

“With Talend, our cloud and on-premises systems are now speaking together. This has empowered the organization as a whole and is moving us from making decisions based on gut feel to making them based on consistent data.”

Greg Sitzman, VP of Business Intelligence, F+W Media.



INDUSTRY

- Online media

INFORMATION

- HQ: New York
- 501-1,000 employees

USE CASE

- Operational reporting

CHALLENGE

- Getting cloud and on-premises systems talking to each other

TALEND PRODUCT USED

- Talend Cloud

RESULTS

- Connecting **30** internal data sources and many others in the cloud
- **A single**, enterprise-wide version of the truth
- Greater **operational efficiency** with less waiting for answers

Meeting the needs and wants of enthusiastic consumers

Founded in 1913, F+W Media strives to offer the most complete-online, offline, anytime-customer experience for enthusiasts in all communities including art, craft, writing, design, outdoors and more. The company is connecting passionate, like-minded groups of people to share an ongoing exchange of information, ideas, and inspiration. It offers the most targeted products and services—books, eBooks, magazines, digital magazines, events, ecommerce, online education, streaming video/ DVDs, eBook subscription sites.

Recognizing the need for a data-driven culture

F+W did not have integrated data resources and had no company-wide “single version of the truth” when it came to critical operational data. Seeing the need for that, a new CEO directed IT to build a business intelligence (BI) center of excellence to replace islands of information with an integrated system that could provide consistent data enterprise-wide.

A serious problem with the existing silos of information, according to Greg Sitzman, vice president of business intelligence for F+W, was that all business questions had to be funneled through a group of report writers that were specific to each separate system. “When you have that type of setup,” he says, “you’re going to get different answers depending on how a question is asked and who fulfills the data request. And then, it’s left up to the requestor to interpret the data.”

For example, staff members had difficulty obtaining basic data to perform a year-over-year analysis on best-selling products; evaluate

the success of email campaigns and promotions; or determine costs, revenue and margins. In addition, requests for data were put in a queue and requestors could wait up to a week for an answer.

“In addition,” says Sitzman, “because data wasn’t at people’s fingertips, they weren’t used to asking the right questions. They couldn’t iterate through several questions and get multiple answers, so their questions were always very basic. There was a level of granular analysis that was missing.”

Sitzman says the end result was that too many people were having to make gut-feel decisions on how to run their day-to-day operations. “That’s why the CEO mandated that we make the infrastructure changes necessary to transition to a data-driven culture within the company,” he says.

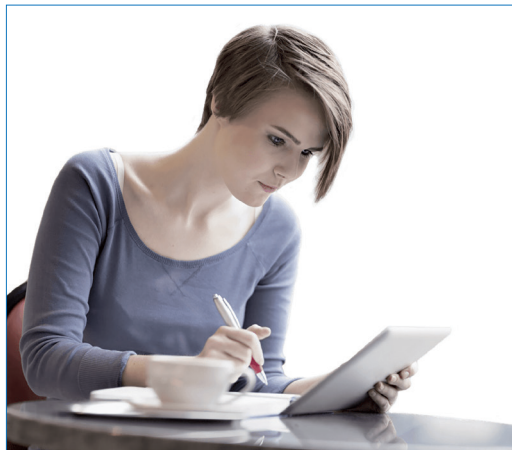
Getting cloud and on-premises systems speaking together

For the enterprise data warehouse component of the BI system, F+W selected Snowflake, a SQL data warehouse built for the cloud, primarily because it integrates well with the rest of the architecture, including Amazon EC2 on AWS and Looker as a reporting tool. “We also preferred Snowflake because it’s purpose-built as a true data warehousing platform, and it handles almost every administrative task you can think of,” says Sitzman. “It’s a share-everything architecture.”

F+W selected Talend Cloud to serve as a data pipeline between data sources and the cloud data warehouse. The goal, says Sitzman, is to integrate data from across the organization,

“From the standpoint of having Talend do what we need it to do and integrating it into our processes, we’re very satisfied.”

including sales; inventory; costs; purchasing; email data on sends, opens, and clicks; Web traffic data on visits and conversion rates, and more.



Sitzman says the primary function for Talend Cloud is to securely transport data that’s behind the firewall, within the company’s ERP and Oracle-based order management systems, to Snowflake on AWS. “We saw Talend as a tool that would help us with that secure transport of data,” he says, “and make the data pipeline itself easier to implement and maintain.”

Why Talend?

Sitzman says that a key reason behind the choice of Talend was its natural fit with the cloud-based architecture of the BI system. “Everything is in the cloud—the data warehouse, our reporting solution, our Linux instances, and more. The only piece of this solution that’s not cloud-based is the Remote Engine for Talend that’s behind the firewall.”

He says that Talend’s pre-built connectors were another advantage. “We have over 30 data sources internal to the company as well as other data sources external to the company, like Google Analytics, so we wanted a solution that was going to have the ability to connect to a lot of different sources.”

Sitzman adds that Talend does many things well, but its key value at the moment for F+W is as a data pipeline tool that delivers rapid access to data and transports it into the new Snowflake company’s data warehouse

as easily and as quickly as possible, while keeping that process very extensible and maintainable.

Running day-to-day operations with greater operational efficiency

The principal benefit of the new BI system, according to Sitzman, is achieving the single version of the truth that was the initial objective of the project. “With this new BI capability, it doesn’t matter who in the business needs the data, they’re all accessing the same data, and they all have it at their fingertips,” he says. “That has also made everyone more productive, because now they’re not waiting on data; they’re asking questions and getting answers within seconds.”

The new system has approximately 230 users, distributed among several departments, including marketing, media, content creation, financing and more. Says Sitzman, “I think the new BI system has empowered the organization as a whole, and is moving us from making decisions based on gut feel to making them based on consistent data. That change has given them more confidence in their decisions on a whole range of issues.”



Looking at the big picture of Talend’s role in building the BI system, Sitzman says that “the most challenging aspect of any data warehouse project is just getting access to the data. And that’s why we choose Talend—because we have a lot of different data sources and we wanted to make sure we had a tool capable of connecting to and pulling data from all those sources.”