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- Julie Benson, director of finance systems, Biogen Idec

Cervello Partners with Biogen Idec to Create Next Generation Data Infrastructure Using Oracle

Biogen Idec is a long-time Oracle customer, with a history dating back to the 1980's. But that may be the only aspect of the company's finance function that has remained unchanged throughout the years. As with any biotechnology company starting out in research and development, as the business grows so too will its processes and the demands placed on its financial systems.

THE CHALLENGE

As Director of Finance Systems Intelligence for Biogen Idec, Julie Benson was charged with spearheading the company's financial systems transformation leveraging the Oracle E-Business Suite and Oracle Business Analytics platforms. The primary goal of the project was to improve decision making capabilities through a chart of accounts redesign; implementation of Oracle Project Accounting; and re-imagining of Oracle Enterprise Performance Management (including, Essbase, Planning and Data Relationship Management).

Over time, Biogen Idec had begun to experience growing pains in the form of inefficiencies that had accumulated in its financial processes and systems and the way that data was captured, managed and reported on. According to Ms. Benson, “We became significantly limited by the way our data was structured that we needed to pull it all apart and put it back together in a more organized, thought out manner. This would enable us to improve internal decision making, maintain our data warehouse more effectively, and tag data in a way that would enable us to get more insightful information.”

Biogen Idec's data management challenges primarily stemmed from its chart of accounts (COA) which had become unwieldy over the years due to a lack of consistency across accounting departments when posting transactions. According to Ms. Benson, “As we grew, our chart of accounts still maintained that small, individualized approach to looking at data. We needed to redesign our chart of accounts to get everyone globally speaking the same language and create rules of the road for how to do it.”

The company's financial data warehouse also presented some key challenges. Changes within the business often required ad hoc fixes to code which made it difficult to maintain the warehouse effectively. It also created reporting challenges. "We realized that as we continued to grow we couldn't operate in this band aid approach. In tearing apart our data warehouse we would then be able to put it back together in a simplified manner which would help ensure things like self-service reporting," said Ms. Benson.

THE SEARCH FOR A SOLUTION

Recognizing the sheer magnitude of the project and the need to supplement the skills of its internal team, Ms. Benson initiated an RFP to solicit bids from professional services firms. Finding a partner with deep Oracle experience was essential as the project would involve expansion of several Oracle systems.

Biogen Idec chose to work with Cervello based on three key decision criteria – skills, pricing and personality. "We interviewed several PS firms; everything from small boutiques to large consulting firms and we selected Cervello based on the high caliber of its people and the energy that emanated from the team during the interview process. In the end, Cervello was just the partner we needed. They brought the right mix of technical and business experience to the table. Their team not only had the skills to work with IT, but they also collaborated with our finance users which was a big win for us."

THE SOLUTION

Cervello first completed an impact analysis on all layers of the Oracle technology in use at Biogen Idec, including Oracle DRM, Essbase, Hyperion Planning, Oracle Essbase Integration Services, Oracle Data Integrator, Informatica, and the Oracle Database. All data – tables, views, storage procedures, functions, objects, and more had to be analyzed for changes. This included hundreds of Informatica mappings, six different reporting applications, twelve different planning applications, and around 300 tables, views and stored procedures. Seventy percent of the objects had to be redesigned or rebuilt as a result of source system changes.

To complete the project, Cervello brought in its team of data warehouse, Informatica and Hyperion experts to redesign all of the objects in order to reduce complexity, change the business logic, and improve performance across the technology. According to Ms. Benson, "Without Cervello, the mapping would have been a disaster. Their team really understood what needed to happen behind the scenes in order to map the old data to the new views. Cervello also understood how difficult it would be for our finance users to comprehend the changes so they got creative and came up with a "Rosetta Stone", a systemic way for users to be able to trace their data from the old environment to the new environment."

After the redesign process, the system went through a rigorous multi-phase testing cycle, including transactional systems, multiple rounds of system integration testing, a month of user acceptance testing and training, and, finally, roll-out.

THE RESULTS

Overall, the project has reduced complexity for IT, enhanced capability for accounting and generated efficiency for business planning. According to Ms. Benson, "In the past we saw more system errors than user errors, but now our system errors are more stable."

Additionally, Biogen Idec's chart of accounts is now more intuitive and streamlined making it easier to onboard new finance staff. The team is also benefiting from business friendly templates that guide users through inputting data into the planning tool while new reports are helping to improve decision making.

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ABOUT CERVELLO

Cervello Inc., is a leading professional services and solutions provider focused on helping companies solve complex data challenges, improve business analytics and optimize business performance. We focus on transformative cloud-based technologies in enterprise performance management, data management and business intelligence and customer relationship management. Cervello works with some of the leading on-premise and cloud software providers such as Oracle, Host Analytics, Salesforce.com and Birst. Our core services include system implementation, advisory services, custom application development and managed services.

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