ABSTRACT

3M takes the lead in data quality reengineering for major manufacturers

PROJECT

Data Consolidation

Partner Management

CRM

e-Business

INDUSTRY

Retail

PROJECT MANAGER

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THE COMPANY

3M has always been well known for product innovation. The company's goal is that 30 percent of each year's sales must come from products less than four years old. Known for innovative products including its well-known Post-It Notes, Scotchgard fabric protector and high-tech composites for laptop computer displays, the $14.2 billion company manufactures and sells 50,000 products in 200 countries worldwide.

3M recognizes that it must be as innovative in its customer relationships as it is with technology. Serving a wide variety of markets—from consumer to commercial and manufacturing to health care—makes managing industry trading partner relationships is a hefty challenge.

THE CHALLENGE

At 3M trading partner data is a corporate asset valued almost as highly as technological innovation. For instance, the company is increasingly drawing on its trading partner database as a source of market intelligence, allowing it to identify where products are selling and who is buying them.

Having high quality customer data is critical in an era where customer expectations for service are rising—and it all starts with an accurate customer name and address. In some regions, such as the Pacific Rim, customers might reject entire shipments for which the invoice is incorrect.

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3M defines a trading partner as any entity with whom it conducts business. That can encompass customers, end users, suppliers, distributors, financial institutions, and government institutions. Because 3M is so highly diversified and operates in so many parts of the globe, it has multiple sources of trading partner data. As in most large organizations, this has resulted in plenty of redundancy and inconsistency in 3M's data.

For instance, different business units serving the same customers often had diverse ways of spelling or representing name and address data. 3M began a corporate initiative to upgrade the information it maintains on trading partners. It created a project team composed of application developers, QA staff, and designers with mainframe and client/server backgrounds. After soliciting division input, the team established guidelines for data ownership and maintenance and embarked on a plan to migrate customer data from legacy systems to a UNIX based Sybase corporate repository.

The migration would provide opportunities both to make the data more widely accessible and to finally clean the data itself. The data repository would contain cleansed data that would be distributed to legacy systems running mission-critical operations.

3M's goals were quite simple: find the quickest, most effective, simplest, and least expensive way to cleanse and standardize data.

THE SOLUTION

3M required a tool that was affordable, and a partner that was well established and carried a proven track record. There was a lot at stake, given the company's diverse markets and the sheer volume of trading partners, numbering in the hundreds of thousands.

The scope of the project demanded a reliable partner. "We met with the Trillium Software representative, and he

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impressed me as someone who was interested in helping us find a solution rather than selling us a tool," said Lann Zimdars, trading partner database project leader. The decision was based on a careful evaluation of a number of different product offerings. Above all, 3M was looking for a provider that could deliver over the long haul.

The company also required a platform-independent solution that would easily work with legacy and client/server platforms. 3M found the Trillium Software System's platform-independent library of functions a critical advantage as it conducted the data migration.

THE RESULTS

The project was extremely demanding, since the team could not afford to bring legacy systems down while developing the project. "We couldn't stop normal business processes that were worth millions of dollars per day," said Zimdars, who described the experience as something akin to "changing a flat tire on a vehicle cruising along at 60 mph."

The Trillium Software System's ease of configuration and use were critical advantages, making a difficult project quite feasible. According to Zimdars, configuring Trillium's table-based cleansing logic was one of the easier parts of the project. "With the help and training we received from Trillium's Professional Services staff, we just didn't have to worry about making the product work," he said.

Even though Trillium Software had demonstrated that the source data

was far dirtier than originally expected, the Trillium Software System's configurable rules tables, parsing, matching logic and object-oriented application structure made the project extremely straightforward.

The first version went live in November 1996. Since then all new data entries have been processed with the Trillium Software System's online cleansing functions. "The reward is that we know our current data has better integrity than anything we ever had before," said Zimdars.

The team is beginning to look at other sources of customer and supplier data. 3M is confident that it is approaching this extremely large product with the right tools. "It wasn't only that Trillium Software offered the best solution," said Zimdars. "It was also the fact that, as a company, it is helping us understand exactly what we need to accomplish."

With more than 450 customers worldwide, Trillium Software provides the industry's leading software solution for cleansing and standardizing global customer information in e-business, CRM and Internet applications.

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