

## The power of performance management: Customer success in retail

Changes in market conditions and economic uncertainty have forced consumers to make tradeoffs and alter their spending and shopping habits. As a result, more than ever, retailers have to stay on top of trends and better manage their customer relationships, operations and financial performance to maximize profits.

Indeed, the new economy can be an opportunity for retailers to work smarter to deepen relationships with their most loyal and profitable customers and to leapfrog other chains to attract and retain shoppers.

So it's no surprise retailers need visibility into their performance - to sustain profitability while growing market share. To stay ahead, they need to actively monitor operations and employ a dynamic, integrated planning process to guide their decisions and performance. By so doing, they can quickly adapt and evolve as needs and challenges arise.

IBM Cognos performance management - planning, scorecarding, reporting, analysis and

dashboards - provides the foundation retailers need. It allows them to budget, manage performance, assess alternatives and model the financial impact of business scenarios and monitor results across the organization.

With integrated IBM Cognos performance management software and services, retail chains are:

- Improving store operations, profitability, initiatives and return on investment.
- Increasing marketing effectiveness.
- Aligning merchandise planning with corporate strategy and customer demand.
- Gaining complete visibility into promotional activities and optimizing return on marketing campaign and trade promotions.
- Standardizing and integrating the planning process, consolidating and gaining consensus between top-down and bottom-up operational plans, and ensuring all parts of the company are managing to a single set of financial measures and business goals.

Hundreds of retailers worldwide already use Cognos to optimize their business. Read on to learn more about how:

- **US Lumber** uses IBM Cognos software to view its key performance indicators on an hourly basis to gain insight into its eight cost centers and make more informed decisions to improve business strategy.
- **Mark Antony Group** leverages IBM Cognos BI to accelerate delivery of business-critical information and key metrics, facilitate better decision-making and increase sales effectiveness.
- **Steak n Shake** uses IBM Cognos BI to help increase efficiency and provide better customer service, improve competitive advantage through information access and corporate insight, reduce overall spending and achieve record-low associate turnover.
- With the help of IBM Cognos technology, **Rooms to Go** has increased sales by helping staff optimize floor planning based on customer buying habits, reduced advertising costs by better targeting promotions to most-likely buyers and driven significant annual savings by eliminating the need to outsource data analysis.

# US Lumber



US Lumber Group is a \$325 million specialty wholesale building-materials distributor with headquarters in Atlanta, GA. The company provides personalized customer service to more than 6,000 customers and currently distributes products from eight cost centers, providing service throughout 14 southeastern and mid-Atlantic states. US Lumber also distributes domestic and imported forest products from Europe, Canada and South America.

Known for its customer service and high-quality products, US Lumber's sales force was rapidly growing. The company needed a sophisticated BI solution to help calculate and analyze a year's activities, including all their financial forecasting.

The company was already using IBM Cognos ReportNet and chose to migrate to IBM Cognos 8 BI in February. More than 130 users across the organization access IBM Cognos 8 BI, running 500 reports with thousands of views. US Lumber is now able to view its key performance indicators on an hourly basis to judge success in

its eight cost centers and make more informed decisions related to business strategy.

## Challenges faced

Initially, US Lumber had a small vendor providing day-to-day metrics. The Web-based application was limited to daily performance indicators and the overall data scheme was small in scope and difficult to extract.

"As the company grew and got more sophisticated, our ability to forecast a year's activities became a lot more complicated with the tools we had available," recalls Felipe Herrera, senior financial analyst at US Lumber Group.

"At the same time, we were planning a major ERP upgrade and were told that the cost for financial forecasting with our current systems would be high. Given this situation, we decided to look outside of ERP for calculating our financial forecasts at a reasonable cost."

## Strategy followed

Given the limitations of its current application, US Lumber set out to find a solution that provided in-depth

reporting capabilities and could also scale to meet the needs of its quickly growing sales force.

"We were held captive because we had to supply all of our data requirements to a third-party vendor," comments Herrera.

