CUSTOMER STORY

Gaining 'in-the-moment' business awareness

Gordon Food Service streamlines business intelligence with real-time data

Qlik

Gordon
FOOD SERVICE

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Eric Patterson, Senior Business Analyst – Sales, Gordon Food Service

Bridging the gap between source and cloud

More than 120 years ago, Gordon Food Service began delivering butter and milk by horse and buggy. It is now the country's largest family-managed food service business with more than 170 stores, dozens of warehouse distribution centers and a delivery network covering food service operators east of the Mississippi River in the USA and coast-to-coast in Canada.

Gordon Food Service aims to base successful business decisions on the latest available data, but as data volumes grew it became increasing difficult to free the data and take action.

"Prior to 2005, the majority of data resided on a mainframe," says Tom Majeski, Manager – Application and Data Services at Gordon Food Service. "By 2015, it had spread to hundreds of Oracle and SQL Server databases in the data center, and many SaaS offerings in the cloud. Managing this sprawl had become a challenge and we recognized the need for data consolidation to support the growing demand for analytics."

The company embarked on an ambitious data transformation strategy which began with the choice of Google Cloud Platform (GCP) as its cloud provider. To move all its data into this single cloud location, its leaders looked for a solution that was easily managed with an intuitive interface and could provide access to metadata. It evaluated three possibilities and chose Qlik Data Integration for its ability to seamlessly capture data from many sources and propagate it to a wide range of targets.

"Qlik represented a vision and consolidated product management direction that aligned with our vision for how we would like to manage data replication," explains Majeski.

Solution Overview

Customer Name
Gordon Food Service

Industry
Consumer Products

Geography
Michigan, USA

Function
Operations, Sales

Business Value Driver
Customer Intelligence, Reimagined Processes

Challenges
- Transfer data from many different sources into one place
- Free the data and act on it
- Ensure that all data is as near real-time as possible

Solution
Gordon Food Service chose Google Cloud Platform because of its machine learning, AI and analytics capabilities and Qlik Replicate to populate it with data.

Results
- Near real-time streaming of 11 sources including SAP, SQL and Oracle
- Cloud data pipeline incorporates over 12 TB of data from six SAP environments, 50+ subject areas and 900+ tables
- Less than a day needed to add a new data source

Successful replication of 4,000 objects

Gordon Food Service ingested its first SAP table in late 2020 and it now achieves near real-time streaming of 11 sources including SAP, SQL and Oracle to Google BigQuery, Oracle and Kafka. As of June 2021, the cloud data pipeline incorporates more than six SAP environments, 54 subject areas, 929 tables and 12.7 TB of data and it takes less than one day to add a new data source.

"We've really fallen into a sweet spot with Qlik Data Integration," adds Majeski. "We're currently replicating about 4,000 objects and it works really well."

"We can now replicate data from any on-prem database and for the most part, we have sub-second latency from the time the change happens in the source database to when it is reflected in the data lake," says Software and Analytics Team Manager, Kyle Partlo. "We have access to all systems that are on-prem or HANA and 98% of source systems are covered. It takes less than a day to quickly fulfill hundreds of data requests."

As well as supporting 'in the moment' business decisions, data is now used by sales staff for lead pipeline generation and deeper analysis into topics such as lost sales. It is also pushed into the CRM which generates alerts to prompt actionable events for the salesforce. The Qlik Data Integration environment is managed by one person on a part-time basis.

Gordon Food Service is undergoing a large scale SAP implementation and through a native SAP connector, Qlik Replicate is also helping it sidestep the problems that often accompany SAP data replication. The company now successfully connects Qlik to all six of its SAP environments.

Answering questions in minutes

Eric Patterson, Senior Business Analyst – Sales at Gordon Food Service, explains: "Our original vision was to produce an infrastructure that was agile, open and near real-time because we knew that the speed of innovation and change would require those abilities at some point in the future. This all came to life as we were building the first rendition of our platform."

Previously, the company could only see operational data through single purpose applications but now it can combine data source objects together and have visibility throughout the replication process. This enables the company to answer questions in minutes when previously it would have taken up to a month using manual exports and spreadsheets.

"We have gone from a 24-hour delay in knowing what happened to being able to raise concerns on an insight after only a few minutes," says Patterson.

Following the implementation of the new data solution, end users from different branches of the organization can deep-dive and discover better ways to look at data and consume it and operational teams now have access to near real-time data to help optimize logistic problems on the fly. To support this, user experience detection is in existence throughout the entire customer journey and Gordon Food Service has built complete data models of the entire order fulfillment process flow. Any issues can immediately be relayed to an employee resulting in swift remedial action.

"Our new platform is geared for the future, and with every new thing we learn or question we answer, it drives all of us forward toward a more insightful future," concludes Patterson.

The keys to success

98% of source systems covered

4k objects currently replicated

"We can now replicate data from any on-prem database including SAP HANA, Oracle and SQL Server into the data lake hosted by Google Cloud and BigQuery. For the most part, we have sub-second latency."

Kyle Partlow, Software and Analytics Team Manager, Gordon Food Service

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About Qlik

Qlik's vision is a data-literate world, where everyone can use data and analytics to improve decision-making and solve their most challenging problems. Our cloud-based Qlik Active Intelligence Platform delivers end-to-end, real-time data integration and analytics cloud solutions to close the gaps between data, insights and action. By transforming data into Active Intelligence, businesses can drive better decisions, improve revenue and profitability, and optimize customer relationships. Qlik does business in more than 100 countries and serves over 38,000 active customers around the world.

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