

Case Study

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Skytide and Netli

CITATION

For more than a decade companies have been grappling with finding optimal ways to analyze the increasing amount of data generated by their internal and external systems. At one point it was thought that the data warehouse would solve many of these problems but time has shown that sometimes the cure may be worse than the ailment. Numerous data warehouse projects were started with great enthusiasm only to fade without delivering any value for the millions of dollars invested. Moreover, some data was more appropriate for that paradigm than other types.

Skytide's founders observed the situation and worked in the industry for years before they identified a specific paradigm that they could address with a new product that reduces the problems often associated with data warehouse projects.

Skytide focuses on analyzing non-traditional data that does not fit the data warehousing paradigm such as situations with a large number of customer/client iterations. It is also common where customer interactions happen across various channels such as call centers, web, e-mail, IM, and chat. This 2007 WizKids award is presented to Skytide for their work with Netli, a sophisticated network acceleration company that had big data analysis challenges which Skytide helped reduce to a manageable scale.

BUSINESS PROBLEM

Located in Mountain View, CA, Netli is a leading provider of web application accelera-

tion and content delivery services. The company's basic service helps major corporations increase performance around the world for their web sites, commerce sites, and customer portals, so that end users have local-like response times. This service enables companies to avoid major expenses associated with building bigger data centers, which would accomplish similar results but with higher costs.

Netli needed a way to demonstrate to a company in California, for example, that its sites in the Far East would perform as advertised. The networks are very large and generate a lot of performance

data, so providing that proof requires some rather sophisticated data gathering, analysis, and reporting capabilities. As Tim Knudsen, senior director of product management at Netli put it, "The core of the service is acceleration, but a big part of the service is also providing visibility into the benefits and activities that the users get on the sites we accelerate."

In concrete terms, Netli needed to be able to provide traffic analysis that would prove the ROI proposition, as well as provide SQM (service quality monitoring) and SLA (service level agreement) metrics. "The problem I was facing was: How do I provide visibility into all this with minimal latency to various audiences that use our highly distributed network," Knudsen said. Finally, part of providing visibility also requires forecasting demand, and in Netli's case, the demand for its services and its analysis was expected to quadruple in a year.

Capturing and analyzing performance data for all of Netli's customers is a big job, and as Knudsen evaluated his future needs, he



concluded there were three options he could pursue.

- Netli could build everything in-house, including the data capture, storage, and analysis facilities needed. A development effort like this required time Knudsen did not have, as well as money to license database software and other tools, develop databases, parsing logic, a presentation layer, and massive storage. It also required some expensive labor in the form of database administrators and programmers.
- A traditional business intelligence (BI) approach, which still required buying database technology and hiring people, but which offered the ability to use packaged solutions for parsing and presentation, for example.
- Try a next-generation approach by using services available on the Internet.

Knudsen had some experience with Skytide from his prior job where he had evaluated the solution. Nevertheless, he made a thorough analysis of the major solution providers and invited them to discuss their approach to Netli's needs. Along the way, he discovered that Netli's need was out of synch with these vendors' business models. The incompatibility arose out of the vendors' desire to sell their solutions through Netli to each of Netli's customers. Only Skytide offered a business model in which its product could act as part of the solution stack, without the need for an OEM relationship to sell licenses to the end customers.

SOLUTION

In the end, Skytide was an easy decision that fit both Knudsen's technical and business needs. Technically, Skytide works with terabytes of semi-structured customer interaction data in various formats to deliver a complete suite of business intelligence functionality focused on customer activity analysis such as customer value, service quality, and billing. This is accomplished without having to put data into a data warehouse or a database, and without having to convert

the data through a custom ETL (extract, transform, load) process. Skytide delivers historical analysis and reporting in near real-time, which is not possible to do with conventional BI tools.

Skytide and Netli agreed on a short proof of concept (POC) to deliver a small subset of analysis and reports needed for the final deployment. The POC was used as a way to develop a comprehensive action plan and to identify potential problems and issues.

The implementation process started by using the POC at the initial planning stage. The POC lasted for five days and produced a set of analysis and reports that Netli then agreed to as the scope of the project. The complete deployment plan was then developed in parallel with the actual deployment work. The technical implementation took 30 days, and then the system was tested for another 30 days running against production data sets. There were two third-party vendors involved in the project:

- **Agami**, which provided a low-cost NAS solution utilized by Skytide for data sources
- **IBM AlphaBlox**, which provided a web-based reporting layer on top of the Skytide solution

CONCLUSION

As of this writing, Netli is processing more than two billion rows of data per day using Skytide, and the company plans to increase that volume four-fold in the coming year.

The company also expects to roll out analysis and reporting functions for its own business and internal users during Q1 2007.

With Skytide, Netli can offer its customers a complete set of BI capabilities without the inherent latency and complexity of traditional BI technology. With low costs and hardly any time needed for deployment, Netli is also freed from many of the overhead considerations that can take up significant time and resources, such as planning storage and ensuring for sufficiency. Because Skytide is a broad business intelli-

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gence platform, Netli can concentrate on what it does well—optimizing the performance of their customers' Web properties, rather than focusing on IT issues that are tangential to the business.

Furthermore, by relying on a next-generation BI vendor rather than a home-grown solution or a traditional BI solution, Netli has greater flexibility for scaling as its data volume increases.

Skytide solved a problem for Netli that many small and medium businesses have—how to get necessary business analysis functionality without the overhead, costs, and risks associated with conventional analysis solutions.

Many companies that have already invested in more traditional approaches will be slow to convert to an on-demand solution due to the large investments they have already made. However, an innovation like this makes a robust BI solution a reality for companies that previously considered themselves too small or without sufficient resources to ever afford them. We expect many more end users to come to see the advantages of deep data analysis with innovations like Skytide.

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