The senior executives at US Lumber were first introduced to the Cognos BI solution in 2005 at the annual Cognos user conference, Cognos Forum, and were impressed by its sophisticated Web reporting capabilities, its flexibility, and its ability to scale. US Lumber evaluated both OutlookSoft and Cognos 8 BI, but ultimately chose Cognos based on its corporate stability and better all-around solution.

US Lumber decided that IBM Cognos 8 BI would enable its sales force to understand and monitor current performance while planning future business strategies. The entire implementation process for Cognos 8 BI took only one weekend. Two of the Cognos trusted partners, Accumetrics and Loadstar, helped with the migration.

“It was just a very easy installation. We had only a handful of reports out of thousands that had issues. All the data was perfect,” states Herrera.

Once the implementation process was complete, US Lumber began running approximately 500 reports, which created thousands of views. IBM Cognos 8 BI views enable data to be seen and understood relationally, which helps each cost center make more informed business decisions.

US Lumber also runs a high-level, corporate overview report for the executives to view and analyze. This report details information on the company as a whole, providing a snapshot view that compares sales and operating costs among the eight branches.

“The daily metrics make it possible for everyone to see exactly where they are and what they’re doing in comparison with the other branches. All I have to do is just tell our sales force to use Cognos 8 BI to find any information they need. It is very powerful,” comments Herrera.

The management, finance, procurement, marketing and sales teams at US Lumber use IBM Cognos 8 BI to view data in a timely fashion and make better decisions for their business operations. Currently, 130 employees use IBM Cognos 8 BI, with the majority of users accessing reports daily. In the future, US Lumber will deploy IBM Cognos 8 Planning to help with product sales planning.

US Lumber also relied on Cognos Support to assist with questions about the deployment of IBM Cognos 8 BI. “When we first migrated, Cognos Support was right there beside us, helping us along with any inquiries we had on the technology. Our overall experience with Cognos Support for the past two years has been very good,” states Herrera.

#### **Benefits realized**

“Cognos 8 BI has opened the eyes of the corporation to how much data we actually have,” states Herrera. “We weren’t aware of how data-starved we were when we only had 12 reports to review and analyze. Cognos 8 BI has really opened up our company data, giving us intuitive insight into the ways it is relevant and connected.”

*“Previously, we would have an application created for us by an outside company. This became expensive, as an update to a third-party procurement application would have cost us \$100,000. With Cognos 8 BI, we can create our own applications that are ten times more sophisticated and flexible than any of the applications created by third-party vendors.”*

*Felipe Herrera,  
Senior Financial Analyst,  
US Lumber Group*

With IBM Cognos 8 BI, US Lumber can now look at all types of data and analyze it on the fly, which helps make daily decisions for management easier and more accurate. Additionally, because US Lumber is able to view its key performance indicators – cost per pound and average margin per day per branch – on an hourly basis, its management team is equipped to understand how their business can be affected by one development instead of another.

“Previously, we would have an application created for us by an outside company,” says Herrera. “This became expensive, as an update to a third-party procurement application would have cost us \$100,000. With Cognos 8 BI, we can create our own applications that are ten times more sophisticated and flexible than any of the applications created by third-party vendors.”

In addition to significant cost savings, IBM Cognos 8 BI provides Herrera with tremendous flexibility in creating new reports by combining data. Branch managers can now create reports that measure planning and reporting at a granular level – account-by-account and expense-by-expense. The company uses this insight into these metrics to assist in judging success and developing more informed business strategies.

IBM Cognos 8 BI has also enabled US Lumber to create a profitability application in which the company assigns costs to multiple items to various types of customers with different sizes of orders. The orders can vary from sending one piece of lumber to a customer to sending them a whole truckload of 45,000 pounds to another. Now, every order has different levels of profitability.

Most importantly, by having all the data in-house, US Lumber has complete control of the information and issues with reports or scorecards. The company is also able to immediately catch an order that was missed or billed incorrectly, and make the necessary adjustment the same day. Now, the sales team is better able to diagnose issues and solve them quickly, increasing customer satisfaction.

