

Database Designs

Section 3: Advanced Retrieving Data Queries

3.1 Aggregate Operators

Aggregate operators allows us to return more interesting information from our data. Below is an example Sales_Data table containing sales for two ASDA stores.

Sales_Data			
storeLocation	productName	salesDate	revenue
ASDA Coventry	Milk	November 02, 2020	1,233.32
ASDA Birmingham	Bread	November 02, 2020	5,434.74
ASDA Coventry	Coffee	November 02, 2020	3,855.96
ASDA Coventry	Coffee	November 02, 2020	2,280.90
ASDA Birmingham	Coffee	November 02, 2020	2,110.95
ASDA Coventry	Milk	November 01, 2020	4,558.24
ASDA Birmingham	Milk	November 01, 2020	6,849.99
ASDA Birmingham	Bread	November 01, 2020	2,543.57

The insights an analyst or business owner may be interested in retrieving from the above dataset are: Total Revenue, Best Performing Stores, Best Performing Products, Best Product-Store Combination that Sold Best.

We would like to find patterns in the data so that we can drive business decisions that would help the business to perform better. Below are some example Aggregate Operations which can help us retrieve more interesting data insights.

```
SELECT SUM(revenue) totalRevenue
FROM Sales_Data;
```

The **SUM** aggregate operator wraps the column in brackets for the column data we wish to apply the sum function. Whatever result is returned from the aggregate operator is then returned in a column we have decided to name as totalRevenue. By omitting the **WHERE** clause from the select statement means that it will sum over all data within the Sales_Data table.

The **SUM** is a function that operates over an entire column and not just a single cell and the result returned is a single value which can be named. The **SUM** can operate over an entire column or any subset of a column and does not necessarily have to be an entire column.

The reason SUM is called an aggregate function is because it acts on an aggregation of cells and not just a single cell.

```
SELECT AVG(revenue) averageRevenue
FROM Sales_Data;
```

The **AVG** aggregate operator is a function that operates over an entire column or a subset of a column and not just a single cell and returns a single value which can be named. This function averages all the values in the column. The syntax is the same as the **SUM** function above but it returns the average instead.

3.2 Group By Clause

The **GROUP BY** clause allows us to aggregate the returned data by grouping data in a certain logical unit. An example command using the **GROUP BY** clause would look like the below:

```
SELECT storeLocation, SUM(revenue) totalRevenue
FROM Sales_Data
GROUP BY storeLocation;
```

The result from the above query will return a table with two columns, storeLocation and totalRevenue, with a total sum of revenue for each store (i.e. a row per unique store).

The column we specify after the **GROUP BY** clause define what groups we would want to use and subtotal. Using the **SUM** aggregate operator with the **GROUP BY**, would define to what groups would we sum up i.e. what is the logical unit that we would run the **SUM** operation on. The **GROUP BY** can be used with other aggregate operators such as the **AVG** function.

We can visualise the **GROUP BY** as sorting the data before we perform the other operations i.e. before performing the **SUM** operation on the revenue column for every group. This will give a flatten result table demonstrated below:

Sales_Data			
storeLocation	productName	salesDate	revenue
ASDA Birmingham	Bread	November 02, 2020	5,434.74
ASDA Birmingham	Coffee	November 02, 2020	2,110.95
ASDA Birmingham	Milk	November 01, 2020	6,849.99
ASDA Birmingham	Bread	November 01, 2020	2,543.57
ASDA Coventry	Milk	November 02, 2020	1,233.32

Sales_Data			
ASDA Coventry	Coffee	November 02, 2020	3,855.96
ASDA Coventry	Coffee	November 02, 2020	2,280.90
ASDA Coventry	Milk	November 01, 2020	4,558.24

Sales_Data Query Results	
storeLocation	totalRevenue
ASDA Birmingham	16,939.25
ASDA Coventry	11,928.42

In the example query we can see that ASDA Birmingham is the best performing store based on total revenue.

The **SELECT** statement allows us to choose which columns we wish to display in our results after we have completed the thinning of the data using the **GROUP BY**. We can confidently remove the `productName` and `salesDate` columns from the results table without losing any information. However, we cannot **GROUP BY** any column that is not present in the select statement since the results would not make any sense. Therefore, any column specified in the **GROUP BY** statement must also be present in the **SELECT** statement i.e. it must be part of the final result.

Remember: The **WHERE** clause is generally used when we want to filter the number of rows that meet the **WHERE** clause condition. Therefore, if we want all rows we omit the **WHERE** clause. The **GROUP BY** clause on the other hand is used when we want to group our data in a logical unit. It is therefore possible to use both the **GROUP BY** and **WHERE** clauses at the same time for a more complex query.

