



Howard Hunt reaps benefits of Data Cleansing within SQL Server

CASE STUDY

HOWARD HUNT

Staying ahead of rivals

Howard Hunt aims to set the benchmark in speed and scale for direct mail campaigns. As one of UK's largest producers of direct mail packs, with over **400 million door drops and around 1.2 billion inserts per annum**, Howard Hunt prides itself on an ability to transform and adapt to stay ahead of the curve in a challenging and competitive market. With 25 years of trading Howard Hunt continues to forge new paths of efficiency, ensuring their customers receive a service that keeps them coming back for more.



To process such incredibly large volumes of direct mail, Howard Hunt's business proposition depends on accurate data and reliable systems.

The process used to rely on a regimented routine where a data file would arrive from a client, with a member of the team manually setting up the workflow and file structure template with their MIS (Management Information System). This would then be manually interpreted and input into a separate data processing tool for proofing or print. The process had been streamlined as much as possible and a job would take an average of 36 minutes. Needless to say, dealing with direct mail on such a vast scale meant even small efficiencies would accomplish significant cost savings.



This method had worked for Howard Hunt for many years, but as a business where systems and processes are routinely scrutinised to drive productivity, Howard Hunt's technical team began to question how they might further automate processes and introduce interconnectivity between disparate systems. In order to maintain a competitive advantage, Howard Hunt wanted a way to drastically reduce the time it takes to turn around files. Howard Hunt wanted to do this without compromising data integrity or accuracy, but more importantly, reduce failure rates on automated regular or overnight processing.



Having already pushed existing systems to the limits in terms of automation, and encountering on-going challenges that accompanied necessary software updates, it was clear that it was a good time to see what some research into the marketplace would uncover.

400 million
door drops and around
1.2 billion
inserts per annum

100's
of data files
a month.



time saving of
250 man-
hours
per month



Streamlining our processes

After coming to the realisation that improving automation and systems robustness would provide the biggest benefits overall, Howard Hunt started looking for a Technology Partner. To realise this vision they engaged with helpIT systems and learned how **matchIT SQL, a fully SQL Server based solution**, could streamline and tie together all of their existing workflows into one single workflow.

“With matchIT SQL the time of human interaction drastically reduced. A new job in our previous stack took 36 minutes; with matchIT we have been able to get this down to under 4 minutes” says Stuart King, Director of Technology.

Up to **8 times quicker**, the time saving aspect was of course a big game changer for a company that processes hundreds of data files a month. The automation alone gave a time **saving of 250 man-hours per month**. But time saving was just the first of many benefits of working in SQL Server.

“We have complete confidence in data integrity, and now have a central platform that is easier to manage, and not reliant on another software platform” says Stuart.

matchIT SQL completely changed the way jobs are processed and has enabled integrations with other web-based solutions, which has reduced the potential for errors which were time-consuming to correct and reprocess. Arriving files generate an automated arrival email, and a standard file structure template is applied. A **proprietary system then offers visibility as to what has been configured**, and settings such as matching, PAF'ing, suppression and Mailsort levels can be checked and validated before the job is executed.

“The fact that the data processing engine is not desktop reliant is one of its most distinguishing features”, says Stuart King, “and this opens up the possibilities to extend to offering services through web-portals.”

Compliance, audit and customer security requirements are handled more easily with all the data stored in SQL Server e.g. it automates the process of clearing down routines per individual customer SLA's and needs, with the ability for manual adjustment as required. **The benefits of matchIT SQL have been greater than originally sought**, and more benefits are becoming evident.

As an ISO27001 compliant business, Howard Hunt takes the handling of customer data very seriously, this means they consider this process area as top priority and the systems solutions they deploy need to reflect their high standards when handling customer data sets, as **there's no second chance when it comes to accuracy and security of data**.

UK Headquarters
helpIT systems ltd
15-17 The Crescent
Leatherhead
KT22 8DY

General & Sales Enquiries
Tel: +44 (0) 1372 360070
Email: sales.uk@helpIT.com



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