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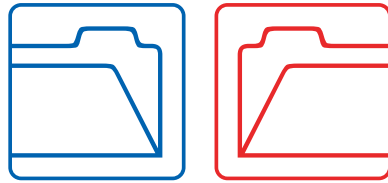
Taking a Look into the Future

Are you ready?

Yes
DEFINITELY

Transforming Data Into Actionable Information

GEORGE LOHNES



Every company today has an information technology (IT) department. But, in many cases, the name does not truly represent the department's mission. The real name should be the data management department. A small discrepancy, you say. But, for progressive companies where information is a strategic asset, it is an important distinction. During the last four or five years we at UNICCO have learned the difference between data and actionable information—it has transformed our business.

Phase I: Departmental Computing:

Data automation started to take hold in the late 1970s and early 1980s. That's when large, and some mid-market, companies started investing in the new emerging

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technology of minicomputers. They automated many of the core processes but, because each data application was either custom-built or came from a specialized vendor, companies ended up with data "silos"—useful for the task at hand but not transferable to other parts of the organization. As a result, accounting, manufacturing and purchasing and administration each had their own applications. Getting the data into a useable and actionable form for more than one department was nearly impossible.

Phase II: Distributed Computing:

The 1980s and 1990s brought the personal computer (PC) revolution... and it was a revolution in that data was wrested from the data centers and individuals started re-creating small subsets of the data for their own use. PCs began the process of turning data into actionable information, but the results were seldom useful beyond an individual or work group. Furthermore, the data was not necessarily accurate or up-to-date. There was also no efficient way to reintegrate the data back into the corporate system.

Phase III: Ubiquitous Data Access:

The Internet also got moving in the early 1990s with the widespread adoption of the World Wide Web. This opened the doors to information from outside the organization, which ironically often made it easier to find things on the Web than it was to locate information within one's own organization. The Web pointed out the potential to turn properly organized data into information.

Phase IV: Untethered Data Access:

Wireless communications and computing have now come to the forefront, while advances continue to be made on virtually every other technology front.

In the meantime, organizations have been collecting mountains of data through more and more applications. This automated data collection applies to building management functions where there are several specialized applications designed to support specific functions. Consequently, as building and facilities managers, you have to deal with tremendous amounts of data every day.

Actionable information supports building management

Today, we have arrived at the point where we can convert these data silos and personal repositories into actionable information across organizations to create synergy and deliver solid business benefits. Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) packages, which handle generic business operations quite well, address this challenge. They tie together many of the typical applications required in a commercial or manufacturing business.

As powerful as today's ERP systems are, every business also has operations that require specialized applications. Building management is an example of a corporate function that does not fit squarely into the scope of ERP applications yet it must still interact with many of the normal business operations that are controlled and reported by the ERP application.

UNICCO moved down this same path. We automated our general business

processes using an ERP system (JD Edwards, now part of Oracle) that ties together our standard business process reporting functions. We also implemented several specialized facilities services industry applications including safety management, payroll systems and work order management—all interfacing with our ERP. We next developed account management applications that differentiated us as a truly integrated facilities services company.

These applications are vital to much of what we do. They give functional managers the details that they need to run day-in and day-out operations. But, as standalone applications, they were not cross-functional and did not aggregate data in a meaningful way. Consequently, we could not measure the impacts of a change in one operational function on other operations.

We found that building and facilities services managers need to be able to combine the business intelligence that is delivered through ERP programs with the specialized work flow management, maintenance and other facilities-specific applications that they rely on. By creating synergy between ERP and specialized functions, managers can develop views of the data that transform it into actionable information.

Breaking away

A few years ago we recognized that our function-specific data could become a true strategic asset if we were able to combine the data into a single business intelligence engine that would create cross-functional synergies. Although simple in concept, it was not easy to do. But we knew it would be worth it because it would give us a competitive advantage and enable us to stand out in the market.

