



Agile Data Delivery Saves Costs and Enhances Reporting

Save the Children UK improves business and IT collaboration with Cisco Data Virtualization

Business challenge

Save the Children believes every child deserves a future. In the UK and around the world, Save the Children gives children a healthy start in life, the opportunity to learn, and protection from harm. They operate on the mantra of “do whatever it takes” for children—every day and in times of crisis—to transform their lives and the future we share. Last year, they helped over 17.5 million children through their work.

Providing the right information to decision-makers, donors, fundraisers, and foundations is critical for their ever-evolving, life-altering mission. But a myriad of internal and external data sources, and the need to respond rapidly to world events, made it hard to integrate this data and provide these insights. Moreover, 91 percent of Save the Children’s funds is spent on charitable activities. That leaves just nine percent for fundraising and all other costs, including IT. For that reason, technology investments must be prudent and effective.

Executive summary

Customer name:

Save the Children UK

Industry:

Nonprofit

Location:

London, United Kingdom

Number of employees:

2000



Business challenge

- Myriad data sources to integrate
- Fast-changing information requirement and technology landscape



Solution

- Implement agile data integration delivery processes based on data virtualization
- Start with a single project; then grow to an enterprise-wide Common Data Model



Business results

- Unprecedented project delivery agility
- Significant improvement in business and IT collaboration
- Successful first steps in the journey to a Common Data Model

When it came to their IT landscape, Save the Children UK faced many of the same issues other dynamic organizations encounter, including:

- Multiple versions of same data (redundancy and different answers)
- No single view of data for reporting and analysis
- No real-time data capability
- Lack of agility to respond to business needs in timely manner
- No shared metadata specification
- Lack of data governance and ownership
- Inability to extract value from new, ever evolving unstructured data sources

Knowing they had to find a better way, Save the Children UK designed a new data, analytics, and insight architecture aligned to help them achieve their mission and overcome technical challenges.

Solution

The data, analytics, and insight architecture was built around a set of principles that govern both the management and delivery of data throughout the organization:

- Data is considered an organizational asset rather than a source for reporting.
- A single version of the truth exists and users know where to go to access data for all reporting and real-time data needs.
- Organizational KPIs are published and data to measure and track them is available.

In addition:

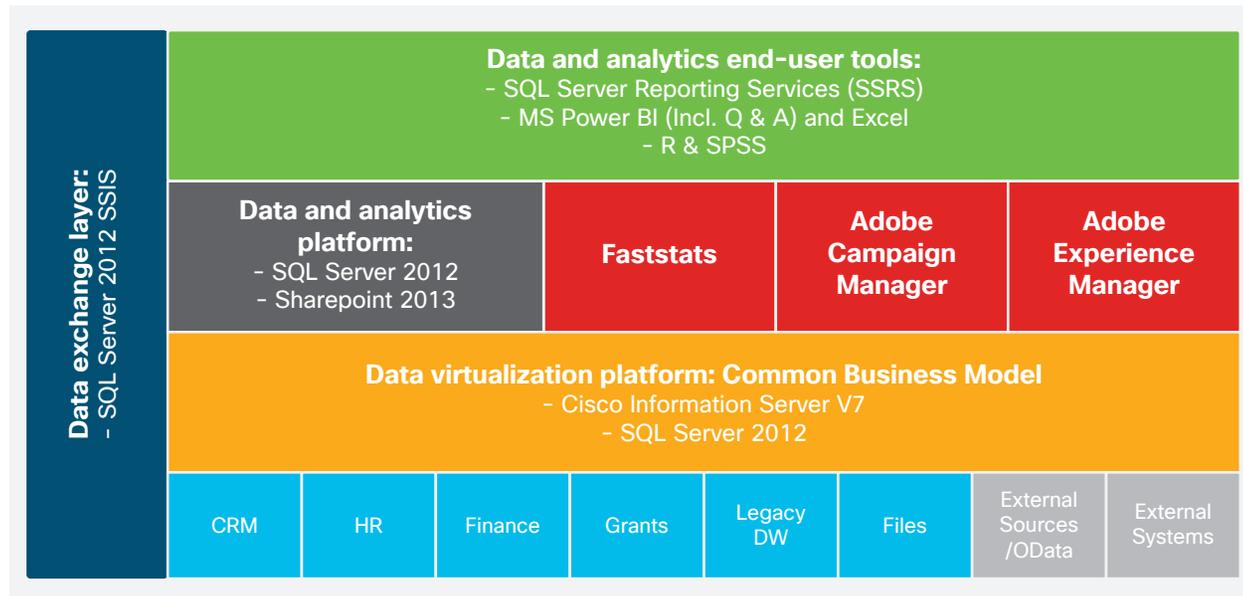
- Business Intelligence and Data Analytics is considered a business-as-usual activity rather than a development project.
- A published set of agreed definitions for all data is available.
- Security exists for all data entities.

