

Maines Paper and Food Service, Inc.



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Bill Kimler, Vice President of Application Development, Maines

Maines Paper and Food Service, Inc. is the nation's second largest independent systems foodservice distributor. Since 1919, Maines has been committed to providing the highest level of quality, reliability, and service to its customers throughout the Northeast, Midwest, Mid-Atlantic, and Gulf States. Maines services restaurants, multi-unit chains, healthcare facilities, and educational institutions.

Maines utilizes state-of-the-art technologies and facilities to achieve operational excellence and superior customer service. The company works very closely with its foodservice operators and vendor partners to improve system integration and to increase efficiencies in the company's supply chain. Maines received demands from customers to make data more accessible to enable faster decision making. The company decided to evaluate business intelligence (BI) solutions that would easily integrate with existing systems and provide increased value for all of its customers.

Challenges faced

To stay ahead of the competition, Maines wanted an advanced and flexible solution that offered information sharing with its franchise restaurant customers. “We were receiving a lot of requests from our customers to bring our business intelligence to the Web,” explains Bill Kimler, Vice President of Application Development at Maines.

To further its edge in the market, Maines sought a solution that could be leveraged internally with the company's sales representatives to enable them to make better business decisions and increase company sales. Key to this commissions program was integrating the solution with a new data warehouse. “We went to IBM's Linux-based DB2 system with several terabytes of storage,” notes Kimler. “For the first time ever we had a data warehouse that we needed to put data into and get data out of—so we needed a reporting solution that offered tight integration.”

Industry:

- Foodservice Distributor

Geography:

- North America

Information Needs:

- Web-based reporting
- Open system
- Tight integration with IBM
- Consulting services and expertise

Platforms:

- Microsoft Windows 2000, 2003
- IBM xSeries (linux)
- IBM DB2
- IBM Websphere Application Server
- IBM WebSphere Portal
- IBM Tivoli Access Manager

Solutions:

- Cognos ReportNet
- Cognos Planning
- Cognos DecisionStream
- Cognos Consulting and Training

Benefits:

- Fast, customized Web-based reporting for customers
- Updates made real-time
- Better decision-making by delivery drivers and sales people
- Automated report generation



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Strategy followed

Maines evaluated solutions from Cognos and Business Objects and chose Cognos based on its openness. Additionally, since the company had already invested in IBM's WebSphere and Tivoli Access Manager, it was important that its reporting solution offered integration with each platform.

"Our finance department had been using Cognos for years and thought very highly of the solutions," notes Kimler. "So when we realized we needed to deploy a customer-friendly Web-based reporting solution that would bring us into the 21st century, choosing Cognos was a relatively easy decision to make."

In the early stages of the development, Cognos Consulting proved to be an important aspect of the implementation process. As Maines had limited internal technical support, Cognos would send consultants to sit with the team and share advice and techniques. "Our invoicing can be rather complex, so we enlisted the help of Cognos Consulting to help put our framework together," says Kimler. "They were able to accelerate data warehousing and data modeling requirements by several months."

Maines took extensive advantage of on-site training from Cognos. Six employees attended 12 classes on Cognos solutions. "My background is in education, so I'm very in tune with educational methodologies," states Kimler. "The written materials, hands-on exercises, and trainers Cognos provided were some of the best I've ever seen."

The first major project was to deliver the invoices online through the customer portal. During the course of the deployment, Maines lost its primary data architect who had participated in the Cognos training and facilitated the Cognos development. Cognos Consulting was able to find an architect to fill this gap for nearly two months while Maines searched for a full-time replacement.

In addition to losing a primary internal resource, Maines also experienced a natural disaster in upstate New York—a flood—which caused Maines to lose an entire distribution center. "Needing to focus our attention on recovering the business and servicing our customers in the devastated region, we looked to Cognos Consulting to provide another resource who could continue on with the Web-based development that had been started," notes Kimler. "Cognos Consulting was able to turn around a resource and commit that resource to us for an extended period of time, ultimately saving the project."

Cognos Consulting was also leveraged to complete the company's yearly budgeting. Maines enlisted Cognos to

provide report writing support. "During crunch time, Cognos helped us develop reports based on our specifications—making it possible for us to meet our target deadline," explains Kimler.

In summing up Maines overall experience with Cognos, Bill Kimler stated, "We felt that Cognos Services personnel brought a lot to us in terms of both education and consulting. They were great to work with. Their consultants and trainers were able to pick up on our business right away and deliver what we needed in the time frame expected."

To date, Maines has focused its efforts on reporting. However, the company looks forward to capitalizing on its investment in BI and integrating Cognos performance management with its reporting. Maines is also planning to migrate to Cognos 8 BI some time in 2007.

Benefits realized

Cognos enabled Maines to offer its customers access to Web-based reporting for retrieval of invoices, financial data, and delivery data—a capability which was previously non-existent. "We have a reporting solution that is designed for our customers' use and has been creating a nice little buzz in our customer community," stated Kimler.

Maines customers like the look and feel of the reports and appreciate the speed in which the reports are delivered over the Web. "If I am talking to a customer who makes a recommendation on how to change something, I can do it while they are still on the phone," explains Kimler. "That was not possible before."

Cognos also offered seamless integration with the company's home grown, J2EE-based scheduling system for delivery drivers and commissions program for sales representatives, enabling better business decisions.

Furthermore, Maines leveraged Cognos internally for general BI reports on daily deliverables, including financial statements, inventory levels and purchase orders. Simple reports, such as how much product a customer used over a six month period, only takes five minutes to generate using Cognos. Previously, the task would take up to 45 minutes to complete through Excel.

Maines also uses Cognos as a data transmission tool for its customers. "Some of our customers require daily feeds in a very specific format," stresses Kimler. "Typically, this was done using our mainframe, which was tedious and difficult to support, but Cognos was born for that kind of data manipulation."

"We've spent our time building the foundation, so a lot of the rewards have yet to be reaped," concludes Kimler.

