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WILL BLAKE

 Director of Technology
and Analytics at CRU


Pyramid Toolsets Fine-Tune CRU's Data-Driven Business

From its London headquarters, a leading commodity market analysis company uses data across its global business to increase efficiencies and grow revenue

Key Figures



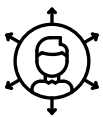
IMPROVED SALES PROCESSES

Untapped revenue opportunities are easier to identify



FASTER REPORTING

Quarterly reports are now monthly



PROACTIVE DECISION-MAKING

Faster access to data makes the business more proactive than reactive webtelligence



BETTER DATA GOVERNANCE

Improved visibility builds trust in data sets for clients

Challenge

CRU is a leader in commodity market analysis, providing unrivalled business intelligence on global metals, mining and fertilizer industries. The last decade has seen the company transformed from a paper-based publisher to a digital operation, making increasingly data-driven analysis available from its website through subscription.

As part of its digital transformation, the company looked to move away from SQL Server reporting services. “The real pain point was availability and doing manual reporting in Excel,” explained Will Blake, Director of Technology and Analytics. “We wanted to make the data available as a ‘single source of truth’ to finance and sales. They were reporting numbers independently, and it was difficult identifying the ones that were accurate.”

As well as squeezing efficiencies out of back office functions, there was also an opportunity to use a sophisticated analytics platform to help with market analysis for clients.

Solution

Will Blake chose Pyramid because of easy integration with its Microsoft stack and the combination of features and price. The company started with the Office BI product and upgraded to Pyramid 2018, but not before considering Microsoft Power BI and Tableau. “They lose out on the whole



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date governance and data management piece, which was very important to us,” he said. “With Pyramid, we can build dashboards centrally and push them out to users, who have some self-service, but it’s still controlled.”

CRU took advantage of Pyramid’s increasing support for cloud and hybrid environments, particularly the tight integration with Microsoft Azure. “One of the big reasons I went with Pyramid is that it fits onto our Microsoft stack and it’s helping move with us to the cloud,” said Will. His priority is to have a platform where different systems in the underlying architecture – on- and off-premise – can be brought together to provide a single source of truth.

The main goal is to create consistency in numbers across the business, while giving different business units dashboards to dig down into data for their own analysis. A big win for the sales team is how Pyramid’s automation of data makes it easier to track customer subscriptions. Previously it was a manual process, reliant on each sales person logging in to see when one of their customers was up for renewal. Now it’s automatically updated every hour.

In finance, improved efficiency means reports that were painstakingly produced every quarter are now published monthly. “Pyramid has moved finance away from reactive reporting to looking at what they can do to impact the future,” said Will. “If numbers are low, we can react quicker and do something about it for the next quarter.”

Pyramid has also become part of the toolbox for CRU’s market analysis services. CRU covers around 30 commodities, each generating millions of data points, which can, for example, be used to forecast the price of raw materials for car and mobile manufacturers. “We could have developed our own reporting solution, but building and maintaining it would have been onerous, so it’s a lot easier to put Pyramid on top,” explained Will. “Within a couple of days, you can build dashboards which aggregate all the data together.”

Benefits

In the last decade CRU has more than doubled its business, which Will Blake partly attributes to running existing operations more efficiently rather than reinventing the business model. Pyramid has played a significant part in the change. “The cadence of our reporting is much faster. We used to get insights a month later than we needed them, whereas now we see constant updates,” said Will Blake. “A lot more visibility means we don’t miss anything.”

In sales, every single subscription renewal is chased down, which has fostered more competitiveness in the team because they can all see each other’s numbers. In finance, the gains have been about efficiency with automated reporting freeing up people to work on tasks with more business value, instead of inputting data into spreadsheets.

The cumulative impact of all the insights is an executive team that has a better view of the financial position of the company at any given time. Sometimes it’s as rudimentary as identifying products being sold to one

company in a sector but not to others, the kind of information that was hidden before processes were automated and the data centralized.

“One of the benefits of seeing where we are month-to-month is that we can make decisions and take actions to improve the situation. Pyramid allows all the data residing in databases to be much more accessible. It gives us visibility very quickly and data in a usable form that is actionable. It has definitely helped with our revenue growth,” said Will.

Pyramid has also enabled better data governance, something that has become important with clients becoming more circumspect about how insights are derived. The ability to track sometimes complex combinations of data sets is much easier with Pyramid. “It’s about putting metadata on data sets for clients who want to know more about our data supply chain. Pyramid has helped us to build trust in our data sets,” he said.

The decision to go with Pyramid has been vindicated in many areas, topped off by the company’s partnership approach to the engagement. “They are fantastic to work with,” said Will Blake. “I deal with a lot of different suppliers and Pyramid stands out as being approachable, honest and transparent.”

With Pyramid Analytics, CRU can:

- 1 Improve business decision-making through more timely insights
- 2 Fill holes in revenue caused by lack of visibility
- 3 Achieve better data governance and the balance between self-service and control
- 4 Advance a cloud strategy with a platform that supports hybrid environments