

Business intelligence for the cloud software stack helps gaming sites quickly adapt to evolving customer needs

The biggest worry for developers of social gaming sites is not so much will customers come, but rather will they stay. Even the most brilliant new gaming idea will atrophy if the site is unable to understand its community's desires, and continuously adapt its features to meet those needs.

Two new online gaming sites are tackling the challenge with an innovative and affordable cloud-based business intelligence (BI) solution. Siblingz, a virtual world platform, and CrowdStar, a Facebook based social gaming company, have tapped a virtualized analytic data warehouse to glean insight from its customers' behavior and usage patterns. With this business intelligence, the sites hope to avoid the mistakes of failed online games that were blind, static and unresponsive to their user community's preferences. This new rapid analytics capability will help the gaming sites acquire and maintain a maximum number of happy fans by quickly responding to their user community's requirements.

The Challenge

Siblingz is a virtual world platform with multiple social games which let their users explore a virtual world, undertake interesting quests together, and achieve team goals through many Flash-based mini-games and some premium content.

CrowdStar is a Facebook based social gaming company and developer of the most popular trivia challenge game Know-It-All with millions of monthly active users. It aims to provide a rich multiuser environment on Facebook for a variety of other gaming interests, such as games promoting social causes (like Save the Reef) and strategic battle games such as The Civil War and WWII.

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Peter Relan, Siblingz and CrowdStar co-founder

Key Benefits

- *Push-button launch*
- *No upfront costs*
- *No data center overhead*
- *Affordable pay-as-you-go subscription*
- *Instant analytics*
- *Ability to rapidly evolve*

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The Challenge (continued)

Like most gaming startups, uncertainty about user adoption and behavior obscured decision-making. “Which demographics will be our most loyal and profitable customers? What activities do users love or hate? Which features can we monetize? Where should we focus our development efforts? How do we scale to meet unpredictable and perhaps wild fluctuations in visitors? We knew the user data held the answers. The question was how best to get at it,” said Peter Relan, co-founder and executive chairman of Siblingz and CrowdStar.

With every user activity monitored and recorded in the database, the challenge was how to handle and make sense of the astronomical data volumes that large multiuser games generate daily. And they had to figure out how to do that quickly to meet a tight launch schedule on the startup’s frugal budget and with virtually no IT staff.

The Solution

After considering and rejecting several popular data warehouse and BI systems, Siblingz and CrowdStar chose a new kind of BI system comprised of best-in-class cloud, analytic database, BI and data integration software. It is a remarkably effective mix of open source and commercial software, giving Siblingz and CrowdStar the high performance and capabilities of a world-class enterprise data center at a fraction of the cost and with no IT overhead.

requirements for the Siblingz and CrowdStar data warehouses by nearly 90 percent. Vertica can operate directly on that compressed data, delivering query results about gaming user behavior and trends 50 to 200 times faster than other databases.

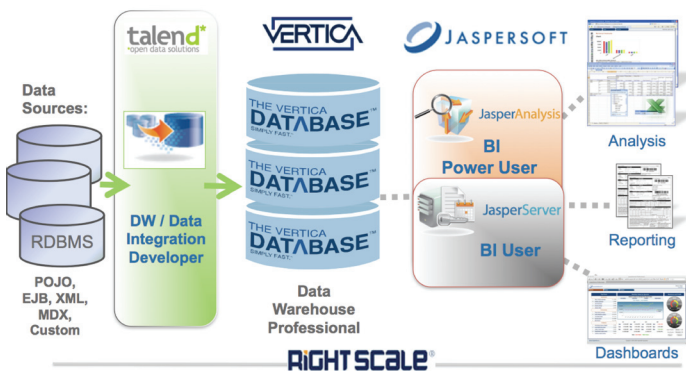
Jaspersoft provides the analysis and reporting front-end to the solution. Jaspersoft provides easy-to-use web-based analysis, ad hoc reporting, and dashboards so that the gaming sites’ staff can make better decisions.