Herrera sums up his Cognos experience, “I’ve been programming for many years. I know how a computer thinks and works. Right out of the box, Cognos 8 BI was easy to pick up and start using. Our employees have also found it to be very user-friendly. Cognos has been a real joy to work with and has made a huge difference in our organization.”

# Mark Anthony Group



MARK ANTHONY GROUP INC.  
*Fine Wine, Premium Beer & Specialty Beverages*

Based in Vancouver, BC, the Mark Anthony Group (MAG) is a privately-held manufacturer and distributor of fine wines, premium beer and specialty beverages. The company's brands include Mike's Hard Lemonade, the number one brand in its category and largely responsible for the company's phenomenal growth over the last several years. MAG's primary markets are in North America.

With offices and distribution centers located across North America, MAG depends on a team of external partners to produce, distribute and sell its products. With so many partners and locations involved at different stages of the production life cycle, MAG initially deployed IBM Cognos ReportNet to ease reporting, and then chose to migrate to IBM Cognos 8 BI to enable its sales force to gain full, real-time access to the information in their customer database.

## Challenges faced

The Canadian alcoholic beverage industry is highly regulated by various branches of provincial and federal government bodies. This level of

regulation allows distributors such as MAG to purchase customer and competitor information directly from the government that is otherwise unavailable at this level of detail and accuracy.

With a sizable number of SKUs and products, mixed with federal information on competitors, distributors and bottlers, MAG had a growing database to manage and maintain. The organization needed to allocate more of its staff's time to growing its business and increasing profitability through intuitive and integrated BI sales tools.

"Our biggest challenge was managing the immense amount of data we have and getting the right data over to our sales force," says Michael Der, BI Systems Manager, Mark Anthony Group. "We needed to distribute our information in a timely manner."

## Strategy followed

MAG set out to find an integrated BI tool that would guarantee the data it had purchased from the government was available off-site, and ensure that its sales and marketing teams were receiving up-to-date and accurate

information in the field. In early 2004, the company was looking for a Web-based reporting environment to eliminate running reports from a local client.

"In the beginning, we just wanted to use the information that we were buying from the government. We invested a lot into that data and it's one of our most valuable assets," recalls Der. "But a lot of the time we weren't using it to the fullest capability. We wanted to provide our users with the tools to get data they could turn into useful information to close large deals."

As part of evaluating technologies in 2004, MAG had two key requirements in mind for its ideal BI solution – a strong analysis capability and scalability. MAG ultimately decided on IBM Cognos ReportNet for its maturity in the market and its ability to allow users to manipulate the information to their advantage.

"We also liked the way Cognos products are supported by Cognos Consulting, Training, and Support," states Der. "We needed to make sure

that there was a strong community of users out there so that if we needed support or access to a knowledge base, it would be available not just today, but in the future.”

After its success with IBM Cognos ReportNet, MAG decided to upgrade and standardize with IBM Cognos 8 BI. In 2007, the company began a migration to IBM Cognos 8 BI. After an eight-week process, the company seamlessly moved its reporting infrastructure into the new environment.

“One of the reasons that we chose to migrate to Cognos 8 BI, was to take advantage of Cognos 8 Go! Mobile,” states Der. “We eventually want all of our US field sales teams to access reports on their mobile devices through Cognos 8 Go! Mobile.

“We see the mobile solution as a simpler and more cost-effective alternative, opposed to having our field team carry laptops to access information in their customer sites.”

MAG decided to migrate simultaneously to IBM Cognos 8 BI, and from SQL 2000 to SQL 2005. During the migration, IBM Cognos Professional Services assisted MAG in restructuring its data model.

Users also participated in fast-track training, hosted by IBM Cognos Education in Vancouver, BC. In preparation for the upgrade, MAG had also purchased IBM Cognos DecisionStream and called in IBM Cognos Professional Services to assist in the report migration.

Currently, MAG has over 125 power users trained on the IBM Cognos solutions and runs nearly 100 reports daily, depending on the business unit – manufacturing, distribution and logistics of its Mike’s Hard Lemonade products, or the agency import wine business.

