

SCOUTS CANADA HONOURS 160,000 WITH DATABEACON ACCESS TO MEMBERSHIP MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

“The system lifeblood of the Scouts organization revolves around tracking changing needs”

Challenge

Interactive Web Reporting and Data Analysis for more than 160,000 members

Solution

One dual-processor Web server running Data-beacon Collaboration Edition

IT Infrastructure

Microsoft SQL Server 2000, Siebel MidMarket Edition 6.2.3

Return on Investment

Fractional cost compared to traditional vendors

User Population

Scouts Canada staff, volunteers, council presidents, executive directors, members

Future Plans

Use Databeacon PageEnhancer API to fully integrate reports into Scouts Canada Web site

Industry

Volunteer Youth Programs

Organization

Scouts Canada

Location

Ottawa, Canada

Web site

www.scouts.ca

You don't get much more Canadian than Scouts Canada. Started in the spring of 1908, mere months after the English scouting movement took off in 1907 with Lt. Gen. Baden-Powell's book, "Scouting for Boys", Scouts Canada has planted itself into the roots of Canadian life and now boasts more than 160,000 members and volunteer leaders in seven youth programs.

I.T. veterans Bob Hallett and Tom Obright have learned that the systems lifeblood of their organization revolves around tracking the changing needs and demographics of those members and their Scout leaders. Hallett is the Divisional Executive Director, Operations Division, with 22 years at Scouts Canada. Obright is the Director, Information Management, with 19 years at Scouts.

When they decided to replace an early-90s client-server Membership Management System that was being fed from 27 disparate regional databases, they knew a Web-based system accessible to anyone with an Internet connection would be the ideal way to centralize data sprawl and better serve their coast-to-coast organization.

"We were only as good at the national level as what was in those 27 databases," says Obright. "The way things worked, including a lot of paper-based data entry, the results of our September-to-November member recruiting drive wouldn't be known until the following August. It was taking us almost a full year to precisely understand how many members we

had in which geographies. That impacted efficiencies on everything from ordering uniforms to stocking our stores to purchasing the proper amount of insurance to cover potential liabilities."

The pair brought in consultants from the Ottawa office of Deloitte Touche Management Solutions to help them select best-of-breed Web technologies for the next generation of their Membership Management System. The objectives for the browser-based system

included the ability for anyone across the country to access and add to a central database.

Hallett chuckles when he says, "For the vast majority of our people, databases have been things you put information into, not get information out of."

Reporting was a key element of any Web-based solution, so after Scouts and the consultants settled on the database vendor (Microsoft SQL Server 2000), they went in search of a

complimentary reporting and analysis engine. The choices were narrowed down to Crystal Enterprise Edition and Databeacon.

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"Ultimately we went with Databeacon because Crystal can't match Databeacon's self-serve reporting flexibility – we envisaged maintaining a small number of standard summary reports with 300-400 user-driven permutations based on people being able to ask their own questions of the data or create their own reports," says Hallett. "As well, Crystal charges

"I've seen what good reporting and analysis software has done for the business world. Now, with Databeacon, it's finally getting to a place where it can make a difference in guiding school systems to the same kind of efficiencies & accountabilities."

on a per user basis while Databeacon charges per server with unlimited users. While we didn't know exactly how many of our members would be accessing the system at the outset, we understood that wide adoption by tens or hundreds of thousands of users was going to be cost-prohibitive with another vendor."

Relying on Databeacon's Web-centric architecture that pushes both the Databeacon Insight viewer, preformatted reports and a compressed multi-dimensional data file (or cube) to the client's PC, Hallet and Obright launched their 1.5-million-record Membership Management System to an initial 24,000 members for the 2001 fall registration season. The 2002 fall registration season saw a full rollout to all 160,000 members.

To start, five initial base reports cover membership profiles, member registration information, awards listings, training progress, and parent information. From there, Scouts Canada staff, key volunteers, council presidents and executive directors are able to drill down to the data they need, and create and save their own self-customized reports whenever necessary.

"The data and level of detail our members can pull from our new system is a large leap over the previous version," says Obright. "Each of our councils was required to undertake a lengthy and expensive process to pull together what now takes a few minutes with Databeacon going against our centralized database."

Obright describes the Databeacon approach as pay once versus pay-as-you-play. "With this software," he says, "the server is used only in the first click as you launch the Databeacon Insight viewer in your browser. After what is commonly a few minutes to load the viewer on a dial-up connection, or seconds on broadband, the user's PC takes over from there. That's how we're able to service a six-figure population with one dual-processor Web server running Databeacon. If we adopted the client-server approach taken by most other vendors, the system would come up faster at the outset, but each subsequent click on the data would take a server processing toll that Databeacon exacts from just the first click of the mouse."

Obright and Hallet refer to Databeacon as "the killer app" inside their Membership Management System (which also relies on middleware from Siebel MidMarket

Edition 6.2.3 to input member data into the database). The reasons range from pocketknife functionality to strategic insights delivered by the software.

At the pocketknife level, Scout leaders use Databeacon to quickly export membership lists for mail-out newsletters and notices. For example, a Cub leader can go to the Member Registration Information report, drill down through regions to his specific pack, and use Databeacon's export facility to pump out names and addresses to a program like LabelMaker Pro. "We used to see database programming bills for several hundred dollars from each district to get the same result," says Obright.

At the strategic level, Hallet is thrilled with the new system's instant fix on reporting Scouts Canada's demographics. "The fact that we can check in and see the progress of our district registrations as they happen is something I've been looking forward to for years," he says.

Upcoming priorities include matching their membership database against census information to allow districts to understand how their recruiting efforts are going relative to the youth population in their area, and a senior management "dashboard" report that relates finances to membership progress.

Hallett and Obright are constantly surveying their members' satisfaction with the Databeacon-enabled system. "So far, 25% say they love it, and want even more reports," says Obright. "50% say they like it and are getting used to it, and 25% say the interface is still too complex for them." For those 25% the I.T. team at Scouts Canada is deploying Databeacon's PageEnhancer API. With this application program interface tool they can use a scripting language to take control of Databeacon Insight Viewer's interface and create a highly simplified "big-button" entry into their system for first-time or occasional PC users.

Obright makes a point of mentioning Databeacon's customer support. "Consistently good, quick and up-front is how I'd describe it," he says. "You have to appreciate Tom doesn't praise many vendors like that," says Hallett. "That's one of the reasons why when our people log into our Membership Management System, the first thing they see on our Welcome screen is the Databeacon logo."

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