The **GROUP BY** clause allows us to group by multiple columns so that we can answer more complex questions that uses a combination of columns. An example query would look like the below:

```
SELECT productName, storeLocation, AVG(revenue) averageRevenue
FROM Sales_Data
GROUP BY productName, storeLocation;
```

The **GROUP BY** clause above groups based on the unique combination of the two columns specified in the statement. In the above example, this provides a unique combinations of: ASDA Birmingham Bread, ASDA Birmingham Coffee, ASDA Birmingham Milk, ASDA Coventry Coffee and ASDA Coventry Milk.

The **AVG** operation will then be performed on each unique **GROUP BY** unit combination to provide the averages of each unit groups.

The above example can help us answer the question of what is the worst performing product in which store.

3.3 Order By Clause

The **ORDER BY** clause allows us to order our results either in Ascending or Descending order. The ordering will depend on the data type i.e. numbers ordered smallest to largest in ascending order and vice versa for descending order while strings are ordered A-Z for ascending order and vice versa for descending. Below is an example of ordering the results of our query using the **ORDER BY** clause:

```
SELECT storeLocation, SUM(revenue) totalRevenue
FROM Sales_Data
GROUP BY storeLocation
ORDER BY storeLocation;
```

```
SELECT storeLocation, SUM(revenue) totalRevenue
FROM Sales_Data
GROUP BY storeLocation
ORDER BY totalRevenue DESC;
```

In the first example the column storeLocation column is forced to order the results in ascending order. In the second example, using the **DESC** keyword forced the results to order the column by descending order.

By default SQL does not order the results that are returned; therefore, using the **ORDER BY** clause there is no longer any ambiguity in the order of the result.

Whatever we specify in the **ORDER BY** clause must be present in the **SELECT** clause which is similar ruling as the **GROUP BY** clause. We can also **ORDER BY** more than one column as seen in the example below:

```
SELECT productName, storeLocation, AVG(revenue) averageRevenue
FROM Sales_Data
GROUP BY productName, storeLocation
ORDER BY storeLocation, productName DESC;
```

In the above example, SQL would order columns in the order they are specified in the query. Therefore, storeLocation will be ordered first in ascending order and then productName will be ordered second in descending order. Each column must be specified the type of ordering required and must be present in the **SELECT** clause.

It is important to note, a SQL query that contains both a **GROUP BY** and a **ORDER BY** clause, the ordering is applied after the grouping i.e. the grouping occurs first and then the ordering is performed on the results. There are many rules like this in SQL which we will see as we continue; for example, the **LIMIT** clause is the only clause that can apply after the **ORDER BY** clause.

3.4 Limit Clause

The **LIMIT** clause allows us to limit the number of results returned from our query results. This is another way of filtering our results once the query has run. Below is an example of using the **LIMIT** clause:

```
SELECT storeLocation, SUM(revenue) totalRevenue
FROM Sales_Data
GROUP BY storeLocation
ORDER BY totalRevenue
LIMIT 1;
```

The above example limits the results returned to the very first row in the results returned. This value can be any number and will limit the number of rows returned from the results. Therefore, if we chose to **LIMIT** up to 3 results and a query returned more than 3 results, the limit will return the first 3 results, whereas, if the query returned less than or equal to 3 results then the first few records up to the limit will be returned in the results.

This will help our query to automatically find the results, without requiring to manually check for the answer, within a single SQL query. For example, the above query allows us to answer the question of which is the worse performing store by revenue using a single query. Adding the **DESC** ordering on totalRevenue will answer which is the best performing store by revenue.

If we want to **LIMIT** the number of results from our SQL query but have an **ORDER BY** clause in the query, the **LIMIT** clause must always come after the **ORDER BY** clause. It is not needed to have the **ORDER BY** clause in order to use the **LIMIT** clause in a SQL query.

3.5 Count and Count Distinct

The **COUNT** operator is an aggregate operator similar to **SUM**, **AVG**, **MIN**, **MAX**, etc. The **COUNT** operator operates on the column(s) defined in the round brackets. The **DISTINCT** keywords is used to return unique values i.e. it tells SQL to ignore duplicates within the counting. An example syntax is provided below:

```
SELECT COUNT(storeLocations) uniqueStoreLocations
FROM Sales_Data
```

```
SELECT COUNT(DISTINCT storeLocations) uniqueStoreLocations
FROM Sales_Data
```

The first syntax example returns a count of all rows while the second syntax returns a count of unique values only.