

DEBENHAMS REVITALISES BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE WITH NETEZZA

UK retailer Debenhams was drowning in data that its existing reporting systems were failing to manage, when the company looked to the market and turned to Netezza for a solution.



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With over 140 UK department stores, over 40 International franchise stores and over £2 billion in annual sales, UK retailer Debenhams has a lot of data to handle. As the company continues to increase its market share each year, this data is a crucial daily tool. In 2006, the company overhauled a key part of its business intelligence (BI) systems using appliances from Netezza, slashing response times and providing valuable new market insights.

Debenhams' buying and merchandising functions are a key part of its operation. Trading reports tell buying and merchandising how well each product line is selling and what contribution they make to profits. Timely access to this information is of paramount importance. The IT department must develop and manage systems to answer queries about the previous week's sales by 7am each Monday morning.

But these queries can be as volatile as the retail industry itself, which is affected by factors including sporting events, major holidays and even day-to-day weather. So, in order to maintain a competitive advantage, Debenhams wanted access to all of its data, all of the time. But its BI systems had become considerably strained.

Debenhams has in excess of two years worth of data in 'total recall' mode, which has been stored in an IBM DB2 data warehouse since 1997, forming part of one of the most mission-critical applications in the Debenhams

portfolio. Consequently, decisions to change the system are not made lightly.

It selected the Netezza Performance Server (NPS), a BI data warehouse appliance designed to reduce costs by integrating database, server and storage services in a single unit. The retailer installed two NPS 8150 appliances, using one as a production machine and the other as a hot failover device for business continuity. The Netezza appliances now speed query processing support for BI reporting software from Business Objects.

As a result, shrinking query times have bought considerable benefits to the retail giant. The NPS system performed up to 99% faster than its legacy system on single-stream queries and a batch test on the Netezza appliance took just two hours compared to eight on the legacy system. The story was similar with concurrent queries. Netezza again beat the old system in non-cached queries and evaluators also found that its queries did not fail when supporting multiple users.

Debenhams also needed to work with a supplier with effective support for extract, transfer and load (ETL) tools, as it had been using a hand-coded script in the past. The company selected Netezza partner, Sunopsis to supply its ETL tool. Other criteria included the total cost of ownership over the following five years. "In fact, the flexibility of a smaller pioneer like Netezza has played to our advantage," explains Steve Kircher, Debenhams IT director. "As an IT supplier, they have been refreshingly responsive and eager to please."

Debenhams is now running weekly reports on sales and profitability across departments, divisions and stores. This has led to a significant improvement in Debenhams BI capability. The business reporting function is regaining confidence among the company's business users, which means that more reports are being produced. These reports are also more sophisticated and complex, allowing buying, merchandising and other business areas to explore relevant business information in more depth.



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