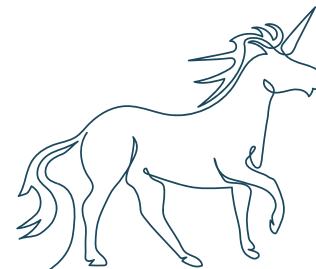




ACHIEVING THE ELUSIVE 360° VIEW

OF YOUR BUSINESS WITH A CLOUD DATA
WAREHOUSE



The Unicorn

For years the goal of a comprehensive, holistic view of customers and business operations has been held as the “unicorn” of business data integration. Fortune 2000 companies have spent billions of dollars on efforts to achieve that magical state of frictionless data access and complete visibility into day to day operations, customer activities, impending problems and employee productivity. With myriad software applications in place (none of which are designed to play nicely with each other), surprisingly, many enterprises have achieved at least a measure of success in pulling those feeds together.

What is a 360° view exactly? Depending on the industry and the specific products or services a company provides the exact definition can vary, but all revolve around having visibility into all aspects of the customer that includes: purchases, payment history, support status, returns, satisfaction levels, even additional sales opportunities.

Having a full view also means operational status, time and attendance, payables and receivables, inventory status, supply chain information—in short, everything management needs to make informed decisions, keep things running smoothly, grow the business and delight their customers. To have all that data brought together in a usable form is a significant step forward, and even more important, the analytics it enables is a substantial competitive advantage—it is indeed the elusive unicorn. A cloud data warehouse enables a company to harness the cloud and can be implemented for a price that fits an SMB’s budget.



As a refresher, a data warehouse is a central repository of data drawn from applications and data sources throughout a company. It takes work to set up but when done properly provides easy ongoing access to company-wide data for developing valuable reporting, analytics and dashboards, all critical tools for better management and operational insights. A data warehouse eliminates the painful and time consuming manual process of pulling data from various applications and copying it onto a massive spreadsheet in an effort to unify this disparate data for reporting and analysis. A cloud data warehouse is simply a data warehouse that resides in the cloud. It is populated by data from both the SMB’s on-premise and cloud applications.

The benefits of having a 360° view of your business are substantial, and apply to companies of all sizes, large and small:

- The ability to see both past and present information about your customers while you are servicing or selling to them, leading to more efficient processing of their needs, and the opportunity to sell more products or services.
- Visibility into both inventory and upstream supply chain status, which empowers management to contain costs, anticipate bottlenecks, and optimize flow.

- Predictive guidance through the use of analytics provides time and information to identify additional sales, proactively reduce customer (and even employee) churn and take advantage of market opportunities.
- Complete operational and financial information to better manage internal costs such as telecom and technology infrastructure and use expenses, and temporary staff over-hire.

That said, while the benefits are many, the effort has historically been daunting, the timeframes for implementation long and the journey grueling for most companies. The cost of on-premise infrastructure, software and data integration, setting up a data warehouse, ongoing maintenance and support, not to mention the relative fragility of these systems, which creates ongoing requirements for care and feeding, have collectively created a considerable barrier. But for those who have enough resources, access to sufficient expertise and enough runway to see the multi-year effort through, the rewards are transformative. As the digital transformation revolution has reached its point of no return, the effort, in many cases begins anew.



The Elephant

Just as there is a clear unicorn to be pursued, there is also, unfortunately, an elephant in the room, especially for small- to medium-sized businesses. Non-enterprise level companies have the same needs as larger organizations for a clear, accurate and up to the minute information on their businesses, customers and their supply chains, but adoption has been slow. Why? There are a number of reasons, starting with a typical tangle of legacy infrastructure and applications that have usually grown up haphazardly as the company itself has grown.

Smaller companies are rarely able to invest the significant amounts of cash and resources necessary to make a generational shift. The phrase “if it ain’t broke, why fix it?” is heard in senior management meetings across the country in smaller companies. Sure, the “new stuff” would be great, they say, but there’s often a sense of things being good enough, and the focus then turns to other aspects of the business.

Lastly, there’s fear: of an overwhelmingly complex project, unaffordable expense, and real risk to the business if the project fails. For these reasons and others, taking the journey to create that unicorn which would make them more agile and competitive, often gets left behind. The fact is, though, and this is the real elephant in the room: not tackling your data tangle leaves you without the tools necessary to compete and to grow in a competitive world. “Good enough” becomes “not enough” pretty quickly.

