Tableau's Visualizations Reveal Critical Trends in Real-Time

US Auto Parts, a leading Internet retailer of aftermarket auto parts, sells over 700,000 SKUs across 4,000+ auto part categories through a network of websites, e-bay, and a call center. The company leverages a vendor network in addition to stocking inventory in their two warehouses. They also sell direct to distributors and local body shops in the Los Angeles area. Analyzing their sales across the various dimensions of their business used to be a tedious and sometimes overwhelming task.

"Previously, there was a lack of visibility at the granularity needed to effectively manage the business, and putting together the data needed was a laborious task that often required IT involvement," US Auto Parts Vice President of Business Analytics, Sarah Gustafson, remembers. Recently, US Auto Parts purchased Tableau Software to organize, manage, and visualize their data: "Now, we have standardized key metrics and much greater visibility to these metrics throughout the organization, and we're able to respond more quickly to trends in the business."

US Auto Parts now uses Tableau throughout the company to analyze product sales, profitability, pricing, email marketing, and fulfillment. "We needed a reporting and analysis tool that could be managed by the analytics team, with limited IT involvement." The tool, Gustafson says, also needed to "empower business units to do their own analysis."

Before US Auto Parts adopted Tableau as their primary tool for reporting, they relied heavily on their IT department to build reports—a process that was neither flexible nor fast. Now, US Auto Parts uses MySQL to house its sales data, and has begun integrating online customer behavior and market research data from their web analytics and research tools to greater leverage Tableau in bringing these different measures together in a single source for all to access.

Tableau's visualizations have changed how the company operates by giving people the information they need to understand and react to trends in real-time.

When US Auto Parts analyzes its performance, it makes use of the interactive functionality Tableau offers. As an example, category managers can filter by time period, sales channel, or website, and interactively drill into category results by product subcategories, parts, SKUs, and SKU application (vehicle make, model, and year). This, Gustafson says, helps the company to stay in step with a constantly changing market, "With so many parts to manage, the visualizations help us quickly identify important trends. You can't do that easily with streams of data."

In addition, Gustafson observes, "The output is so elegant. You can quickly build views of the data, and barely any time is needed for formatting. It's presentable immediately for printing or publishing."

For Gustafson and the rest of Business Analytics at US Auto Parts, Tableau "has saved hours and hours of time pulling and manipulating data. We can focus more time on the activities that really matter – analyzing the data and serving up discoveries and recommendations to move the business forward." Gustafson says that the evidence for their return on investment rests in the time saved, the insight gained, and speed of response to trends in the business.

For More Information About This Case
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