Sunset Transportation Client Portal Delivers Data Transparency for Better Logistics Planning, Tracking, and Cost

360°

Clients' view of their shipping & logistics activities

LOGIK

Client portal delivering cost & performance transparency

INSIGHT

Real-time data for selecting carriers in advance

Challenge

What gives Sunset Transportation an edge over other third-party logistics (3PL) providers is not just its ability to efficiently move goods, but its view of data and how to put it to use for the benefit of its clients. As Sunset's analytics needs expanded, the business operations team determined that the existing business intelligence (BI) platform lacked the enterprise capabilities for taking client analytics to the next level.

"We gave our incumbent vendor the opportunity to scale their use cases, but they couldn't match the breadth of ibi™ WebFOCUS®. We use a lot of internal and external data, and we needed a robust analytics platform that could be embedded into a larger application," says Todd Burdell, Director of Business Operations.

Sunset evaluated several leading vendors before selecting WebFOCUS software as the most capable solution for developing the new client portal.

Transformation

"The WebFOCUS platform has advanced functionality we need to create our own content, establish our own designs, and visualize data with advanced metrics and charts," Burdell explains. "WebFOCUS software can access and collaborate with transactional systems, messaging systems, and databases. We are accessing data directly from our Snowflake data warehouse and from a traditional RDBMS and consuming external data through RESTful APIs. The software

Sunset Transportation

Sunset Transportation offers logistics management and brokerage services to mid-market organizations throughout the US, Canada, and Mexico. As a third-party logistics company, it helps clients manage shipping, freight audit, and payment processes.

also features strong integration with Esri for digital mapping. In transportation, that's huge."

Sunset selected AWS to host this new analytics environment due to its proven ability to deploy and scale quickly while maximizing flexibility for the future. With AWS, the company doesn't have to invest in traditional hardware, and it's easy to scale the environment as use increases.

Using WebFOCUS analytics, Sunset created a customer-facing portal called LOGIK that launched with two dashboards: Shipment Metrics and Live In-Transit. The Shipment Metrics dashboard displays financial metrics, such as spending and volume by shipment mode. Clients can visualize real-time shipping activity, monitor origin and destination density, and review historical metrics to determine the most cost-effective lanes—including accessorial charges for freight services beyond normal pick-up, transport, and delivery.

The Live In-Transit dashboard plots shipment data on an interactive map, enabling customers to monitor shipments from origin to destination. An order tracking and history tab allow the team to filter data by direction, status, and carrier. Ad hoc analytics allow users to display shipment-level details and export their data out of the cloud database to create their own metrics.

Burdell says it's all part of Sunset's philosophy of data transparency. "Not only do we not hide data from our clients, we allow them to extract their data at a very detailed level. They can see current shipments, planned shipments, and their entire history with us, to make sure they are keeping their costs in line." For example, clients can drill down to line-item details for every shipment in every mode. It's easy to monitor location details, costs, and commodity information on detailed tracking maps.

According to Tracy Meetre, Chief Commercial Officer, most 3PL companies offer historical metrics. However, Sunset also gives clients the insight they need to select carriers in advance—a particularly valuable capability when dealing with less-than-truckload (LTL) shipments handled by FedEx, Old Dominion, Estes Express Lines, and other carriers.

"Instead of retroactively revealing which carriers would have been better, our clients can now see this data in real time," Meetre notes. "They can make the right decisions upfront and take corrective action if needed, rather than merely examining historical data."

The portal's real-time tracking capabilities enable clients to expedite delays. "It's actionable, and all the data is in one place," Meetre continues. "Previously, customers could see how much money they spent, but they couldn't see what it meant to their organizations or how they could do better. Now that data is readily at hand. They can always be up to date on where their freight is."

Sunset Transportation deployed the WebFOCUS portal directly into AWS Cloud. Customers can provision software instances on demand and scale them at will, so it's easy to use right away. The result is a comprehensive, on-demand platform for analytics and data management that does not need to be installed, integrated, or maintained—no need to engage multiple vendors.

"ibi has established a cloud service within AWS that is customized and optimized for running the WebFOCUS platform," Burdell notes. "We could access all the pertinent directories and files from the AWS servers very easily."

Benefit

Internally, Sunset's customer service and sales teams use the portal to view KPIs and trend history, while Sunset's Freight Audit and Payment division uses it to ensure clients are charged according to their contracts. Two additional dashboards are in development—analytics and finance. Ultimately the entire portal environment will be embedded into a larger application that includes order entry, freight auditing, payments, and reporting services—giving clients a 360-degree view of their shipping and logistics activities.

"WebFOCUS delivers the holistic client experience we need. By mining the data with WebFOCUS analytics, our clients can continually improve their operations and realize ongoing savings," says Burdell.

As part of a six-week engagement, WebFOCUS helped Sunset deploy a Snowflake data warehouse and then created extract, transform, and load (ETL) processes to load transportation data, financial data, and freight audit and payment data. The consultants set up the database tables and created ETL processes. As transactions are committed to Sunset's Microsoft SQL Server database, the data flows directly into the data warehouse, enabling portal users to view them almost immediately. A native Snowflake adapter ensures outstanding performance and efficiency for WebFOCUS queries.

"WebFOCUS did a great job creating the ETL procedures and unifying the data," Burdell says. "In addition, Snowflake is perfect for Sunset; we don't have to throw IT resources at it or hire a DBA to make sure the database is balanced, updated, and scaled to support a growing load."

In other words, rather than spending time planning, deploying, and maintaining database infrastructure, Burdell and his team can focus on projects that move the business forward, such as creating and enhancing the analytics portal that will increasingly differentiate the company in the years ahead. "Most of our prospects evaluate more than one 3PL as part of an RFP process," Meetre concludes. "They often tell us what makes our solution stand out: it allows them to take action before their freight has even left the dock."

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