Hillcrest Foods, Inc. Cuts Costs and Increases Efficiency with New Business Analytics Solution

Company Overview

Hillcrest Foodservice is a foodservice distributor offering fresh and frozen meats, seafood, dairy and groceries, as well as specialty items, gourmet food products, disposables and cleaning supplies. Hillcrest delivers to restaurants, daycares, schools, caterers and retail stores with a focus on pizzerias, fast casual and white table cloth restaurants throughout northern Ohio and western Pennsylvania.

Hillcrest's success today can be directly linked to hard work and its owner's "customer first" approach to doing business. Hillcrest achieved success and solid growth through careful selection of both employees and business partners, earning a great reputation within the industry.

Today, Hillcrest continues to seek out business opportunities to partner with organizations that are in need of quality products, excellent service, and competitive prices.

Problem/Challenge

Hillcrest did not have any type of standardized reporting system in place, and therefore, could not easily extract data from the enterprise systems nor timely deliver critical sales performance information to their executive leadership.

Most data analysis and manipulation was done using Excel or Access. In many cases each report was a custom build and would have to be recreated each time a report was needed, often multiple times per week. Trend analysis was very difficult, and filtering data to different managers was time consuming. The speed and accessibility of critical information was very limited.

Solution/Requirement

Hillcrest's initial search for a BI solution began when it became evident that there was a need to centralize, systematize, and access business metrics in an efficient manner. The solution had to offer connections to multiple databases including DB2, MS Access, MS Excel, CSV, and XML files, with ease of use playing a key role as well.

After adopting InetSoft's Style Intelligence, a major percentage of the software's resources are now utilized for supply chain optimization and management. Hillcrest is a distributor with multiple locations and offers a wide selection of goods. Style Intelligence is used to connect different databases to create reports for the optimum transfer of products.

After using the software, Jim Schnurr, Director of Customer Solutions at Hillcrest, told InetSoft: "We found a lot of the canned reporting in the AS/400 mainframe wasn't user friendly. The Operations department wanted to have some of their own reporting to slot and work the warehouse more efficiently.

As our business evolved, we kept a lot of our extra or slow moving inventory in a different building, and we needed to develop an efficient way to get information between the two locations.

Style Intelligence looks at quantity in the first building and asks if we have enough to meet current demand, or do we need to shift certain items between locations. Once that started happening there was a lot of demand to create additional reports internally to optimize other areas of our business."

Customer Value

Hillcrest has had great success with InetSoft's solution. During the time Hillcrest has spent with the software, they have produced many useful visualizations and reports. Schnurr's latest accomplishment is the one he is most proud of; it's a report that optimizes the printing of pizza boxes for various customers.

"We have a printer for printing pizza boxes, and we have a variety of customers we produce boxes for; a little under 400 prints total. We wanted to find the most efficient way based on purchases to set up individual customer print operations. With Style Intelligence, we created a report that looks at customer purchases and determines what to print, how many to print, and best order to produce them. The report considers various metrics, such as the color and size of the boxes.

It also takes into account if inventory dropped more quickly than usual, and if it did, runs another report called the 'hot print' which determines a need for immediate production. We run this report every Monday and it basically lines up the production schedule.

Prior to this report, it took one person 10 hours a week to create this information manually. With Style Intelligence, not only do we save 500 man hours every year, but it allows the previous overseer of this process to manage other segments of business. This better time utilization is spent on projects that are more profitable for the company. The report reads the information from various databases to determine printing order and optimizes our printing, inventory levels, and ensures a maximum fill rate.

"Always ask yourself 'How does what you do affect your customer?' We follow fill rates and error rates very closely, and that's really kind of the driving force we're looking at. Every little error is a big error as far as our customers are concerned."

- Jim Schnurr

Projects like this were not first envisioned when we first purchased Style Intelligence, but it's a big part of what we ended up doing. We can use the software as a means of identifying opportunities to be more efficient."

Hillcrest has created many other dashboards with Style Intelligence for use in sales, purchasing, payroll production, operations, and accounts receivable. These are some of the most prevalent:

- Tracking – looks at six million lines of invoice detail, linked into multiple databases, and all pulled together into one report

- Today's routes – tracks arrivals and departures of company vehicles to accurately determine where trucks are at all times

- Short for delivery report – automatic report that goes out to purchasing team and tracks orders without enough stock and inventory to ship next day; allows Hillcrest to source a different area/double check inventory numbers/substitute product to improved fill rate