Robinsons Group:

QlikView Business Intelligence Advances Upscale Retailer's 150-Year Tradition

"Since the introduction of QlikView, Robinsons Group's decision makers have faster access to more actionable data leading to smarter, timelier business decisions so critical to retailing success."

Abigail Alice Tan, Head of Information Technology, Robinsons Group

In brief

Company
Robinsons Group

Industry
Retail

Challenge
Reduce dependencies on paper-based reporting for operational decision making

Solution
QlikView business intelligence dashboards of company operations 60 users company-wide using QlikView analyses for store operations, supply chain management, finance, marketing, executive management, and information technology

Benefits
- 50% less time to access 80% more detailed information
- At-a-glance views of company performance for various merchandise hierarchies and time dimensions
- View and compare multiple variance reports on a single data display and drill drown into data to easily investigate performance influencers
- Deeper understanding of consumer behaviors, customer relationships, and responsive merchandising

Company Background

Robinsons Group (Robinson and Company, Limited) operates 16 upscale retail stores in Singapore and two in Malaysia. The company is the parent of Robinsons (www.robinsons.com.sg) and John Little (www.johnlittle.com.sg), and the Singapore and Malaysia franchise holder for global retailer Marks & Spencer (www.marksandspencer.com). In business for almost 150 years – longer than any large retailer in Singapore – Robinsons Group clearly has proven its formula for long term success. Specifically, Robinsons Group stores provide high quality products representing the best-value for money in attractive retail environments, levels of service that exceed customers' expectations, and a collaborative working environment for employees to achieve their full potential.

Challenge: Access to Mission Critical Information without "Tons of Paper Reports"

In every commercial enterprise, the timeliness of information can spell the difference between profit or loss, success or failure. Companies rely on operational reporting not just to monitor performance and report to stakeholders, but to continuously improve bottom-line results. In highly competitive retailing, receipts issued at the point of sale are the only reporting most consumers associate with their purchase. However, before and after sales transactions and across many operational functions, retailers perform extensive reporting on every aspect of business to generate more cash per customer and grow legions of loyal customers.

The Point-of-Sale (POS) system that issues purchase receipts will likely also provide reports on cash register balance, transaction details, hourly sales and each salesperson's productivity. Companies like Robinsons Group also profile and compare total sales of merchandise by item, department, store location and other criteria such as stock-to-sales ratios and inventory turnover for each of its branded chains. Other reports analyze specific customer behaviors such as seasonal purchasing patterns and responses to various marketing promotions. In addition, similarly extensive reporting and

analyses are required to manage and coordinate inventory purchasing, warehouse stocking levels, and the movement of merchandise through supply chains.

"Our organization prints tons of paper reports," said Alice Abigail Tan, head of information technology for Robinsons Group. "The information on all those reports is 'mission critical' to the success of our retail operations and how well our people can perform their jobs."

Nonetheless, the drawbacks of paper-based reporting were no different for Robinsons Group than for any other type of enterprise. Manually examining a report for specific information, or comparing several reports to make a business decision added administrative time that, in effect, delayed action. As head of information technology, Abigail constantly seeks ways to improve information access for the company.

Solution: Business Intelligence Dashboards of Company Operations using QlikView

Abigail's research led her to investigate several business intelligence solutions. "The first products we evaluated seemed too complex for use throughout our company," she reflected. "If our users are intimidated by the technology, they are not likely to use it. And would have taken many months for us to build data warehouses and different OLAP cubes for each of the business areas before we could deploy the solution."

Abigail was then introduced to QlikView by her local IT consulting and systems integration vendor. She quickly became a champion for QlikView within Robinsons Group and began working with the QlikView Southeast Asia Office in Singapore on a full product evaluation and eventual implementation.

"QlikView's interactive interface and user friendliness won me from the very beginning," said Abigail. "I could see people outside of our IT department working with it – and more importantly, wanting to work with it."

Robinsons Group's initial applications with QlikView introduced operational summary and detailed productivity dashboards – pulling data from the company's ERP and POS systems – to provide at-a-glance views of company performance for various merchandise hierarchies and time dimensions. Sales information over any current period could be quickly viewed and compared with any prior period by criteria such as store location, department, merchandise item, size, color, margins, etc. More dashboards followed. The 60 current QlikView users at Robinsons Group are distributed throughout store operations, supply chain management, finance, marketing, and executive management.

Benefits: 50% Less Time to Access 80% More Detailed Information with QlikView

"Since the introduction of QlikView, Robinsons Group's decision makers have faster access to more actionable data leading to smarter, timelier business decisions so critical to retailing success," said Abigail.

She estimates that users spend 50% less time to analyze data and glean more relevant results. The content of dashboard views and reports, according to Abigail, yield up to 80% more detailed information than the prior paper-based reporting.

"So we're not just reducing all the paper," she said. "Users are better equipped and spend more time focusing on business outcomes without having to generate and pour through multiple reports."

To further emphasize the point, Abigail cites examples of capabilities that were unimaginable before QlikView: "Users are able to view multiple variance reports on a single dashboard display and perform data comparisons that would be impossible with our previous processes," she said. "There is also the easy filtering of data and drilling down into data to investigate details of any displayed results."

Exactly how QlikView dashboards affect a retailer's performance across all business functions can elude the average person, but here are some ways anyone who has ever ventured into a department store would understand the value of flexible, powerful business intelligence:

With QlikView, Robinsons Group chains can more quickly identify merchandise that is not selling and restock shelves with what does sell. This can include the movement of merchandise underperforming in one store to another store location with higher customer acceptance of certain items. Similarly, chains can track merchandise that sells quickly and reorder additional quantities before running out of inventory. They can price merchandise for best turnover and profit – by store and chain-wide. And they can more quickly respond to changes in market conditions and buyer preferences.

"QlikView better enables our behind-the-scenes operations to enrich our customers' buying experiences. The additional competitive advantages we get with QlikView all relate to our faster and deeper understanding of consumer appeal, customer relationships, and responsive merchandising," said Abigail.

Abigail's confidence in her decision to bring QlikView into Robinsons Group is evident– buoyed by the user acceptance and contributions to improved company operations. Another plus is the reduced demands on her own IT staff, since QlikView users require much less support than they did with the paper-based reporting.

As the retail industry continues to change and grow more competitive, success depends on the ability to make correct and quick decisions. QlikView serves as an instrumental tool for Robinsons, transforming the way the Group uses information and enhancing the quality of decisions. This will help to ensure Robinsons' success far beyond its 150th anniversary celebration.

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