



Data Meaning Educates the University of Richmond About Business Intelligence Tools



Data Meaning

True Collaborative Approach Educates Users and Developers

Business Challenge

Business Intelligence (BI) tools allow organizations to extract and transform data from multiple databases into reports and dashboards that can be made available to any user with access credentials. Large non-profit organizations encounter major challenges finding expertise to develop BI tools and to educate their users about how these tools can be used to improve decision-making. The University of Richmond provides a collaborative learning and research environment for approximately 4500 students in Richmond, Virginia. To maintain its competitive edge in attracting funding dollars and high caliber faculty and students, the university initiated a project to update fundraising and student admission reporting systems. While they wanted attractive BI reports using state-of-the-art dashboard displays, the college did not have the in-house expertise required to design these reports. The report users could not envision how the dashboards would look and how they might use them to best support their objectives. Data Meaning provided a unique consultative service to the university by working with users to educate them in the use of BI tools. Once user requirements were gathered, Data Meaning built proof-of-concept tools that demonstrated the value to users. The proof-of-concept also included design advice for the university IT department and expertise to overcome technical barriers to implementation.

Data Meaning BI Expertise and Value

As specialists in implementing BI tools, Data Meaning staff are able to provide a flexible combination of expertise and value for clients such as University of Richmond. The company worked with the university project manager to ensure that their time was spent productively. Data Meaning delivered design and architecture advice so that the university could leverage their investment in existing systems. Data Meaning also educated users in how to define their dashboard requirements. The prototype BI tools that Data Meaning built for these projects provided a learning environment for internal university resources to gain BI report expertise. Data Meaning accomplished the work quickly for a reasonable price and concentrated their resources to add the greatest value for the university.

Prototype Dashboards

Data Meaning developed prototype dashboards for the University of Richmond Student Admissions and Fundraising departments. First, Data Meaning facilitated discussions with end users to educate them about defining their business requirements. The objective was to understand how BI tools could deliver flexible and scalable reporting to users. Once the requirements were established, Data Meaning applied their technical expertise to demonstrate that a solution could be delivered to meet the requirements. Using the prototype dashboards the Student Admissions department generated 20 pages of additional report requirements that they could use to attract better students. The Fundraising department also used the prototypes to design more requirements for their ongoing implementation. The Data Meaning approach opens up new ways for clients to make information accessible and consumable.

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Maximizing Value from Existing Infrastructure

The University of Richmond purchased MicroStrategy software hoping to leverage its functionality against their existing investment in Microsoft SQL Server 2008 analysis tools. The university had already developed a unified data model in a SQL server analysis services (SSAS) database. The SSAS database contains multidimensional objects (also called mdx cubes) that reference multiple underlying data sources and are used to generate Microsoft SQL reports. Considerable work is required to design and architect SSAS cubes. The university wanted to develop MicroStrategy BI dashboards and reports against the SSAS cubes rather than starting from scratch by building a new unified data model just for MicroStrategy. Data Meaning used their expertise to analyze the pros and cons of this approach. There are certain limitations imposed by using existing mdx cubes as the basis for BI reporting because the cubes contain data that is already transformed. Fewer MicroStrategy capabilities are available when using SSAS cubes as a data source. However, because Data Meaning staff are expert MicroStrategy BI tool developers, they were able to build workarounds so that the University of Richmond could still enjoy rich dashboard functionality. In each client engagement, Data Meaning uses this expert collaborative approach to maximize value and save time and money for clients.

Benefits Delivered

Data Meaning delivered unique value to the University of Richmond in a collaborative engagement that educated developers and users alike. The systems department felt that their investment in Data Meaning paid for itself by delivering short-term expert advice about using existing infrastructure and proof that the required functionality could be delivered despite technical limitations. The users gained long-term understanding about extracting value from information. This project was a short three months and the work was delivered on time and within budget. The University of Richmond is now rolling out BI tools to their users, confident that they will continue to see a return on value for their investment.

The Data Meaning Value Proposition

This project demonstrates how Data Meaning delivers expertise to truly understand and meet client requirements. The Data Meaning value proposition includes bringing expert resources to bear in building BI systems without compromises in performance and functionality. Data Meaning is able to provide this specialist expertise directly to clients or as part of a larger implementation team.

To learn more about Data Meaning, please visit www.datameaning.com