



Business challenge

Continental Foods has grown rapidly because of its wide product range that meets various local tastes. To continue expanding, it set out to more closely track product performance.

Transformation

Continental Foods is a leading food provider with operations across Europe. To gain greater insight into the performance of each of its products in various locations, the company deployed IBM® Planning Analytics software on IBM Cloud™. By enabling the company to tailor its offering to demand, the solution helps boost sales.

Results

Contributes

to higher profitability by facilitating decisions that drive sales

Boosts

competitiveness by helping the company react faster in changing markets

Enhances

employee productivity by accelerating access to useful data and reports

Continental Foods

Deep operational insight drives better decision-making

Continental Foods is one of Europe's leading food companies, with headquarters in Puurs, Belgium. The company also has operations in Finland, France, Germany and Sweden. With over 1,000 employees, Continental Foods achieves approximately EUR 400 million in annual net sales.

“IBM Planning Analytics helps us drill down into sales performance. Using this information, we can optimize our production and marketing decisions to get the biggest returns, helping us drive up our profits.”

—Vince Mertens, Group Accounting and Consolidation Manager, Continental Foods

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Think locally, grow internationally

Taste is notoriously subjective, with eating habits and preferences shifting significantly between countries and regions. What the residents of one country consider delicious, their neighbors may view as much less appetizing.

Continental Foods is a sector leader for soups in several European countries and also markets many popular sauce brands. The company built its long-term success on a deep understanding of how tastes differ across Europe.

Vince Mertens, Group Accounting and Consolidation Manager at Continental Foods, explains: “We soon learned that in the food business, the key to international growth is to think locally. Consumers across Belgium, France, Germany, Sweden and Finland enjoy our soup and sauce ranges because we differentiate our products according to local tastes. We’ve learned that, for instance, a soup that Belgian people love will not necessarily be a huge hit in France.”

To ensure long-term sustainability and provide a solid platform for future growth, Continental Foods is constantly seeking to innovate by releasing fresh new food brands. To make sure that it can quickly change tack if new products sell poorly, the company wanted to gain more detailed insight into its operations



across Europe to support efficient budgeting processes and enhance decision-making.

Plan in the cloud

To power better business decisions, Continental Foods chose to implement IBM Planning Analytics solution hosted on IBM Cloud. Using the technology, the company optimizes creation of its annual budget, generation of financial reports, and analysis of historical and projected data.

“For a few years now, Continental Foods has relied on cloud-based IBM Analytics software to evaluate financial performance across the organization and for individual sales divisions,” says Mertens. “When the latest iteration of IBM Planning Analytics was released, it made sense

for us to upgrade to take advantage of more powerful reporting features and greater user-friendliness.”

Continental Foods uses the Planning Analytics software to track actual sales and compare them with forecasts on a monthly basis. Quarterly, the company reviews its budget and updates its forecast for the year. Using historical data from the past five years, Continental Foods assesses how different business areas grow or contract over time, giving it groupwide insight into performance.

For each stock keeping unit (SKU) and material number, the company can use the solution to extract net sales in each country in which it operates, along with gross sales, enabling it to pinpoint the products that perform best in each location.

“The sheer level of detail that IBM Planning Analytics provides is very impressive,” says Mertens. “We can calculate our sales and gross margins for each SKU in Planning Analytics and generate insightful reports at the click of a button. As a result, senior managers can rapidly access the comprehensive information they need to make effective strategic decisions.”

By choosing to deploy the cloud-hosted version of Planning Analytics software, Continental Foods benefits from simple troubleshooting. If the company’s IT team members cannot resolve a problem independently, they can submit a ticket and the IBM help desk team will quickly respond. Mertens continues: “The availability that the IBM Cloud provides is vital to ensuring that we can carry out our budgeting processes efficiently. Without access to IBM Planning Analytics in the IBM Cloud in the last few months, the business impact would have been considerable.”

Seize competitive advantage

By implementing the new solution, Continental Foods extends insight into its operations across Europe and helps ensure that its products are well-suited to their target markets.

Mertens comments: “IBM Planning Analytics helps us drill down into sales performance, allowing us to work out which products are doing well in which markets. Using this

information, we can optimize our production and marketing decisions to get the biggest returns, helping us drive up our profits.”

With ongoing insight into customer demand and how it varies from geography to geography, Continental Foods can adapt its strategy with greater agility than competitors, gaining a key advantage.

“By monitoring actual sales figures and how they compare to our forecasts with the IBM solution, we can keep a close eye on how well our offerings suit demand,” says Mertens. “As customer preferences evolve, IBM Planning Analytics enables us to react very quickly, helping us protect and win market share.”

Moving to the latest version of Planning Analytics software, Continental Foods is unlocking new efficiencies for users. Specifically, the company is reducing the time spent on report generation, system maintenance and troubleshooting. Multiple users can work on the same data in parallel without issues with version control, enabling greater productivity.

Mertens concludes: “With the cloud-based version of IBM Planning Analytics, it’s easy to roll out enhancements to our users. The latest developments give our employees easier-than-ever access to the insights they need while saving them time. As we get more familiar with the latest version, we’re excited to see what new benefits it will deliver that will help us continue to provide great food to consumers across Europe.”

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Solution components

- IBM® Cloud™
- IBM Planning Analytics

Take the next step

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