

Meredith Gets a Better Read on its Customers with Hummingbird®

When people need advice on home and family issues, they look to sources they can trust. And the best companies earn this trust by listening to their customers, understanding them, and delivering helpful answers—year after year.

Headquartered in Des Moines, Iowa, Meredith Corporation—one of America's most trusted companies—knows how to listen. The Meredith Publishing Group is the country's foremost home and family authority, publishing 17 subscription magazines, more than 160 special interest titles, and over 300 books in print. Since the publication of the first edition of the Better Homes and Gardens New Cook Book in 1930, Meredith books and magazines have been a staple in America's households. They teach people skills that range from baking bread to building a deck, and they do it in style.

In order to grow its Business, Meredith is constantly looking for ways to learn more about its customers. Each month Meredith's stable of magazines, led by the flagship Better Homes and Gardens, reaches approximately 65 million people, or nearly one-third of the U.S. adult population. With such a huge customer base and range of publications, keeping track of customer subscriptions and preferences is no trivial task. It takes a lot of people—and a lot of data. Meredith relies on this data to provide customers with the quality information they have come to expect.

Bringing Home a Universe of Data

Meredith's consumer database (CDB) is one of the company's most valued resources, containing more than 75 million names and information on 2/3 of U.S. households. The great breadth and depth of this data—with an average of 300 data points per individual—enables Meredith to customize offers for specific customer segments with pinpoint accuracy.

Until early 2001, the entire CDB was outsourced and housed externally. It took at least four weeks to process subscriber data—one week to collect it from fulfillment vendors and another three weeks to update it. The resulting backlog was unacceptable, so Meredith management called upon its Enabling Technologies Group to come up with a solution.

The result? An opportunity to listen to customers more closely—an enterprise data warehouse—built on Genio and Teradata—to bring the CDB in-house.

"Genio was the product we selected for the data warehouse because its tight integration with Teradata was critical to us—we can use it to execute data transformations inside the Teradata Database."

Jose Lora,
Senior Systems Architect, Meredith Corporation

Industry

Media and Publishing

Customer

Meredith Corporation

Business Challenges

- Outsourced customer database slowed processing for subscription data
- No IT infrastructure to store customer data or handle complex ETL process internally
- Inability to run quick counts against all available customer data

Business Solution

Genio®

Partner Solution

- Teradata®, a division of NCR, www.teradata.com
Enterprise Data Warehousing

Business Benefits

- Maximized performance by executing data transformations on the Teradata Database
- Improved ability to customize subscription offers with access to 100% of available customer data—more than 70 million customers
- Reduced data processing time from weeks to a matter of days

Integrating Hummingbird and Teradata

At the beginning of the data warehouse project, Meredith had no IT infrastructure to store the CDB or to handle the complex ETL (extract, transform, load) process to load it. As a first step, Meredith chose Teradata for its enterprise data warehouse and customer relationship management (CRM) applications because Teradata enables Meredith to manage huge volumes of data and run complex data transformations without sacrificing performance. As a strategic partner, Hummingbird works closely with Teradata, a division of NCR, to help businesses integrate disparate data sources into the Teradata Database.

Jose Lora, Senior Systems Architect of Meredith's Enabling Technologies Group, chose Genio to extend Teradata's capabilities by automating many of the ETL tasks that normally require time-consuming programming. "We didn't want to reinvent the wheel by building in all the standard features of an ETL tool—such as user control and versioning—from scratch," explains Lora.

"Our data transformations for the data warehouse are extremely complex, with very low-level transactional data rolling up into summary tables; if we had implemented a hand-coded solution, the code itself would have been too difficult to maintain and too difficult to illustrate for business users," Lora said.

The challenge for the ETL team was to automate a complex, 30-stage data transformation process to load the Teradata enterprise data warehouse. They needed an ETL tool that could extract transaction data from several sources, optimize and unify it to improve its accuracy, and minimize data duplication costs—while complementing the existing investment in Teradata.

"We wanted to take advantage of Teradata's processing power. In the end, Genio was the product we selected for the data warehouse because its tight integration with Teradata was critical to us—we can use it to execute transformations inside the Teradata Database," says Lora.

Advanced Genio Capabilities Make an Impact

Genio enables Meredith's IT department to replace several steps of the data loading process, and it provides them with a graphical environment to define the ETL processing logic. "Genio makes it easy for us to illustrate data flow, which saves us development time because we can create, maintain and understand new code more quickly," says Lora.

"We're also very pleased that we can use the Hummingbird Genio solution to run the same ETL process in multiple environments (production, test, and development) without having to modify it each time. We can easily define very complex data transformations using a series of simple functions because the Genio interface is oriented specifically to follow the ETL process."

The data Meredith is migrating to its enterprise data warehouse comes from several internal and external sources. The ETL team, working closely with the Business unit, created a completely new data model for the new Teradata Database. "At the beginning of the project we didn't know much about the externally outsourced database systems or their data structures. Our new data model changed numerous times to meet new business needs. As you can imagine, if we didn't have impact analysis capabilities, we'd be in trouble—we wouldn't be able to identify those processes affected through the rest of the system by doing something as simple as changing one table," explains Lora. "The impact analysis capabilities of Genio are significant for us."

Getting a Better Read on Their Customers

Now that Meredith has the CDB in-house, all data from major fulfillment vendors is received directly and updated daily and weekly—instead of monthly. Data processing time has been slashed from four weeks to a matter of days. As a result, business users can analyze all of Meredith's customer data more often, providing more timely, more accurate, and better targeted business decisions.

Before it had internal access to the CDB, for example, Meredith's marketing group could only run quick counts on a small sample—about 1%—of the total customer data held in the external databases. With direct access to all customer data, loaded into the enterprise data warehouse by Genio, they can now run quick counts against 100% of the available customer data—more than 70 million customers—within minutes.

There's no question that being able to create detailed data models is making a difference at Meredith. "We're evaluating the project in terms of opportunity cost," says Lora. "The marketing group can create more descriptive analytical models because they have all of the customer data in-house right down to the row level of detail. They can discover new ways to promote customers to different segments by targeting new variables they didn't have before. Having the CDB in-house opens up a huge set of new opportunities for us to market creatively." And that gives them a much better read on their customers.



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