Solution: **Cloud**   Industry: **Education**

Portland State University

Graduating to a new era of educational excellence with user-friendly business intelligence analytics

Inspiring students to advance the frontiers of knowledge demands precision in managing every aspect of campus life, whether it's course scheduling, handling student enrollment or collecting course fees. To help staff to support educational excellence, Portland State University (PSU) enhanced its business intelligence tools with IBM® Cognos® Analytics.

Share this   f   y   G+   in

Business challenge

As a large, urban university, every department at PSU depends on detailed analytics to keep operations running smoothly. How could the university ensure staff had access to the very best analytical tools?

Transformation

To enhance the functionality and usability of its business intelligence platform, PSU upgraded to IBM Cognos Analytics—providing 1,500 users with an even richer analytics experience.

Results

Unlocks

new methods of interrogating data, such as geolocation analysis

Empowers

users to serve themselves by uploading and analyzing their own datasets

Minimizes

disruption with a smooth, low-risk upgrade path

Business challenge story

Imagining a more user-friendly future

With more than 27,000 students enrolled in over 200 degree programs, Portland State University's (PSU's) top priority is to ensure that each student receives a truly enriching education. This demands excellent planning and resource management.

Alison Nimura, Manager of the Business Intelligence Team at Portland State University, elaborates: "Whether it is monitoring enrollment, advising students, or budgeting for the next year, almost every aspect of university life depends upon having fast access to key performance data and business-critical reporting. We have around 1,500 Cognos users, and

many of our operational departments simply wouldn't be able to function without the accurate and intuitive reporting we provide on a daily basis.

"For many years, we've used IBM Cognos to support university-wide reporting—with great success. But there are many opportunities for improvement: we are always engaging with academic units and administrative staff to work out how to take our reporting capabilities to the next level."

After receiving feedback from various users, the business intelligence team at PSU identified a number of ways to enhance reporting across the university.

Alison Nimura continues: "Our users wanted to enhance the look and feel of our reporting tools, with a more modern interface that would enable them to adapt and customize dashboards to match their individual needs. We also saw the potential of a more intuitive user interface that would actively help users explore different ways of displaying information."

For example, the business intelligence team identified a number of use cases for visualizations that could help users interpret geolocation data with greater precision.

"The tools we had were only able to visualize data on world or country-level maps," says Alison Nimura. "We wanted to dive much deeper and look at geographical data at state, city, or even campus level."

She adds: "Users also said that they would like greater control over uploading their data into Cognos. At busy times of year, such as student registration periods, having to wait for IT to add data to our central data warehouse could sometimes delay mission-critical work."

> "Feedback on the user experience of IBM Cognos Analytics has been excellent—users especially love the customizable dashboards."

— Alison Nimura, Manager of the Business Intelligence Team, Portland State University

Transformation story

A new set of tools

To satisfy user requests to advance its business intelligence capabilities, PSU began the search for a solution that would enable it to develop the look, feel and functionality of its analytics tools.

"We have thousands of reports built in the IBM Cognos platform, so we look for reporting enhancements that work with our existing reporting infrastructure as much as possible," says Alison Nimura. "We considered integrating a third-party tool as a data visualization layer, but that would have significantly increased our licensing costs, as well as making data governance and security more difficult to manage."

After learning more about the new capabilities offered in the latest version of IBM Cognos Analytics, PSU decided to upgrade its existing IBM Cognos environment.

"We decided to upgrade to IBM Cognos Analytics because, having used IBM solutions for a number of years, we know that we can trust Cognos solutions to provide rapid, accurate and insightful business intelligence. We were also attracted to the new personalization and customization options implemented in the latest version as well as the ability to enable users to upload data themselves. We felt these new capabilities would provide staff with greater freedom to craft the user experience that best suits their needs and working style.

"For example, the latest version comes with much more detailed mapping features, visualizing data down to the street map level. So if we have a dataset that contains latitude and longitude co-ordinates—the locations of buildings on our campus, for example—we can potentially explore a whole new range of analyses."

PSU deployed IBM Cognos Analytics on premises over a nine-month period. The upgrade went smoothly, with minimal disruption to the university's day-to-day business.

"We weren't moving to an entirely new platform; we were just giving our users an enhanced version of their familiar business intelligence tools, which helped to ease the transition to the new solution. To further mitigate the risk of disruption, we formulated a detailed implementation plan with change management at the heart of our strategy.

"We also sought advice from the BI team at the University of Oregon, who had also recently upgraded to IBM Cognos Analytics. They gave us a number of useful tips that made the transition to the new solution even smoother."

"Empowering staff with enhanced analytics tools ultimately helps us deliver an even more enriching and structured learning environment for our students."

— **Alison Nimura, Manager of the Business Intelligence Team, Portland State University**

Results story

Top-class reporting

With IBM Cognos Analytics powering its business intelligence, staff throughout PSU can customize their workspace to their individual preferences and exercise greater control over creating, analyzing and visualizing their own datasets.

"For us, one of the greatest benefits was just how seamless it was to transition to the new solution," says Alison Nimura. "We dedicated a significant effort to communicating the upcoming changes and training staff on how to use the new interface. We offered videos to help them navigate the interface as well as one-to-one training sessions. Due to this initial preparation and the readiness of the product, the upgrade to IBM Cognos Analytics went smoothly. We spent much less time than we expected troubleshooting production issues.

"Feedback on the user experience of IBM Cognos Analytics has been excellent—users especially love the idea of customizable dashboards. Dashboards will allow them to drag and drop the data they need, and create a workspace that is just right for them. The search feature in the new version of Cognos is also greatly improved, so it's much easier for them to find the reports they need.

"And it's not just good for beginners: our more established users enjoy the new data upload features. Instead of having to chase IT to upload their data before they can dive into analysis, they can get to work on their datasets within a few clicks."

PSU is also considering how to apply geolocation visualization tools to a wide variety of activities and reports, uncovering interesting ways to explore this type of data.

Alison Nimura says: "IBM Cognos Analytics could potentially allow us to track and predict the dynamic flow of individuals through our buildings, for example. This could greatly help with class scheduling, by identifying schedules that will produce shorter travel times

between classes, improving the student experience. That's just one of the many new use cases that Cognos Analytics makes available to us."

She concludes: "With IBM Cognos Analytics, we keep all the benefits of rapid and accurate data analysis while also gaining new functionality and providing our staff with a more personalized user experience. Business intelligence touches almost every aspect of university life, so empowering staff with enhanced analytics tools ultimately helps us deliver an even more enriching and structured learning environment for our students."

Portland State University

Portland State University (PSU) has a 49-acre downtown campus serving approximately 27,000 students each year. Located in the heart of one of America's most vibrant centers of culture, business and technology, PSU is recognized throughout the world for programs like Urban Planning, Social Work, and Environmental Studies that directly engage the community and aim its students towards the creation of a better, more sustainable world. For the third year in a row, Portland State University has been ranked among the 10 most innovative universities by U.S. News & World Report.

Solution components

- Cognos Analytics

- Cognos Business Intelligence

- Educ: Technology Infrastructure

Take the next step

IBM Analytics offers one of the world's deepest and broadest analytics platform, domain and industry solutions that deliver new value to businesses, governments and individuals. For more information about how IBM Analytics helps to transform industries and professions with data, visit ibm.com/analytics. Follow us on Twitter at @IBMAnalytics, on our blog at ibmbigdatahub.com and join the conversation #IBMAnalytics.

View more client stories or learn more about IBM Analytics

Print