Jaspersoft's open source business intelligence suite is the world's most widely used BI software, with more than 9 million total downloads worldwide and more than 10,000 commercial customers in 96 countries. Jaspersoft products are web-based, open, and modular. Jaspersoft's software is rapidly updated by a community of more than 99,000 registered members working on more than 350 projects, which represents the world's largest business intelligence community.

Talend, the world’s leading open source data integration provider, ties it all together at the data level. Talend provides the ETL (Extraction, Transformation and Loading) services for retrieving, enriching and pre-processing the gaming data for the Vertica database. The software enables users to easily launch and configure a Talend server on the cloud through the RightScale Cloud Management Platform. They can quickly move their on-premise data onto the cloud, or use the Talend Cloud Execution Servers for transformation upon loading of their cloud sources with great speed and performance.

RightScale is the cloud management platform that manages the underlying cloud infrastructure and enables the gaming site’s staff to launch and control the BI software stack. RightScale is the leader in cloud computing management and offers a fully automated cloud management platform. RightScale’s platform provides best practices methodology to easily deploy and manage business-critical applications on the cloud with new levels of automation, control, and portability.

Cloud-based BI Software Stack



This new cloud-based BI software stack starts with the Vertica Analytic Database as the analytic engine. Vertica is a high-performance columnar database that employs a massively parallel processing (MPP) architecture and pioneering data compression to reduce storage

The Solution (continued)

RightScale created a sophisticated macro which integrates ServerTemplates for Vertica, Talend and Jaspersoft. The macro integration instantly provides the configuration needed for the BI software components to operate as one smooth running system. The Crowdstar and Siblingz BI stack deployment is managed by RightScale to run on Amazon’s Amazon Elastic Compute Cloud (Amazon EC2), a cloud provider of resizable compute capacity. A key feature offered by the RightScale platform is that it also provides the freedom to chose which cloud infrastructure provider to use for your BI deployment, therefore avoiding lock-in to one cloud provider.

MetricMine headed the integration project. MetricMine is a boutique data management and BI services consultancy. It specializes in cloud BI applications and offers terabyte-level analysis on an affordable budget.

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Gaming sites are particularly challenging for business intelligence applications because of wild and unpredictable fluctuations in user demand. The cloud-based solution

enables the gaming sites to scale their analytic data warehouse on demand up and down, fast and easy, as user activity dictates. The sites avoided huge capital investments in building, staffing and cooling an expensive data center equipped to handle the unpredictable capacity, much of whose computing resources would have sat idle most of the time.

Instead, the sites get all the benefits and reliability of an enterprise BI solution with no management overhead for an affordable monthly fee.

It’s also critical to figure out user trends and quickly make adjustments in the early life of a new gaming site. Siblingz and CrowdStar staff will now be able to analyze many terabytes of usage data daily, and roll out new functionality within 24 hours based on those insights. The staff will be able to analyze demographics and other metrics such as how does user behavior change over time; how often do users return each week; what activities they tend to return to; what premium content has the most uptake; and which games and features are users most willing to pay for.

They’ll also be able to innovate incrementally, trying out different campaigns and gaming ideas and gauging audience reaction within hours. The companies believe that by continuously enhancing the sites, they will spawn better word of mouth which attracts more customers and more sustainable revenue.

“The beauty of the cloud BI stack is its low cost barrier, without having to sacrifice performance or functionality,” Relan added. “No huge investments in hardware, staff and other resources are required to get a scalable, end-to-end enterprise BI solution delivering results on the first day of business.”

Cloud computing offers new opportunities for companies like Siblingz and CrowdStar who need the ability to rapidly deploy enterprise-class BI solutions quickly, on the fly, and without the huge capital expenditure of building and staffing a data center. For more information on the new BI for the Cloud software stack, please visit www.RightScale.com/BI.