Origin – The Organisation

Origin Energy was founded in February 2000, when Boral (another major Australian company) shareholders approved their energy business to become its own company (Welcome to Origin pdf). Now Origin Energy is one of the largest energy retailers in Australia, along with being an energy producer managing power stations in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria (Origin Pdf and website). As an organisation the main purpose of Origin is to build a sustainable energy future, as such Origin has placed significant investments within solar and battery technology and digital tools to support its vision. Additionally, customer engagement and satisfaction are also a major part of Origin’s vision - something which I personally saw through the work the Reporting and Data team do. Having a large scale in operations, means Origin has a wide data footprint covering everything from customers, the energy market, financial reporting- almost anything that can be measured. All this data is managed within Origin’s data lake, aptly named after an actual lake in the Snowy Mountains on NSW- Jindabyne. The team I worked in, broadly came under the Future Energy & Technology wing of Origin working specifically in Reporting and Data Operations, as shown in the organisational chart below (source peopleCentral). Just as shown in the chart, Origin divides each major area of the business. Each area performs a different function to support the business as a whole. The area of Origin I was working in was purely data driven, even within the Reporting and Data Operations Team we had people who would work on creating and maintaining business reports with Tableau (a data visualisation tool) or worked on the batch jobs which were the data sources for the reports.

The Individual Role

At Origin my main role was to support my team in their reporting-based tasks, though I broadened my scope of work over the course of the placement. The technical name of my role was a ‘Reporting Analyst’ and my main reporting-based duties involved two major reports at Origin- The Net Position Report and the Origin Active Number (OAN) Report. These two reports were perhaps the most direct measures of Origins business performance, the Net Position report showing the number of customers won and lost over the financial year and the OAN showing the total number of accounts Origin is providing a service for.

Since these reports are used to assess Origin’s performance in retail and in audits from other companies their correctness is critical. Furthermore, OAN and Net Position act to verify the success of different business plans- if your team was doing well then it should show in one of the two reports.

As such my main task was to refresh these reports daily and investigate the numbers within them (MAYBE SHOW FIGURE HERE). If there were any sharp increases or decreases, I would report this to my team or investigate further with SQL queries to Jindabyne data tables or look at the report itself with Tableau.

I also worked on contributing to some of the reports, creating views for stakeholders or adjusting their frequently used reports so they could find specific information.

SDC Outline

Sustainability Data Capture which was a web application that allowed users to directly input and review results for business metrics. At Origin the word ‘Sustainability’ is quite broad it can mean anything from actual carbon emissions-based metrics or even customer satisfaction-based ones. So, the application had numerous metrics to account for which would then be drafted and used in the annual Origin Sustainability Report (OSR).

The Origin Sustainability Report is a document published annually by Origin that gives an overview of all the initiatives taking place at Origin. It also details Origin’s performance in different business areas, which in the documents are categorised as ‘Customers’, ‘Communities’, ‘Planet’, ‘People and Culture’ and ‘Our reporting’.

meeting the needs and expectations of those who are most interested in our business: our ~~investors~~shareholders, customers, people and communities.

Read the Documentation

In the SDC build, one expected requirement was that it could validate a user without them having to fill in any kind of login prompt. Thus, I had to be able to retrieve the username of the user entering the application without any kind of form. Though I had already done this in Scorecard, SDC was different because it was expected work outside of Tableau (Tableau allowed us to send the username without any kind of code implementations). When confronted with a specific coding problem such as this, my workflow at this point was just to look for commands or keywords on google or stack overflow posts and then go through a process of mindless trial and failure. This was inefficient for two main reasons:

1. It was massively time-consuming.
2. Each failure does not inform the next, so there is no progression to a solution.

This trial and failure process were exactly what I did when confronted with the username retrieval problem. I had set a day to implement this functionality; four hours had passed, and I was not any closer to a solution then when I began. In a despondent state, I asked Issac for help and what he said will perhaps resonate with me for the rest of my ‘career’:

I asked, “Issac do you know any way I can retrieve the username?”.

He replied, “It is already there.”

He elaborated saying that the solution was in the documentation- the one place I hadn’t looked. I then implemented the command he showed, and I was able to retrieve the username. Later on, in the SDC build I reached a similar point, where I needed a command that could send data to and from my front-end. This used ajax, a method in javascript, but this time I went straight to the documentation. I read each line and found the data method, which worked instantaneously. This time was different because I took the time to read the documentation line by line to progressively arrive at the method I was looking for. Furthermore, since documentation for modules are written in this style where methods are first general and then become more specific, each method you read bring you closer to the solution- the complete opposite of the mindless trial and failure I was following previously.

While working at Origin, particularly in reporting-based tasks it was very common that a stakeholder would ask for a view or some kind of functionality but did not know exactly what they wanted. This may sound ridiculous but to elaborate- they knew what information they needed, but not how it should be presented. Many times, I would hear questions like:

“Kai could you make me a view that gives the number of wins?”

“Can we have a pipeline view….?”

“Could we add a flag for that?”

“Can we filter by date?”

In none of these questions do they explain how it should be presented. This is important because tableau is a data visualisation tool, so the visual part a huge component of their request. Thus, how should one direct their work efforts? You could make a view, and have it been different to what the user expected though it may still meet their requirements. If we call the user’s expectation ‘Point B’ and our starting position, ‘Point A’ this workflow can be represented by the figure below.

This style of work has a huge risk associated with it; you may make something that is completely against user expectation. Instead, what I found my team did was using targeted questions. By targeted question I mean very specific questions on functionality, which allowed one to gauge the user’s expectation without them saying it directly. I noticed this in their reporting- when they completed a feature, they would go back to user, ask for feedback perhaps have a meeting and discuss any further changes. Then they would continue, an again ask and re-implement. This created a workflow more like the one shown in figure x.

This workflow is of high importance to me because it allowed my team to make a successful sustainability build. Any time I developed a key feature I would inform Kai; he would suggest changes if needed. We had weekly meetings with Mary, the project manager where she would also contribute with her own feedback. Additionally, Mary also staged meetings with key stakeholders- another opportunity to steer ourselves towards user expectation and even beyond. Thus, what I found was that using targeted questions allows one to navigate to Point B (user expectation) from Point A (the starting position) without being given a path from any external source.