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Redefining Processes to Create a Self-Service Data Buffet at VodafoneZiggo

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Imagine leaving your office for a nice lunch. You arrive at the restaurant and can smell the wonderful aroma in the air. You order a burger and minutes later the food arrives—in pieces. Instead of a ready-to-go meal, you get an uncooked patty and a hot plate. Tomatoes, lettuce, and pickles are also included, but you have to cut everything and assemble it yourself.

As silly as this experience sounds, it matches the self-service Business Intelligence (BI) operation that organizations sometimes create. This approach is unnecessarily cumbersome to the users and likely discourages participation. Just as restaurant patrons typically aren't chefs, users are often not formally trained in data, nor do they want the raw version of the product. The best self-service strategies collect data from a variety of sources and create a nice buffet of information in a usable format. The users can then take those products and digest them to find valuable insights for smarter decisions.

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>
> SHARE IT   TWEET IT

This was the approach we took at VodafoneZiggo. Our company is a cooperative venture jointly owned by Vodafone Group and Liberty Global. We service about 3.9 million fixed households and 5.2 million customers. About 1.5 million households are customers with both Vodafone and Ziggo, all served by our 7,500 employees. As our society never sleeps, VodafoneZiggo makes valuable connections and brings enjoyment to people, to share. We are the driving force of Dutch digitization, but also the infrastructure that comes with it and we use the power of technology to help people and make society stronger. I have worked in the BI department of Vodafone for years, and today I am a Chapter Lead / Manager Business Intelligence at VodafoneZiggo.

Making Changes to Ensure Future Success

We realize that being in front isn't permanent, and it isn't a given. Remaining at the cutting edge requires a willingness to adjust our strategy to the changing climate. The pandemic crisis is just the latest event requiring such adjustment. As COVID-19 created a need for working and personal arrangements that required physical separation, our customers changed their expectations as well.

Among the changes we made was a commitment to going completely digital. We knew that despite our current market share, full digitization would be necessary to ensure future success. It would also give us the agility to operate in an ever-changing world while continuing to provide customers the service they need.

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Another change we made was to completely revamp our BI operation. VodafoneZiggo's commitment to running a data-intelligent operation is demonstrated through our personnel. We have around 250 people in our BI department, and in January 2021, we renamed our department Data and Insights to better reflect our new focus.

The new BI operation is centered around two goals. First, we want a more data-based approach to customer interactions. That includes responding better to customer inquiries and proactively selecting the best individuals for marketing offers. The second goal is to have data-driven staff. We believe the best way to convert big data into big value is by giving every employee the tools to maximize the mountains of data at our disposal.

From Static Reports to Intuitive Self-Service with Qlik

At this stage in the game, nearly every organization has data capabilities to some extent. For decades, producing reports and discussing their findings has been a standard part of regular business meetings. We were no different. Under our old process, our BI office produced some 1,000 regular reports requested by our leaders as a way to track our business goals.

However, the reports—and the conversations that followed—were often misleading as they were almost always out of date by the time they got to the right hands. There could be days or even weeks of delays involved in collecting, analyzing, and distributing these reports. At the same time, the reporting format was not very intuitive. BI staff basically provided whatever information was available in a digestible format, and leaders did their best to make decisions.

Qlik allowed us to overhaul our BI process to create a working self-service environment that gives employees the ability to order and receive the data they need. Using near real-time dashboards is a more intuitive method for extracting and consuming data. This makes it simpler to integrate data into our day-to-day decisions.

Redefining Roles and Creating a Continuous Feedback Loop

As part of this, the role of data professionals has changed within VodafoneZiggo. Whereas before our team created the finished product and distributed static reports to staff, now we work behind the scenes. We collect offline data from the market or gather the results of various analytical models. This external data is then combined with real-time information like statistics about the various contact centers, retail outlets, or the results of marketing campaigns.

Regardless of the source, all this data is then run through a central decisioning engine that uses adaptive learning. From this process, we glean recommendations for actions or strategic moves that are forwarded to the appropriate teams, such as our sales departments or our contact centers. The feedback from this recommendation gets fed directly back into our data warehouse, which allows us to sharpen our models. This creates a continuous loop that helps us to constantly improve our service over time.

We've also used Qlik to embed analytics into sales channels. By the end of 2021, we hope to create dashboards for our corporate customers that are accessible via a web portal. With this, our sales staff can use their time with the client more efficiently to address their specific needs, instead of guessing or wasting time getting information we already have. Because the portal will be created using Qlik, we know it will be reliable and easy to manage. Most importantly, it will allow both internal staff and external customers to make data-driven decisions about our services.

Navigating the Change: How We Updated Our BI Operation

While we've made tremendous strides in analytics throughout our organization, it took some time to get there. We first began to realize that we needed a dramatic change in early 2019. We completed a comprehensive review to find out how our full-time reporting analysts spent their time. By that summer, we realized that only 9 out of 37 people on my team were actively involved in developing apps using Qlik. The rest of the staff were still using legacy processes and outdated equipment and software. We decided then and there that we wanted to move everyone to a more updated process by the end of 2019.

The first step was to decrease the time it took to respond to requests with usable data reports. Through a series of two-week sprints, we defined a process that could quickly cycle data projects from initial inquiry to finished product. This model would make us more responsive to our customers by delivering faster results.

The process was fairly simple. After receiving a business request or project, we assess the requirements through a design-thinking phase. From here, we create a proof of concept application that can potentially provide the resources needed by the client. That initial pilot is demonstrated to the customer and any feedback goes back to the design team. Once we have a working application, we move to a delivery and refinement stage. Going back to the food analogy, because we want an approach based on providing meals instead of ingredients, we focus on the full customer journey.

The Importance of Getting People on Board

Our application delivery process is every bit as important as the initial creation phase. Our preparation involves, among other things, training staff on the new application. This training includes understanding the dashboard itself and migrating old reporting formats to the new system. After a couple of weeks, we turn off access to the legacy software and begin to phase it out.

From that point, we focus on generating awareness and excitement about the new application. That includes highlighting people within each team that can serve as champions for the products based on past successes. Keeping these role models front and center allows us to

reframe the change by showcasing best practices. It also helps to get top-level management involved since they can help with promotional opportunities and other ways to increase buy-in.

Perhaps the best example I can offer is the app we created for people leaders. By combining the information from several IT systems, we created different roadmaps for staff based on their experience with Qlik. Staff members that were already active in Qlik could get access to resources for advanced users or be used as role models. People that had no experience with Qlik would be offered mandatory, basic training to get them started on their journey. By using this process, we were able to communicate to staff using language and perspectives that were most relevant to them.

To ensure our analysts were making great apps, this training included short movies that defined development standards. This way all of our apps had the same layout and look, creating the consistency and reliability that make user adoption easier. The movies were available online and on demand.

We also begin Demo Thursdays to provide personal demonstrations of the development process. This also allowed us to spread inspiration and excitement by getting everyone together and highlighting current users by sharing their projects with pride.

Increased Adoption, Increased Results

As a result of this strategy, we dramatically increased our Qlik adoption. At the beginning of 2020, we had about 800 active users. By the end of that year, we had around 2,242 users. That represents a 280% growth during a single year. For 2021, we have targeted another 250% growth resulting in 5,500 Qlik users (of which 2,500 embedded).

I think the most important lesson from this transformation is to focus on the customer journey. Throwing mountains of unassembled data at users doesn't work. Just like restaurants, the best experiences come from people receiving manageable meals in a format they can easily consume. If you want to succeed, walk the path most likely to help your customers succeed, and everyone will leave satisfied.

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