

Perspectives and Solutions

The foundation for better business decisions



Cisco and Intel partnering in innovation



Hardware and software investments help Staples Australia move strategically toward data transparency for customers and suppliers.

Be nimble, be agile, take risks, and apply innovation to how you're using data in your business. It's a fairly ambitious goal, but it's one that Garry Whatley, VP of IT and Business Services, Staples Australia, believes is a matter of perspective. You either focus on the risk or you focus on the strategic advantage. Whatley is a proponent of the latter.

"Our end goal is to provide information transparency to our customers and suppliers, so we can make better business decisions collectively," says Whatley. "That goal drove our transformation program, where we implemented a new hardware platform to support a new business warehouse (BW) software suite. Our business intelligence vision is very defined, and we invested in it substantially because it is strategic to how we're going to operate as the business moves forward."

The value of data access and analytics

Unlike its parent company in the U.S., Staples Australia does not have any retail locations. It engages with customers online or through its sales force. In both instances, sophisticated data transparency creates an opportunity to alter business processes significantly. For a high volume, high data business like Staples, Whatley believes better data access and analyses can help drive cost out of the supply chain and reveal new business insights.

Staples Australia chose the Intel® Xeon® processor-based Cisco® Unified Computing System™ (UCS) as the hardware foundation supporting its data transparency initiative and SAP NetWeaver BW investment. The company also implemented the Cisco Business Warehouse Accelerator to amplify the speed of its SAP NetWeaver BW software to drive faster queries, reporting, and decision making.

The Cisco implementation was consistent with Whatley's emphasis on strategic advantage. As Corporate Express (prior to the Staples integration), the company was an early adopter of many new Cisco technologies, including IP Telephony and IP Contact Center as well as previous iterations of Cisco UCS®. Whatley wanted to maintain the strategic commitment to the Cisco relationship.

So was the strategic gamble worth it? Whatley believes it was. "Both the Cisco UCS and SAP choices were sound strategic decisions that I would make again. In fact, we should have done it sooner. Our users were frustrated with performance, and we have reversed that experience significantly. Now, we are in a position to not only deliver performance, but also drive toward our vision as well."

The hardware and software investments have been fundamental in helping Staples be agile and react to insight gleaned from the data. For example, operations personnel can gather metrics that help rank and compare suppliers against KPIs and other supply chain partners. On a monthly basis, Staples provides the Supplier Performance Reporting Pack to its suppliers. Previously, completing those reports required a significant amount of manual effort. With automation, Staples can provide visibility around performance levels to the more than 300 suppliers in its supply chain.

In addition, data transparency is enhancing inventory management. Staples can calculate daily performance on KPIs for the purchasing team, operations team, and the overall business based on day-to-day order fulfillment and the company's "perfect order" model. The ongoing insight is improving customer service levels and reducing inventory holding.



Driving toward its future vision

With the foundation in place, Staples can contemplate adding new capabilities to drive its future vision. Mobility is a key priority. With no retail presence, the company relies heavily on its sales force to service corporate and mid-market customers. Pushing order information and online reporting to reps while at customer sites is a primary focus. Executive insight enablement is also critical. In a high volume, low value business model, having the visibility to track the business in fine detail on a daily basis promotes better business decisions.

In fact, Staples is about to launch a pilot focused on reviewing and analyzing customer sales history. Through advanced analytics, business users can examine factors including what customers spend, where they spend, categories of spend, and which areas of the business spend more than others. It is similar to the breakdowns of paper reports, but the automation enables drill down, discussion, analysis, and “what if” scenarios on the fly.

“Clarity in what you’re driving toward is what enables you to move away from a risk focus to a strategic orientation,” says Whatley. “At Staples, we are clear that mobile intelligence and real-time analytics represent our optimum data transparency capabilities. And we have the hardware and software foundation to move there confidently—delivering the value of visibility to our customers and suppliers for better business decisions every step of the way.”

Cisco bridge to SAP HANA appliance

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