We started by bringing together all of our data resources into a Web-based intranet portal that we call myUNICCO.com. It enabled our managers and supervisors to access all of the functional applications that they needed, such as work order management or purchasing, from anywhere. This required bringing dozens of enterprise and function-

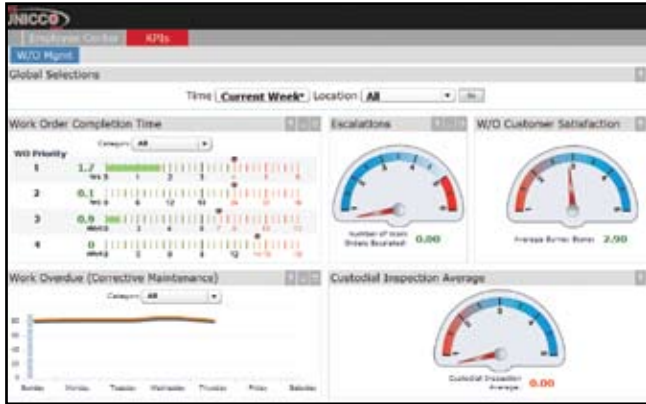
specific applications together into the portal. It was a tremendous undertaking that required coordination among several UNICCO departments, such as our leading edge IT department, operations, human resources, etc.; collaboration with our vendors; the endorsement of executive management, and staff commitment.

It was a complex undertaking. One of the first steps was to provide a single sign-on for users. This seems simple, but it required establishing authorization-level permissions and standardizing log-ons across several different applications. It also required that the proper permissions be assigned to each authorized individual at each location for each application. For instance, a supervisor at a specific customer site would have authorization to see the work orders for that site, limited personnel information for his/her direct reports and be able to perform other specific tasks. The manager for that same site would have broader access and authorization.

This was an early step towards information. We had created a portal that presented data that looked like it all came from the same source. We were offering consistently-presented, functional information in a single location, the portal, so that supervisors and managers could better understand each piece of their business. Most of the pertinent information was accessible in one spot, but we did not yet have the ability to share it across applications.

The next step was to cross-functionalize the different applications to bring the data together and, more importantly, enable management to look at the information in new ways that would facilitate informed business-level decision making.

On the functional side, we created cross-platform applications that essentially extended ERP functionality to our specialized applications. For instance, we now have an e-commerce component that enables site supervisors and managers to purchase products and services up to their prescribed limits. The e-commerce engine ties in the authorization, purchasing,



Through password-protected log-ons, the myUNICCO.com portal provides customers a view of the appropriate reports for their site and/or company, and the ability to review the data to conduct in-depth analyses.



The myUNICCO.com portal provides an integrated set of tools and documents for the operations and corporate support teams to maximize information sharing and improve organization communications.

accounting, billing, receiving, warehousing and other back-office operations. Our supervisors and managers simply log in, select the items from our online catalog and all of the other functions are automatically performed in the background.

On the business management side, our managers can view reports and evaluate performance using data that was separate in the past and that could not be easily compared and understood. By seeing logical business performance combinations, managers see the relationships between functions that are often difficult to correlate.

For example, our rigorous account management system allowed us to track performance against several metrics, but we had never been able to directly correlate safety performance with individual account profitability. This was due to the base-level information that came from many disparate sources some even external to the company. As a result, this meant that our insurance cost allocations were estimates based on head count, industry and other factors. By aggregating the data into a single portal, we can tie actual safety performance directly to customer accounts and sites with the result of being able to properly allocate actual costs. This is important to management as it looks at overall account financial and operational results and

compares them to Service Level Agreement (SLA) commitments. It also enables us to view and review employee records, both for compliance and training.

Bringing in our customers

The next logical step for us was to extend our information resources to our customers. This presented another challenge—how to translate our operational metrics into business intelligence information that would enable our customers' business managers to analyze results and evaluate our performance.

Here again, myUNICCO.com provides the portal and, through password-protected log ons, our customers can not only view the appropriate reports for their site and/or company, but also review the data to conduct in-depth analyses. They can also aggregate the information to see top-level results and compare them to SLA terms.

Today, this information sharing portal enables UNICCO managers and about 150 of our customers to have collaborative discussions about UNICCO's services working from the same information reports. It has become an important tool for us and our customers.

The need to transition from data to actionable information is obvious. It took

some visionaries within the company to not only see the potential, but to also overcome the challenges of combining several disparate applications into a single information resource delivered through the myUNICCO.com portal. The entire system is focused on a few objectives: to give our managers the tools they need to run the business most efficiently, and to enable our customers to have the insights they want in order to provide their building occupants with the best facility.

In the process, we've also learned that actionable information is not only powerful it is critical to our success. **FMJ**

About the Author:



George R. Lohnes is vice president at UNICCO Service Company. He is uniquely qualified to comment on technology and facility management having served as director, strategic planning for a \$6 billion computer company prior to his 15 years in facility management. He also holds a master's degree in computer information systems from Bentley College in Waltham, Massachusetts. To reach UNICCO, visit www.unicco.com, call 888-751-9100 or e-mail info@unicco.com.