

Kore Technologies Provides IBM U2-SQL Data Integration

National RV dealer network uses Kourier Integrator and SQL Accelerator to migrate data for reporting and analysis purposes.

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) needed housing for displaced people, fast. One source it turned to was FreedomRoads, the nation's largest recreation vehicle retailer, with 56 RV dealerships across the country. "The federal government told us exactly what they needed," said Matt Baden, the company's chief technology officer. Due to a large-scale data integration project the company had just completed, "within 15 minutes we knew exactly what we had in inventory in all stores," Baden noted. "FEMA bought nearly everything that matched their requirements."

About three and half years ago, FreedomRoads began to acquire RV dealerships across the U.S. Since then, it has purchased 56 retail stores in 13 states, growing to \$1.3 billion in revenue in the first two years. Not surprisingly, managing growth presents challenges. "The biggest problem was receiving data from each location for consolidated reporting," Baden said. It could take 25 days to get data to the company headquarters in Chicago and then manually consolidate it for use by management, banks and other stakeholders. "It was a Herculean task to get it done quickly," Baden said.

Data Integration Initiative

To solve this problem, FreedomRoads migrated the dealerships onto a common IT platform. "Some of the dealerships had sophisticated networks and some had no networks," Baden noted. Many, however, used Integrated Dealer System (IDS), the leading dealer management solution for RV and marine dealerships. IDS runs on the IBM Universe/UniData (U2) multivalued database platform.

FreedomRoads built a corporate data center at its headquarters location in Chicago and implemented a centralized IDS solution. "We built a powerful system to support our thousand users," Baden said. "Data is moved over a VPN from the dealerships to Chicago."

But, Baden noted, that while IBM U2 is a great transactional database that is easily adapted to the business environment, the database is not as effective for reporting at the man-

agement or operational level. "We wanted to move to a SQL Server platform that would give us flexibility in how we could look at the data," Baden said. The company looked for vendors that offered the ability to extract data from U2 and move it to another data source. It discovered Kore Technologies.

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Integration Solution

Founded in 1999 by a group of experienced IT professionals, Kore Technologies offers a comprehensive range of professional services and develops applications for the IBM U2 and Microsoft SQL Server databases, including its Kourier Integrator and SQL Accelerator solutions. Kourier Integrator allows companies to extract data from the IBM U2 database in many different formats and exchange it with other data sources. Built on the .NET platform and leveraging the capabilities of Microsoft's SQL Server Integration Services and Data Transformation Services, SQL Accelerator automatically moves data extracted from a IBM U2 database with Kourier Integrator and loads it into a Microsoft SQL Server database.

"We reviewed other solutions but they had shortcomings," Baden said. For some, the scheduling was inadequate. Others required too much set up. "You would have to spend hours before you were ready to deploy," Baden noted. "We had to figure out how to get data out of 56 databases." The Kore solutions, Baden said, were virtually plug and play. The Kore team also had the expertise to help with the needed data normalization.

Implementation and Benefits

Given the importance of the project, Baden himself supervised the implementation effort. "It

took us three days to configure 57 accounts," he said. Not only did Kore Technologies provide the solution, because of their experience with the U2 database, the team helped FreedomRoads understand the data and to extract it in a meaningful way. "Kore's consulting service added a lot of value," Baden said.

Currently, using Kore's proprietary net change functionality, FreedomRoads does extractions every hour, so the data warehouse is only one hour behind the field operations. Nightly, 1.5 gigabytes of the 90 gigabyte database is fully refreshed. "During the day, it takes a minute to extract the difference every hour, and 30 seconds to write them to SQL Server. For the full refresh, the extraction takes 10 minutes total and another 10 minutes to write SQL Server," Baden said.

The solution also allowed Baden to identify when data was corrupt in the U2 database and where to fix it. And once the integration project was complete, Baden was able to identify data inconsistencies and normalize them.

Ongoing Relationship

FreedomRoads has maintained an ongoing relationship with Kore. "These guys are great," Baden said. When questions arise, "they answer the phone and fix it." In fact, he has partnered with Kore in developing enhancements, including a new and improved scheduler.

The data integration project represented the culmination of the entire effort to build the corporate information infrastructure. Being able to extract data, Baden said, "is the reason we invested in the infrastructure."

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