Save the Children UK launched several key initiatives to implement these principles.

The first was a new approach to data modelling called the Common Business Model. With this model, organizations can centralize their data and business rules to a logical data model of entities and attributes. This in turn creates a single source of truth for applications and reporting. Additionally, it helps the organization enforce a standard data model, governance, ownership, and architecture.

The second was chartering an internal group to build and maintain these models. Save the Children brought together representatives from every department, including data owners, and formed the Common Business Data Panel. Their job is to agree on (and determine ownership of) the rules, definitions, and processes for data that go into the Common Business Model. The panel also helps contribute to a business data directory, approves any changes to the Common Business Model, and regulates what can be seen in the Common Business Model and by whom.

The third key initiative was to coalesce around a number of best-in-class data and analytics products, including those shown below.



Data virtualization was a new addition. Cisco® Information Server was selected to instantiate and operationalize the Common Business Model.

Save the Children started with a single project in order to set up the infrastructure and train staff. The goal of the project was to reengineer the myriad data feeds to Save the Children’s Adobe Campaign Manager system to improve delivery agility and to remove extra steps. As this system is used to manage email communications to Save the Children supporters, it was a key strategic platform. For that reason, the project was highly visible across both the organization and IT.

To help ensure the entire business and technical team were familiar with the product and how to use it, Save the Children engaged a Cisco consultant for the duration of the project, which included a one-week intensive training course. After the training, the team was able to get started immediately using an agile project methodology.

Results

The project team was able to provide a consistent, single view of organizational data to Adobe Campaign Manager, regardless of the original data source. It also proved the success of the agile delivery process across business and IT by taking advantage of Cisco Information Server’s iterative coding capabilities. This level of agility couldn’t be achieved using a traditional waterfall delivery model, and is now the standard model for software development at Save the Children.

Among other outcomes, Save the Children was able to:

- Initiate plans for replacing a legacy data warehouse with a virtualized feed to save costs while providing more consistent reporting.
- Reduce interim staging environments and their associated storage costs and ETL processing workloads.

Next steps

With data virtualization skills, infrastructure, and agile delivery processes in place, Save the Children was well-positioned to build on their first project success. Partly funded by savings from the initial ventures, a number of projects were then identified and commenced such as refining and expanding the Common Business Model to:

- Include grant information
- Increase supporter attributes
- Provide data interfaces to and from digital system(s), such as Adobe Marketing Cloud and online donation forms

The team will also continue development of the OLAP cube (SQL Server Analysis Services – SSAS) feed from the CIS platform to help ensure system integrations, and to report that all use the same data.

The organization also plans to use the Common Business Model to:

- Further integrate with the Adobe digital platform
- Deliver projects continuously as required by the business pipeline and roadmap
- Advance the new data, analytics, and insight architecture
- Continually improve the agile delivery process

For more information

To learn more about Cisco Data
Virtualization visit

<http://www.cisco.com/go/datavirtualization>.