H.Y. LOUIE & CONNX CASE STUDY

H.Y. Louie Co. Limited engages in the retail and wholesale distribution of grocery products. The company services independent retail locations and 45 IGA stores. The company was founded in 1903 and is based in Burnaby, Canada

Industry
Wholesale Grocers

HQ
Chicago, IL

Solutions
CONNX for OpenVMS

Highlights

♦ Established over 100 years ago, H.Y. Louie Co. Limited is one of North America's oldest wholesale grocers servicing numerous independent retail locations and 45 IGA stores.

Initial Challenge

CONNX Solutions entered the picture over a decade ago when H.Y. Louie sought out CONNX Solutions' flagship product, CONNX for RMS, to access its distribution system for purchasing, shipping and inventory report generation. In addition to data access and ad hoc reporting, CONNX was also viewed as a data integration tool. The company had just started developing some SQL talent with a Microsoft SQL Server database project that it was integrating with the distribution system and retail sales data. H.Y. Louie's distribution data still resides on a DAI, DEC-based system, which is extremely difficult to use according to Mike Rouleau, Director of IS. All of the data is in a RMS file format and does not lend itself to novice programmers or individuals with limited Windows programming.

Solution

CONNX came in by providing easy access to the legacy data, making it appear as simple SQL. Rouleau considers CONNX to be a seamless product that allows the user to access data from any location without the knowledge of where that data resides, making the data appear as if it is one view. Rouleau explains, "I think the biggest selling point for me for CONNX . . . was that from that moment in time . . . CONNX has not shown a seam in this company. I can't tell you where the CONNX seam is. . . .I don't have to wrestle with CONNX. I don't have to figure out where the data is with CONNX. It's just another SQL Server to me. The data that's being generated through those character cell screens every day and, the data that's being generated by OpenVMS jobs overnight that I want access to the

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Advantages

That same seamless aspect of CONNX allows H.Y. Louie to perform queries that produce ". . . real-time, up to a minute ago [data] . . ." according to Rouleau. Real-time queries are an important feature that is used in the company's shipping department when looking up a shipping status or generating a preliminary invoice to send to H.Y. Louie stores informing them of inventory to expect.

Not only have individual departments found value with CONNX, but also the executive compass of H.Y. Louie. They have gained better access to critical decision information than if they relied solely on their DAI system. Using only this system for data access and ad hoc reporting was not an appealing alternative. The reports being produced were perceived as too cumbersome to help the company make competitive adjustments.

Data Integration

Over the years, H.Y. Louie has developed another use for CONNX. The company can send out market competitive pricing with CONNX via its retail point of sale system to its independent retail locations and IGA stores. In the past, static pricing updates were saved on disk and mailed to the individual stores. ". . . How we're analyzing our data has changed dramatically over the past 10 years. CONNX is what's allowing us to do that. . ." states Rouleau. H.Y. Louie has designed an algorithm for determining the suggested ad pricing distributed to individual stores. With CONNX, this algorithm utilizes the real-time RMS data residing in the [retail point of sale] system and applies market intelligence to that data in the company's SQL Server database to determine a market adjusted price. This new pricing is then pushed back to the retail point of sale system where it is available to the H.Y. Louie's stores. Overall, CONNX enables market pricing algorithms to be calculated in a relational database (SQL Server) and be written back to a legacy Database (RMS) for direct connection by the H.Y. Louie stores. Rouleau further elaborates, "We are actually writing back very key pricing data back to the . . . Alpha System. It's probably our most key piece of data. CONNX allows us to do that."

A Money Saver

Providing these capabilities, CONNX has saved H.Y. Louie from replacing its ten year old distribution system and spending up to five million dollars on a brand new enterprise solution. The company's distribution software was deemed as archaic, but replacing it was considered extremely cost ineffective. Upgrading the software would mean upgrading to a new required level of hardware to support that software and upgrading the store terminals to access that data.

Easy/Seamless

From the very beginning, H.Y. Louie considered its experience with CONNX to be successful. The evaluation process and implementation of CONNX was easy. Even after implementation, the company never encountered any issues with CONNX. Rouleau explained, ". . . I think CONNX made it easy for us to try it out, for us to be comfortable with it and for us to slide it into production because it made sense. . . . We had stopped thinking about CONNX as a tool in our shop, it was just the highway. . . It was the highway between that legacy system and new tools that were being refined and perfected everyday like Microsoft. . . We are primarily a Microsoft shop. . . CONNX never got in the way, it was seamless, it was hidden from us, and it just continued to work. . . "

The success H.Y. Louie experienced with CONNX from the onset, has followed the company throughout its relationship with CONNX Solutions. Version updates or upgrades were only installed for the purposes of staying up to date with CONNX technology.

Knowledgeable Staff

H.Y. Louie's overall experience with CONNX has been smooth. Therefore, contact with CONNX Solutions customer service staff has been minimal. Thinking back to those few instances, Rouleau considered the CONNX Solutions customer service department to be ". . . Very patient, very knowledgeable and very customer-service oriented. . ."

Holding the Bridge Up

CONNX is a seamless solution that is practically invisible to the H.Y. Louie executive staff and IT team. However, the power of CONNX has not gone unnoticed. In addition to being "the cables that hold the bridge up," CONNX has assisted with the development of many documents, reports and processes H.Y. Louie relies on a daily basis. The order entry processes, loading documents, letdown reports for the shipping warehouse and pricing interactive tools have all been possible because of CONNX. Rouleau explains,

"See that's the thing with CONNX. . . That over there, that's because of CONNX, and that over there, that's because of CONNX. . . You don't think of CONNX as part of the solution . . . even though it's an integral part of the solution. If CONNX [were to stop] tomorrow, I'm [in trouble]."