DATA INTEGRATION

Cutting processing speeds 400%

Urban Sports Club boosts engineering efficiency and reduces time to decision

Qlik Q

URBAN SPORTS CLUB

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Artur Yatsenko, Head of Data Platform and Product Analytics, Urban Sports Club

An outstanding market offering

Health and fitness is big business. In Europe alone, its value reached €28 billion in 2022 as the market bounced back after the Covid-19 pandemic and people returned to their regular lives and routines. It's also a busy and competitive market in which standing out involves a special offering.

In many ways, Urban Sports Club is like any large health and wellness provider, with membership providing access to gyms, pools, yoga sessions and fitness classes. However, it's a concept that Urban Sports takes much further.

With a network of 10,000 partner clubs and facilities in hundreds of cities across Belgium, France, Germany, Portugal and Spain, Urban Sports covers a much wider area than most providers. It also offers a significantly broader choice of sports and activities, from waterskiing to pole-dancing, paddleboarding and rock-climbing.

"Our ultimate mission is to inspire people to lead active and healthy lives. Just looking at my own usage in the last 20 months, I participated in 19 different categories ranging from water sports to martial arts," says Artur Yatsenko, Head of Data Platform and Product Analytics at Urban Sports Club. "I don't have to stay in one place with one activity; I can try out and experience lots of different things and build a routine depending on my lifestyle and interests. That flexibility is the stand-out element of Urban Sports."

Solution Overview

Customer Name
Urban Sports Club

Industry
Retail and Services

Geography
Germany

Function
IT, Marketing, Sales

Challenges
- Improve support across three key business ecosystems
- Increase understanding of member engagement
- Accelerate speeds of implementation and insight

Solution
As part of the development of a new cloud-based data environment, Urban Sports outsourced its data pipeline requirements to Stitch.

Results
- Improved loading speeds deliver faster, more accurate analytics
- Engineers can focus on higher-value tasks and processes
- Faster insights enhance matching of supply and demand

Remodeling the stack

The business ecosystem at Urban Sports consists of three main entity groups: individual members, partner clubs and providers, and corporate buyers that use Urban Sports memberships as part of wellbeing initiatives or incentives. Successfully meeting the various requirements of all three is key to the business' popularity and growth.

A vital part of meeting this challenge is data. Key responsibilities for Artur and his data and analytics team include providing information on member usage and trends, and assessments of which parts of the business are most effective.

"On the member side, it gives us insights into how often they use our product and where and when they're checking in, for example," he explains. "It's information we can use to improve our product and understand how best to acquire customers across different channels."

After 11 years of operation, however, Urban Sports realized that its data environment was underperforming. Old in-house solutions were slow and prone to errors and schema changes were laborious and difficult to manage.

"We decided to remodel our stack and move to something more modern," says Artur. "We retained the SQL production databases but migrated the transformation element to Google Big Query, with everything in one centralized space."

The challenge for Artur and the data team was how it could move the data faster and make greater use of low-code and no-code platforms. A trial of Stitch, part of the Qlik product portfolio, allowed Urban Sports to set up some test data pipelines to assess performance.

"We needed different tooling for the loading element, something that would fit into a more advanced data stack and save us time in the process," Artur adds. "We ran some security threat modeling and found that Stitch was a perfect fit."

Speed and simplicity

Of the multiple advantages that Stitch offered Urban Sports, the ones that struck Artur first were the simplicity and speed at which it could be incorporated into the new stack.

"Stitch stood out because it was so easy to get started. It reduced the lead time to change considerably," he says. "We load data primarily from back-end systems, but we also need some external connectors – data from Shopify, for example, needs quite specific tooling.

"Having access to all the different connectors that Stitch offers made the configuration process much quicker."

Around 80% of the data volume handled by the new stack now works on standard connectors supplied by Stitch, giving Urban Sports a central location for data migration.

"Multiple different Urban Sports entities now use that same space," Artur notes. "Outsourcing our main loading pipeline to Stitch has been a major contributor to that."

A huge productivity boost

From building new connections to developing vital customer insights, data processes across Urban Sports are now quick, accurate and reliable. Important improvements at the back end include the speed at which new sources and connections can be incorporated into the environment.

"Adding a new source from our production databases previously took one person an entire week," says Artur. "In most cases that can now be completed in a maximum of two days; that's a huge boost for our productivity in several processes."

With Stitch making a significant contribution at the heart of the new stack and processes, loading speeds have also significantly improved, typically falling from around six hours to just 1.5. These two gains alone have relieved many of the strains on engineers at Urban Sports, allowing them to apply their skills to other key process developments.

"We can focus on things like building machine learning workflows and making further improvements to the current infrastructure," Artur explains. "Stitch also gives us more time to drive insights for end users."

A resilient and scalable solution

Reduced loading times lead to quicker access to data across Urban Sports, giving it the speed and agility to handle critical workloads and drive growth.
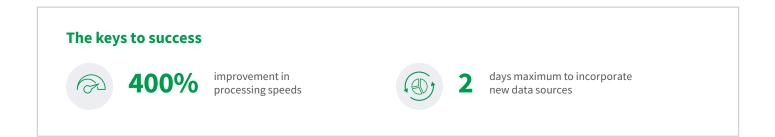
"There's much greater visibility and availability of data. The time between an analyst requesting data and when they can actually work with it is much lower," says Artur. "There are no roadblocks for team members anymore; that increased speed of delivery is our main objective."

A better view of members and their activities and usage patterns now gives Urban Sports valuable feedback on which facilities are used where and which member-acquisition processes are most effective. It also provides visibility at the partner level, highlighting engagements with different courses and classes.

"It means we can model things like supply and demand, for example, which is such an important part of our business," Artur adds. "Ultimately, it's about the time to decision, which is now improving all the time."

Potential new use cases include giving members access to analytics, driving further engagement and loyalty.

More importantly, however, the new environment means Urban Sports has a solid foundation on which to further build out its operations.

"As the business matures data volumes grow, it's important that we have a reliable infrastructure with minimal maintenance effort at our end," Artur concludes. "We can rely on Stitch to handle that resilience and scalability."

The keys to success

400% improvement in processing speeds

2 days maximum to incorporate new data sources

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