"It's our goal to make Safeco an 'intelligent' organization by putting strategic BI technology into the hands of senior management and thus greatly facilitate their decision making." ~ Mike Skibeness, Manager of Information Systems – Safeco

Safeco

Revenue: $7.3 billion

Industry: Insurance/Financial

Employees: 11,000

Users: 800

Headquarters: Seattle, Washington

Situation Analysis

Safeco has been helping people protect their valuables and secure their financial futures for more than 80 years. Today, it provides a comprehensive mix of insurance and investment products sold nation wide through a network of independent agents who double as trustworthy financial advisors. Through them, Safeco's mission is to make the consumer's experience of buying, selling, and owning insurance easier than with anyone else. Safeco's success with this approach has propelled it up into the Fortune 500 ranking of top companies.

The independent agent/advisor has been key to Safeco's rise. Each one receives the most competitive products possible from Safeco in order to meet their clients' needs for rock solid insurance policies and investments. In turn, Safeco's agent/ advisors thrive on the long-term relationships that the easy-to-choose, long-trusted Safeco products help build.

Another secret of Safeco's success is the company's careful focus on cost savings and effective expense management. Its state-of-the art systems for expense budgeting, management reporting, and decision support monitor and control costs and expenses. Also, the systems keep tabs on overheads and optimize working capital so that Safeco can provide its sales representatives with the most competitively priced packages.

In order to tightly monitor Safeco's operations in this way, its Finance and IT departments jointly manage the process by bundling their budgeting, forecasting, consolidations, reporting and analysis into one, enterprise-wide Corporate Performance Management solution that benefits not just the company but also Safeco's agent/advisors and their clients.

Solution

When it comes to technology and business innovation, Safeco is an early but judicious adopter. Soon after market analyst firm Gartner identified and coined the term "Corporate Performance Management", or CPM for short, Safeco embraced its principles – long before many other companies had appreciated what CPM could do to improve business processes. Safeco adopted CPM by forming an internal Corporate Performance Management department staffed by financial controllers who quickly found that the easily-implemented CPM complemented their established focus on Business Intelligence (BI) best practices.

In 2002, Safeco replaced its legacy expense planning system which involved a combination of Essbase OLAP cubes on the back-end of the company's computer system and Excel spreadsheets out on the user front-end.

"We needed a new solution that would get at the Essbase OLAP data we needed for budgeting and planning – one that was flexible and that could be tailored to fit our business exactly," says Skibeness. "We did look at other budgeting solutions - but they locked us into a rigid, standardized expense planning process inherent in the software and that wasn't going to work for Safeco."

What Safeco needed and wanted more was room for creativity and customization. It had to be able to create menus, form templates, and do up reports specifically suited to Safeco. Also, the company changes to a more productive organizational structure from time to time so it needed a budgeting and planning solution that would easily adapt to new departments and other corporate improvements.

"We want to help our agents sell our products. The better we handle our expenses and watch for variances, the better we, in turn, are able to offer right-priced insurance and financial products for consumers and therefore make it more attractive for independent agents to sell Safeco."
~ Mike Skibeness, Manager of Information Systems – Safeco

CLARITY systems

> Clarity 6 is used as the data collection interface for expense, revenue, and corporate planning for all of Safeco's 800 budgeting and planning users.

Results

The result is that today, CPM software from Clarity Systems – Clarity 6 provides Safeco with all its budgeting, planning, forecasting, and financial reporting tools. Clarity 6 is used as the data collection interface for expense, revenue, and corporate planning for all of Safeco's 800 budgeting and planning users (who are responsible for over 1,400 cost centers throughout the United States). The web-based system also meets Safeco's finance and information technology needs as well as end-user requirements with key features and benefits including:

• An Excel-like look and feel that provides budget managers with a familiar environment
• An easy to deploy to large communities nature, thanks to it being web-based
• Seamless inter-workings with existing leading multi-dimensional databases
• Full-feature functionality needed by budget managers to spot budget oversights
• A reliability that makes it easy to administer, maintain, and update the system, keeping downtimes to a minimum
• An ease of customizing reports and templates as business conditions change
• An adaptability to current and future needs of the organization
• Security features that allow only specified users to view authorized information

With its built-in performance measurement, web reporting, and navigational dashboard, Clarity 6 delivers real-time information enabling the user organization to have a faster, better grip on its bottom-line performance.

"Getting the right data in the right format to the right people is what it's all about," concludes Skibeness. "We used to have reporting only on actuals. Now we can see year-to-date, actual versus planned, as well as variances, all thanks to Clarity Systems. And we can get those views very frequently -- down to the day if required. We can see discrepancies right away and address them immediately."

In short, Clarity 6 has been a boon to Safeco senior management's decision making.

And it didn't take long for it to happen. From signing of the software contract through to the often suspenseful "go-live" date, it took just a few weeks to implement the system – and do it without drama. Granted, Safeco already had the SQL database, Web, and Essbase OLAP servers they needed, but they also made a wise decision.

"We used a Clarity consultant for the initial set-up and implementation which I would highly recommend," explains Skibeness. "We also used Clarity's consulting help for some of the customization and template work. So it took only two short months to put all our expense, revenue, and corporate planning processes in place."

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