child to fund a variety of programs in developing countries. Designed to make a lasting difference in the lives of children, their families, and their communities, its programs involve health care, education, access to clean water, housing, and micro credit. More than 90,000 Canadians currently sponsor 100,000 of the more than 1.1 million children worldwide who are helped by this international organization.

While Foster Parents Plan has been around for more than 60 years and boasts an established donor base, competition for funding remains a challenge. Currently, there are more than 70,000 registered charities in Canada, and that number is always rising. Moreover, what worked 20 years ago in reaching prospective donors does not necessarily work today. Communication tools are evolving, demographics are constantly shifting, and constituents are demanding faster communications and better customer service. FPP turned to its information technology (IT) department for help in getting fast access to information that could help the organization better respond to demands.

In the area of marketing strategies, FPP needed to first dig up valuable background information like which communication vehicles work the best, how to retain sponsors, how many children

Solution Overview

Customer Profile

Industry: Not-for-profit Organizations

Business Situation

Faced with the challenge of how to operate more effectively in a changing environment, while maintaining the highest level of accountability, Foster Parents Plan of Canada had to re-engineer its IT structure to implement a knowledge management strategy. This would uncover buried data needed to help the organization make better business decisions, like how to retain sponsors, how many children in certain countries need sponsors, and much more.

Solution

Business Scenario

Knowledge Management

Benefits

Foster Parents Plan of Canada's data-warehouse solution provides real-time operational data and enables the staff to make smart, accurate, timely business decisions that reduce inefficiency and maximize dollars sent to its programs.

Products and Services

Microsoft Windows 95
Microsoft Windows NT Workstation
Microsoft Windows NT Server with Internet Information Server 4.0
Microsoft Office 95 & 97
Microsoft Exchange Server
Microsoft Internet Explorer
Microsoft Project
Microsoft SNA Server
Microsoft SQL Server
Microsoft Consulting Services



currently require sponsors, and much more. To help accomplish these goals, the organization built a data warehouse to help turn raw operational data into meaningful, actionable business knowledge — knowledge that helps employees make fast, informed decisions that maximize organizational dollars. Its solution is built on the Microsoft® SQL Server™ 7.0 database and other Microsoft BackOffice® products, using Cognos® business intelligence tools for desktop analysis.

Gaining Access to Meaningful Data

With a legacy IT system housing its most critical data, FPP sought to set up an entirely new technology base. The organization knew it required a comprehensive knowledge management strategy to put information at managers' fingertips. The organization wanted its system structured in a manner that would allow it to spot trends and extract information needed for making decisions.

However, the answers to these questions and others were located in information stored within the organization's AS/400 host applications. Kelvin Cantafio, chief information officer for Foster Parents Plan, explains, "While our AS/400 is great at taking in our operational data, it is often inefficient at outputting the available data for analysis purposes. Our departments need specific information on a daily, weekly, monthly, and ad hoc basis, which is difficult to extract from this host system." In order to stay efficient, the company's information had to be streamlined and better organized, to capture the natural flow of data and help deliver it to individuals with on-demand fluidity.

Design a Business-Friendly System

To get on top of a solution, Cantafio's staff, in concert with Microsoft Certified Partner M.R.S. Company Limited of Mississauga, Ontario, developed a data warehouse based on the BackOffice family of products. Foster Parents Plan had standardized on Microsoft Office products back in 1996 to improve overall office productivity, so selecting Microsoft BackOffice as its enterprise operating platform made sense and promised consistency for broader internal information-sharing.

Several qualities needed to be threaded into the system to provide access to organizational data that can be easily dissected by all key business measures and a set of tools to effectively analyze and present information was required. The organization knew that these critical components would enable it to reach new heights.

Foster Parents Plan made sure that business people from all areas of the organization were represented on the data-warehouse team. "We needed to give key decision-makers quick and easy access to critical information that allows them to make the most of our resources," Cantafio explains. "To make fast, accurate decisions that get results for our constituents and chew up a minimum of cycles, our managers need detailed breakdowns of important information about expenses, supporters, and resources. A data warehouse is a perfect vehicle for this."



Self-Serve Business Information

M.R.S. helped implement the BackOffice portion of the solution. Director of marketing and sales, Peter Christopoulos, says the solution has succeeded in revamping Foster Parents Plan's IT structure and in delivering an effective knowledge management strategy. "This deployment has realized phenomenal results," he says. "Six months after we launched the pilot project, everyone was generating reports and analyzing information straight from the system. It has really improved the way FPP operates."

Cantafio noted that under this new system, users can get answers themselves that used to require IT intervention. "We now call it self-serve information; it's empowering users to build their own reports, answer their own questions, without waiting on IT," he says.

Raising the Knowledge Bar

At FPP, the knowledge management solution partnered technology with corporate cultures and business processes so each aspect of the solution became a vehicle to manage and deliver the business information. The diversity of knowledge sources can now be embraced, giving it greater meaning through its relation to other information within the organization.

Cantafio has indicated that the FPP data marts have raised the bar of knowledge within the organization. "It's one thing to put Microsoft Windows® in an organization. It's quite another to make operational data available to every business manager for analysis. By using real-time data to make real-time business decisions, we operate more efficiently and maximize the dollars we spend on programs. Everyone's in agreement that the more nimble and responsive we are, the fewer resources we consume and the more dollars we send to the field, ultimately supports our objective to improve the lives of children, families, and communities in the developing world."

The data warehouse provides FPP with measurements of its activities that are easy to manipulate and analyze. The organization uses this data to identify opportunities and areas in need of improvement, it then determines if its strategies are a success. "We can see what's going on in our business and improve internal efficiencies," Cantafio says.

The organization is also rolling out its data-warehouse experience to other donor countries in the PLAN family and developing a worldwide data warehouse strategy. The objective is to capture corporate performance and evaluation information from each of the countries where PLAN operates and make it available through a series of global data marts. It is also exploring a Web-based solution that will allow PLAN offices around the world to access key data through browsers.

"The Microsoft platform gives us all kinds of leeway to expand our infrastructure in literally any direction. It's easy to manage and maintain. And of course, low cost of ownership is critical for not-for-profit organizations like ours," Cantafio notes.



For More Information

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