SAS Professional Services helps energy supplier forecast demand

When this customer recognised it would benefit from a new approach to forecasting field engineer demand, SAS provided the solution – including professionally managed design, implementation, training and support from SAS® Professional Services.

■ Industry

Utilities

■ Business Issue

Replace an inflexible, difficult to use yet business-critical legacy forecasting system with a new, more accurate solution – at fixed cost and to a fixed deadline.

■ Solution

A new platform founded on SAS® Forecast Server and SAS® Data Integration Server, designed and implemented by SAS Professional Services as part of an integrated approach including Consulting, Phase Zero, Project Management, Adoption Services and SAS Education.

■ Benefits

Hands-on support, project management and continuity of SAS personnel ensure successful installation of this strategic platform within time scales and to budget; an immediate 8% increase in forecast accuracy.

This SAS customer employs a large number of engineers for boiler and electrical maintenance, servicing and breakdown repairs. The business engaged a SAS partner to provide a bespoke system to create daily roster forecasts for engineers. This provided area-level forecasts for the number of engineers and different work required each day (annual service, on-demand repairs, etc.) plus average time per visit. According to this customer, "In the years our daily forecasts have been generated by SAS, not once have we had a technical issue; it's great technology." However, the system was built as a 'black box', so the customer was unable to modify it. With extreme weather conditions affecting forecast accuracy, the system was also increasingly difficult to use and maintain.

As time went on, the customer wanted to benefit from the latest forecast technologies and modelling techniques, and new opportunities presented by additional data sources. To deliver these improvements, the company worked in partnership with SAS to implement SAS® Forecast Server and SAS® Data Integration Server, adding greater dynamism and enriching short-term forecasts with additional external weather feeds – so gaining a far more flexible, easy-to-use and accurate solution.

New levels of Discovery

Phase 1 of the project, dubbed Discovery, focused on creating new models that delivered tangible improvements. Almost immediately, there was an achievement of an 8% increase in

forecast accuracy, helping the customer better deploy engineering resource and so optimise operations. The customer spokesman says: "We're very grateful to everyone at SAS involved in this project and for 'getting us over the line'. I know how difficult this project was at times, and I recognise the enormous effort delivered by SAS and our people to keep this moving along."

Bernard Carmo, SAS Principal Solutions Implementation Consultant, was involved throughout. "The task here was replacing a seven-year-old 'legacy' system with more powerful, flexible and user-friendly technology." Importantly, he was involved early in the process, before licensing had been agreed. "We could not only demonstrate proof of concept but also showed we understood their issues, what they wanted to achieve, that we knew the technology inside out and had all the skills the customer needed. Knowledge of their business was critical." SAS Professional Services was engaged to design, project manage and implement the solution, from architecture design onwards: "Our job was to bridge the gap between the legacy system and the new, more powerful and accurate solution, which included increasing external weather data feeds to 30, and creating a longer time window from 3-day to 10-day forecasts."

Fixed deadline – fixed costs

The project also had a fixed deadline: the customer was moving into a new data centre and delays in implementing

> "This is a great example of how SAS can integrate a range of services to ensure the best outcomes for the customer, engaging early and working right through strategic delivery. The end result has seen us migrate the customer from a difficult-to-use 'black box' legacy system to a high-value forecasting solution that gives the business better answers, helping it target resources and control costs.
>
> **Kevin Meachen**, Director of Professional Services, SAS

the solution – being unable to vacate the old premises – could mean monthly penalty costs of millions of pounds. In addition, the customer had requested that SAS Professional Services be provided on a fixed-price basis, given the dependencies within the business and potential risks for out-of-scope activity; a key issue for the customer was ensuring costs were predictable, given the scale of the work. "Because we know the software and our own capabilities, SAS could agree to that," Bernard says. "This demanded excellent teamwork between the SAS project team and the customer's in-house team. We were completely interlocked. It all had to run like clockwork – and we were all highly motivated." He says implementation was extremely fast, with Paul Ivory, an experienced SAS Project Manager, playing a pivotal role.

"The transitions from pre-sales to Phase Zero requirements gathering, then to installation, training and delivery were extremely smooth, with continuity of SAS personnel," says Steve Kidnee, SAS Client Services Manager. Adoption Services were complemented by a SAS Education programme that included bespoke materials, scheduled public courses and on-site training. Phase 2 activity – 'commoditised' work including data transformation and coding – was passed to a SAS partner. "The customer was delighted with the outcome: a core solution designed and deployed by SAS to deliver the best possible foundations," Steve adds. The project led to further discussions about how the platform could be extended and developed, and how SAS Professional Services could continue playing a high-level role in governance and support moving forward. This might include further Integration Services, SAS Education and SAS Premium Support. "We can help this customer continue to manage and develop its platform in the best way to deliver value from its SAS investments."

"This is a great example of how SAS can integrate a range of services to ensure the best outcomes for the customer, engaging early and working right through strategic delivery," says Kevin Meachen, Director of Professional Services. "Everyone was aligned throughout the project. This meant a continuum running from pre-sale assistance, through design and installation, configuration, training and adoption services, all coordinated by strong project management. The end result has seen us migrate the customer from a difficult-to-use 'black box' legacy system to a high-value forecasting solution that gives the business better answers, helping it target resources and control costs. It is also easier to support and maintain, meaning a reduction in total cost of ownership."