In addition to field sales support, MAG uses IBM Cognos 8 BI in inventory planning to determine the amount of glass or paper they need to buy

for the packaging of their products. Now, MAG runs IBM Cognos 8 BI on Windows 2003 and SQL 2005 servers. The company’s ERP runs on MFG Pro ERP from a UNIX server.

“I don’t think we can ever say we are finished with BI because we are always looking at ways to use it differently,” says Der. “We tell our users, if you can dream up a way to look at the numbers differently, then we can use it. We want to encourage users to raise questions. If it is quantity-based, we are confident we can get that information.”

#### **Benefits realized**

“We are pleased with the way Cognos is working for us,” states Der. “Giving our users the ability to manipulate the information from our database has been an advantage for us.

“Especially with the amount of information that we produce, we are able to take advantage of that capability. Building analysis models from our own data wasn’t enough, we needed to manage the competitive information and identify gaps in our business as well.”

With IBM Cognos 8 BI, MAG has been able to accelerate the delivery of business-critical information to its sales force, giving team members full insight into their customer accounts and the ability to identify which accounts are potential customer wins.

MAG is also using IBM Cognos 8 BI to measure critical success metrics like the amount of additional customers the company is gaining. This measurement used to take place on a monthly or quarterly basis, but can now be obtained weekly, so the company can view the amount of additional points of distribution they are gaining on a week-by-week basis.

“We’ve always had data, but it wasn’t easy to derive this information from it,” states Der.

Der sums up his IBM Cognos experience, “We rely heavily on Cognos 8 BI to get our information out to our sales team. We are able to push our reports out to them, rather than have them access the reports online.

That’s been a big benefit for us and reduces the amount of time that they’re spending in front of a computer. With this real-time access, our sales team has a leg up on the competition, and they can use this tool to increase the size of their accounts and even close major deals.”

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*Michael Der,  
BI Systems Manager,  
Mark Anthony Group*

# Steak n Shake



The Steak n Shake Company is a full service, casual dining restaurant open 24 hours a day. Offering made-to-order food at the speed and price of fast food, Steak n Shake is one of the oldest restaurant chains in the US.

Steak n Shake operates 483 restaurants in 20 Midwest and southeast states, including 49 franchised units. With more than 20,000 employees, the company's revenue is approximately \$700 million.

In 2006, Steak n Shake began executing a multi-year strategy to achieve sustained same-store sales growth and prepare for market expansion. Integral to the plan was implementation of an enterprise BI solution.

With that in mind, Steak n Shake selected IBM Cognos 8 BI to enable the company to focus on its key economic drivers, and help drive performance management and profitable growth.

## Challenges faced

To meet its business objectives, Steak n Shake needed to overcome some challenges in its IT, operations and finance groups. Like many mid-size companies, the company's IT

department had to do more with less. More specifically, the technical team needed to consolidate internal skill sets, streamline reporting, and provide field users and corporate business units with self-service reporting.

On the operations side, store managers needed to spend less time analyzing numbers and questioning the data, and more time taking care of associates and guests. For finance, the objective was to align corporate strategy with operational metrics and measure performance to plan.

"This is about taking into account all of our key metrics in how we manage our business," says Stephen Pruden, Director of Information Technology Strategy and Integration at Steak n Shake. "Whether it's focusing on improving our leadership, whether it's focusing on retaining associates or whether it's focusing on whether we are hitting our margins. All of these things drive same-store sales for our operators."

The solution? Build two complementary technology assets: an enterprise data warehouse and a single BI platform. The BI platform, in particular, would serve as a key enabler for future growth.

## Strategy followed

After considering several BI vendors, Steak n Shake selected an IBM Cognos solution. The company was attracted to the IBM Cognos system due to its seamless integration across multiple data sources, ad-hoc reporting, and dashboard, scorecard and self-service capabilities.

Steak n Shake then sought guidance from IBM Cognos Platinum Partner, JCB Partners. "We wanted a partner that had expertise, not only with the technical solution, but also within our specific industry, the hospitality and multi-unit restaurant operator space," states Pruden.