To further complicate things, the tech industry is overstuffed with confusing terms, conflated models and overwrought promises. Take a moment and google “360° business view” and you’ll be inundated with CRM, master data management, analytics and related tools and applications all promising that elusive 360° view. The problem is, most either take a narrow (albeit important) view, such as customer relationship management software, or a deeply technical one, which leaves an SMB lost in a sea of jargon. Rarely will you find a roadmap to a true 360° that incorporates all aspects of your business.

Behind every silver lining is...the Cloud



But all is not lost for the small or medium-sized business that is determined to get ahead of the competition, or even compete over their weight. Gaining a 360° view of your business can be achieved through digital transformation, powered by the Cloud, with a stepwise approach, the right tools and cloud services, and the help of the right expertise. Bringing together cloud based data warehouses or data marts, employing the right resources to migrate and integrate the disparate data that today is siloed all across your organization, and then building low- or no code applications and analytics to take advantage of that information gets you where you want to be.

The benefits of moving your data to the Cloud are many:

- 80-90% reduced total cost of ownership compared to building or maintaining data marts or warehouses on-premise.
- Security and data integrity are substantially increased using a cloud vendor such as Amazon Web Services (AWS) or Microsoft Azure.
- Consumption and flexibility are greatly improved both in terms of instant access to storage and computing power as and when needed. Scale up when required, scale down when not needed and never pay for capacity that isn't needed.
- Better user experience because of Cloud computing's superior speed and performance.
- Access to value added services which are only available on the Cloud.

Rapid Time to Value...and Low Risk

A reasonable fear of a small- to medium-sized company is getting in too deep with a data warehouse project. Stories abound of time and money sinkholes, being held hostage by third party services providers, failed integrations and risk to the business. The good news is that the Cloud and the right partner can get a company to better business visibility in an incremental, quick time-to-value way. Often the quickest path to value is with a cloud data mart. Think of a cloud data mart as a smaller version of a data warehouse, but with far fewer data sources connect. It can be used very effectively to deal with "point problems" such as customer relationship management, sales management or HR benefits. In these cases, the power of a data warehouse in the Cloud is scaled down to provide a narrower range of insights and information, often within a single (or a few) functional areas. Best of all, as the company's needs grow, the data mart can be scaled out to encompass an increasing number of feeds, building into a full-fledged cloud data warehouse, with all the attendant insights and value.

From there, using a company's existing analytics and reporting tools a company can gain an affordable, manageable 360 view of its business. As well, it can easily build new low code custom applications the meet specific needs of its business to harness this data. The unicorn can be achieved safely and at an affordable cost.

How does Accur8 get it done?

Accur8 Software employs a 7-step process which enables us to move smoothly from ideation to reality. While timeframes and step details are dependent on the specific circumstances and project complexity, here's how we make 360° a reality:

1. We start with a review of the objectives of the cloud data warehouse with the SMB's business and IT teams including selecting the data sources that will be included to begin as well as to understand the performance requirements needed by the business.
2. We then use our data virtualization platform to streamline the process of data discovery, data cleansing and the building of the composite data model that will govern the cloud data warehouse. We save significant time by quickly iterating with the customer, on a virtual basis using live data, to determine the optimal composite data model while avoiding traditionally time-consuming processes such as loading the data mart with new data after each modification.
3. Determine the best cloud data warehouse technology for the customer. Our tooling enables Accur8 to quickly test the behavior and performance of the company's data on various cloud databases (PostgreSQL, Aurora, RedShift, MySQL, Presto, etc.) to find the best fit given the customer's requirements.
4. Using our integration engine, we map the pathways data will travel from each source system into the data warehouse. This includes setting up row or table level integration that can be performed on a real time, triggered, or scheduled basis according to a customer's need. For large, complex datasets our engine automates the mapping process to reduce time and limit human errors.
5. Connecting the customer's reporting system (Tableau, Sisense, Power BI, Crystal Reports, etc.) to the cloud data warehouse if they have one. If not, we can use our analytics engine to build out the required reporting.
6. Testing, optimizing and fine tuning is undertaken with reports and dashboards generated using live data from the new data warehouse.
7. Ongoing care and maintenance are provided post-production, which includes monitoring, bug fixes, data validation and backups.

A Final Thought

Moving data to the Cloud is a well-recognized imperative for companies of all sizes who wish to get a more accurate, holistic and actionable view of their business. Unfortunately, the challenges of building a cloud data warehouse or data mart which small- to medium-sized businesses face have too-often held them back from doing what they know will help their operations. Happily, however, both the Cloud service providers, and more important, third party solutions providers like Accur8 have the expertise and the tools to take the SMB on an affordable, low risk and high return journey, right past the elephant in the room and into the data space where the 360° view of their unicorn is unimpeded.