

NET-A-PORTER Case Study

Based in the Whiteley's Centre in London, NET-A-PORTER.COM is the world's premier online luxury fashion clothing and accessories retailer.

Since launching in June 2000, NET-A-PORTER.COM has successfully established itself as a luxury brand with impeccable packaging and unrivalled customer care.

The company's award-winning website which is viewed by over 2 million women each month, is updated weekly with new content and presented in the style of a fashion magazine, offering the style-savvy customer exactly what they want – unprecedented access to the hottest looks of the season from international cutting edge labels via worldwide express delivery.

Now stocking over 300 international brands such as Jimmy Choo and Christian Louboutin, NET-A-PORTER.COM has experienced consistently strong growth and trading results since its launch and now employs more than 800 people in New York and London.

The Challenge

With a rapidly growing business and ever increasing but isolated information silos, NET-A-PORTER.COM needed to find a way to better leverage its corporate information. The business had a single reporting server that held most of the historic and current information that was required by senior management and the commercial teams, but providing rapid and customised access to this information was problematic and could only be achieved with the involvement of the company's IT specialists.

'Each morning we took snapshots of our application's databases and loaded onto our Reporting Server so that our more technically experienced users could undertake analysis in Access and Excel,' explained Nikki Irvine – NET-A-PORTER.COM's Management Information Systems Manager. 'This in itself was very limiting and most of the

management and operational teams were provided with standardised reports which were created by the IT department. We had the capability of building different views to provide more customised and specific reports but these views and report templates had to be designed and built from scratch, taking time and diverting the IT team away from day-to-day infrastructure management and business critical project development.'

NET-A-PORTER.COM recognised that to help sustain its business growth it needed to dramatically enhance its reporting capabilities and provide individuals across the business with the ability to access and work with information far more intuitively. 'I was given a remit to develop a centralised data warehouse that could be used by business users to obtain the information that they needed, when they needed it and in a format that they could understand,' explained Nikki. 'It was clear from the outset that the key driver of this project would be the provision of end-user tools that would allow business users to be self serving.'

Having decided to approach this project from the reporting tools side, Nikki Irvine evaluated offerings from a variety of suppliers. Interviews were held and tenders submitted. Some way into this phase of the project, Nikki met with CONTEMPORARY to discuss the SQL Server and ProClarity offering. CONTEMPORARY proposed a solution built around the Microsoft SQL Server application stack using SQL Server Integration Services to populate a data warehouse, SQL Server Analysis Services and ProClarity for end user Analytics.

Quick Facts

Industry

Online Retail

Business Plan

To develop and implement a business intelligence solution providing centralised data storage and flexible, customised reporting across the business.

The Result

Business users can now access company information and generate reports that deliver the results that they need, when they need it and in a format that they can understand, allowing better, faster and smarter business decisions to be made.

Products

Microsoft SQL Server, SQL Server Integration Services, SQL Server Analysis Services and ProClarity.



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The Solution

'From our first meeting, I wanted to select CONTEMPORARY as our partners for this project, irrespective of which platform we adopted,' continued Nikki. 'One of the things that most impressed us was CONTEMPORARY's policy of working with their clients as partners and viewing knowledge transfer as an integral part of the project delivery process, rather than a traditional consult/build/handover consultancy approach. This was extremely important to us and was one of the main reasons why we engaged with them – it was critical for me to have support to deliver, rather than just have something delivered for me'

CONTEMPORARY's proposal would provide NET-A-PORTER.COM with a combination of tools that would allow data to be consolidated in a single, centralised location, building a firm foundation upon which further Business Intelligence capabilities would be deployed. To support this, CONTEMPORARY would need to develop OLAP (Online Analytical Processing) cubes to allow NET-A-PORTER.COM to analyse its large volume of data in a multi dimensional way. 'The Cubes are extremely efficient when it comes to storing summary levels and hierarchies and allowing NET-A-PORTER.COM to slice and dice data for analysis,' explained CONTEMPORARY's Managing Director, Andy Steer. 'A traditional relational data model is very flat and often leads to complex and slow running queries, whereas the Cubes used within NET-A-PORTER.COM provide unrivalled flexibility in the way that data can be analysed, evaluated and compared against past performance and market trends.'

The development process was extremely complex as there was significant business understanding that had to go into building the data warehouse and cube. 'SQL Server Analysis Services was used to give a high performance engine combined with rich analytical capabilities such

as KPI and custom calculated members,' continued Andy Steer. 'This allowed NET-A-PORTER.COM to use ProClarity against the Analysis Services cubes to create a number of pre-defined briefing books which gave concise, dynamically updatable views of the business, conveying key information while still allowing users to explore the data to answer their own questions using the ProClarity functionality.'

'CONTEMPORARY's approach really sped up the project development process,' said Nikki. 'At the start of the project I took the decision to go live only when the development of the first phase had been virtually completed so that we could present a credible and immediately usable solution to our business users. CONTEMPORARY's ethos of knowledge transfer and 'quick-start' were key to the project's success and their professional approach and readiness to adapt to our changing objectives during the development phases instilled tremendous confidence in them throughout the company.'

NET-A-PORTER.COM's data warehouse and reporting solution is now live and has already delivered substantial benefits. 'This new solution has had a tremendous impact on the way in which we do business,' continued Nikki. 'We are making smarter and faster business decisions than we ever could before simply because we didn't previously have access to the sort of information that we now have.'

The next phase of the project includes the deployment of Microsoft Office 2010 – the new generation of the Microsoft Office suite that will provide a host of new capabilities including greater collaboration and improved information visualisation. CONTEMPORARY will play a pivotal role in this project.

About CONTEMPORARY

CONTEMPORARY is a Business Objects Platinum Partner with over 17 years product and Business Intelligence industry expertise.

If you are looking for a way to harness your data and transform it into useful, useable information, then look no further.

CONTEMPORARY has worked with a wide range of organisations throughout the UK to successfully deliver business intelligence consulting, training and products that have helped to drastically improve business performance.

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