To kick off the implementation, Steak n Shake created and loaded its new data warehouse with IBM Cognos Data Manager. The company then tapped JCB Partners to help create a "one-stop shopping" portal for employees that included dashboards, reports and analysis cubes. JCB consultants completed the data warehouse design and initial dashboard and report implementation in under 120 days.



To enable employees to take full advantage of their new IBM Cognos 8 BI solution, Steak n Shake also established a Business Intelligence Competency Center (BICC). Sponsored by the company's CFO, the BICC comprises a cross-functional mix of company executives and subject matter experts. The BICC is seen as a model for project prioritization, requirements gathering, strategic alignment and governance.

In addition to the BICC, Steak n Shake used several unique strategies to ensure rapid adoption of the new system across the company:

- Building an infrastructure that would scale to meet rapid demand.
- Starting with the revenue-generating business units.
- Concentrating on simplification and user perception.
- Encouraging organic growth.

After an initial deployment of 50 sites, Steak n Shake has since implemented IBM Cognos 8 BI throughout all of its stores. The organization has also standardized on IBM Cognos products for all of its dashboard, reporting and analysis needs.

"Over a 9-month span, the IBM Cognos solution was deployed to 2000 users in our restaurants, corporate and other offices," notes Pruden. "This deployment was not scripted ahead of time, but grew organically from our initial implementation.

"We believe our overall success was due to the speed at which we deployed the BI solution. This would not have been possible without a very scalable infrastructure providing trusted information through a simple reporting portal that meets the needs of restaurant managers, executives and analysts."

#### **Benefits realized**

Using the IBM Cognos system, Steak n Shake has been able to standardize its reporting process and provide users with a single and complete view of the business.

"With IBM Cognos 8 BI, our reports are being delivered faster and in a more efficient way with little IT overhead," explains Pruden.

Specifically, 2000 associates in 500 locations use IBM Cognos reports to manage labor, enforce quality and cleanliness standards, improve

*"Employee satisfaction is very important to Steak n Shake so the IBM Cognos system has been a big win. Not only did IBM Cognos 8 BI score an impressive 96 percent rate of satisfaction among our pilot store managers, 91 percent believe it is easy to train new users and 85 percent state the solution saves them time every day."*

*Stephen Pruden,  
Director of Information Technology  
Strategy and Integration,  
Steak n Shake*

guest satisfaction, and manage financials. Analysis tools are used by marketing, payroll and finance. And senior executives use IBM Cognos dashboards to stay on top of daily performance and strategic trends.

“Our IBM Cognos implementation has shaped all major business units at Steak n Shake,” says Pruden. “Most importantly, our executives have the faith in information delivered through the IBM Cognos system to drive our corporate strategy and measure our progress.”

The IBM Cognos self-service reporting capabilities provide employees with easy access to information that is more accurate and timely. Equally important, store managers can now judge the day-to-day health of their restaurants quickly. Armed with this new insight, staff are able to make better decisions and support the growth targets and corporate objectives of Steak n Shake.

Pruden notes that information access and corporate insight are

a real competitive advantage in the current economic climate. Restaurant operators use IBM Cognos dashboards to measure sales and average check performance; manage food, labor, and other controllable costs; understand customer satisfaction based on third-party surveys and increase speed of service for drive-through sales to maintain and grow market share.

“Our IBM Cognos implementation gives us the ability to change behavior quickly in our restaurants, measure the impact of these changes relative to our strategy and refine as needed to drive results,” says Pruden. “During these tough times, we have reduced overall spending through doing more with less. Associate turnover is at a record low of 128 percent, overall guest satisfaction levels are near record levels and speed of service times has decreased substantially.”

Further, the IT department has gained efficiencies and now has more time to devote to other projects.

“Because of the IBM Cognos BI single report-authoring tool set, we have been able to reduce the number of tools that we support,” says Pruden. “We have also found the IBM Cognos system to be very-user friendly and intuitive, so it is easy to train employees.”

The IBM Cognos solution has also helped put IT on the map at Steak n Shake. “Steak n Shake restaurants now view IT as enabler of the business,” states Pruden. “Previously, we were often seen as a bottleneck to securing valuable information. Now we have employees lining up outside our door because they want more information and support for streamlining their business processes.”

