athenahealth

Focusing on what really matters: delivering the best possible service to customers

Overview

The need
athenahealth needs to provide the same excellent level of support to all its customers – whether they are individual doctors, small clinics or large hospitals.

The solution
By automating its analytics processes, athenahealth can focus on customer service and find new ways to optimize processes such as billing and medical records management.

The benefit
athenahealth has accelerated financial reporting from days to minutes, and empowered C-level executives to serve themselves with instant insight into financial data and plans – giving its analysts time to focus on finding new ways to enhance the customer experience.

Data plays an invaluable role in today's healthcare industry, helping clinicians diagnose and treat patients more effectively than ever before – and administrators find more efficient ways to manage both operations and finances.

The importance of data will only continue to grow, as healthcare organizations recognize the need to find smarter ways to deal with increasing regulatory pressures, maintaining the quality of care while also remaining competitive and delivering the best possible value for money.

As a leading provider of support services for doctors and healthcare providers across the United States, athenahealth knows that it has a key role to play in helping the whole healthcare sector become more efficient in response to these challenges. The company is in the vanguard of the movement to share, analyze and extract new value from healthcare information, and specializes in collecting, curating and putting this data to work for its clients.

The customer is king – especially in the healthcare industry, where people's lives can be on the line. "Now that analytics has given us more time to actually look at the data, we can redirect our resources to our real mission: making the healthcare industry a better place," says Eric Molin, Senior Manager of Finance, Planning and Analysis at athenahealth.

Solution components

Software
- IBM® Cognos® Disclosure Management
- IBM Cognos TM1®

However, following a period of rapid growth, athenahealth recognized a need to modernize its internal approach to data analysis.

Eric Molin, Senior Manager of Finance, Planning and Analysis at athenahealth, explains: "We rely on data from multiple sources, including financial and operational data from our own systems and data brought in from the outside. As the company grew quickly through a number of acquisitions, our existing analytics and reporting solution fell increasingly short of our needs.

"Our analysts spent too much time manually gathering data, leaving little space for actual analysis. The process was laborious and technical, so business leaders needed to wait for analysts to generate reports on their behalf. And to keep pace with the rapid changes in the healthcare industry, we needed a more flexible approach that could help us respond faster to changes in rules, regulations and demands from our customers."

Unlocking productivity

As a basis for its transformation, athenahealth chose to deploy a suite of analytics solutions from IBM, covering planning and forecasting, business intelligence and automated reporting. This set of solutions is changing the way that analysts spend their time for the better.

"Our CEO, CFO and COO don't need to wait for us to pull the numbers together for them any more – they can all log into the web interface directly and generate reports for themselves," says Eric Molin. "It's just a few mouse-clicks, so it's actually quicker and easier for executives to serve themselves than to pick up the phone and ask someone else to do it for them."

Even traditionally hand-written reports, such as management reports for the company's board, can now be significantly automated. Budget data and actuals flow through the IBM® Cognos® TM1® planning system into IBM Cognos Disclosure Management, which inserts the latest figures automatically into the relevant places in the final report documents.

Even if there is a late change in the data, the system will automatically update the report and keep the numbers accurate and consistent. This allows analysts to focus on writing the qualitative parts of the report, instead of spending all of their time checking for mistakes in the figures.

"We have dramatically reduced the amount of number-crunching that our analysts need to perform, so they can spend more time on analyses that add value," says Eric Molin. "We have a highly intelligent, skilled team in our finance department – we don't want to waste them on low-level tasks when they could be helping us find new ways to move the business forwards."

"Our reports to the board now practically write themselves – the numbers flow seamlessly from our operational systems."

— Eric Molin, Senior Manager of Finance, Planning and Analysis, athenahealth

Accelerated reporting

By automating data collection and analysis, athenahealth is succeeding in eradicating manual work and boosting efficiency.

"One of the benefits we have been able to realize as a result of deploying IBM Cognos software is a faster monthly financial close," remarks Eric Molin. "Before, it could take an analyst a day to import data from our general ledger system, prepare the data and build the report. With IBM solutions, we can complete the entire process in just 10 to 15 minutes – a huge efficiency gain."

With greater flexibility and centralized control of company-wide data collection and analysis, athenahealth is free to refocus on its core mission of continually improving service to customers.

Eric Molin concludes: "Analytics makes it easier for us to incorporate new acquisitions, clients or revenue streams quickly. Additionally, we can now respond faster than ever before to new regulatory or client demands. With greater insight into our finances and operations, we can identify areas for improvement and take action to enhance our services in ways that really make a difference to our customers."

About athenahealth

athenahealth provides cloud-based electronic health records, patient engagement, population health management and medical billing services for clients in the healthcare industry. More than 64,000 health providers are now part of the company's nationwide cloud-based network, athenanet, where real-time data is collected, curated and put to work to drive performance for organizations of all sizes. To learn more about athenahealth, please visit www.athenahealth.com

About IBM Analytics

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