Pruden sums up the company’s experience with the IBM Cognos solution: “Employee satisfaction is very important to Steak n Shake, so the IBM Cognos system has been a big win. Not only did IBM Cognos 8 BI score an impressive 96 percent rate of satisfaction among our pilot store managers, 91 percent believe it is easy to train new users and 85 percent state the solution saves them time every day.”

# Rooms to Go



Rooms to Go is America's #1 independent furniture company, offering stylish furniture at everyday low prices, original room packages, superior service and fast delivery.

## Challenge

Which cocktail tables and accessories sell best with a particular sofa? Which living room packages sell most often with each bedroom package? For Rooms to Go, having the answers to these questions is key to maximizing sales and profitability.

However, with each sale captured as a discrete transaction in one of three regional transactional databases, it was virtually impossible for marketing staff and store personnel to identify buying patterns.

"We knew what sold and who our customers were, but we couldn't see how it interrelated," says Russ Rosen, the company's CIO. "If we don't learn from our past sales, we're leaving the chance to increase profitability behind."

## Solution

Using IBM's Information Agenda approach to develop a unique information agenda for its company, Rooms to Go is transforming information into a trusted strategic asset that can be rapidly leveraged across applications, processes and decisions for competitive advantage.

Step one has been the creation of a trusted and accurate source for information. Working with IBM Business Partner JCB Partners, the company is combining its three regional transactional databases into a single enterprise data warehouse based on IBM InfoSphere Balanced Warehouse.

With the Balanced Warehouse, Rooms to Go now has an integrated environment that provides the flexibility, scalability and performance it needs to deliver a single version of truth to its staff, within context and in real time. Additionally, because the offerings are ready for integration, no custom work is needed, lowering the risk and accelerating delivery time.

During phase two, JCB Partners used IBM Retail Data Warehouse and IBM Cognos 8 BI software to accelerate the delivery of reports and provide staff with insight into the top-selling packages; sales by geography, category and customer type; and much more. The pre-built IBM Retail Data Model and the flexibility of Cognos software enabled IT staff to begin delivering reports in just six weeks.

"We needed a platform that would grow with us," says Rosen. "IBM Information Agenda consultants helped us to design an information infrastructure that would address our needs today and support us as our business needs evolved."

Using IBM Global Financing, Rosen spread the cost of the initiative over 24 months. "I've had an excellent relationship with IBM Global Financing over the years," says Rosen. "Because payments are spread over time, it's easier to get projects like this approved."

## Benefits

According to Rosen, unlocking the business value of company information will help drive increased growth and greater profitability for the company.

“In the past, buyers often made decisions based on gut feel. Now, they can see relationships among the data that they couldn’t before. With this insight, we can adjust our floor planning based on customer buying patterns and target the most-likely buyers for each promotion.”

Additionally, IBM Information Management solutions provide marketing staff with the flexibility to analyze the data as needed.

“One marketing manager in Florida began running TV ads for mattresses at 3 a.m. and needed to compare sales for several time periods to determine the ads’ effectiveness,” says Rosen.

“Before, she had to contact IT and wait for programmers to develop the report. Now, she can access the

information right from her desktop without delay and alter the advertising strategy more quickly.”

Following its biggest quarterly promotions, the company had previously hired an external firm to analyze sales data. Now, marketing staff can quickly and easily gain the same insight through the IBM Cognos BI reports, saving the company about US\$120,000 annually.

*“IBM Information Agenda consultants helped us to design an information infrastructure that would address our needs today and support us as our business needs evolved.”*

*Russ Rosen,  
Chief Information Officer,  
Rooms To Go*

## **About IBM Cognos BI and Performance Management**

IBM Cognos business intelligence (BI) and performance management solutions deliver world-leading enterprise planning, consolidation and BI software, support and services to help companies plan, understand and manage financial and operational performance. IBM Cognos solutions bring together technology, analytical applications, best practices, and a broad network of partners to give customers an open, adaptive and complete performance solution. Over 23,000 customers in more than 135 countries around the world choose IBM Cognos solutions.

For further information  
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