

## Canada-wide Retail Chain Achieves Data Clarity with Business Information Software Built on SQL Server 2000

### Overview

**Country:** Canada

**Industry:** Retail

### Customer Profile

Edmonton-based Rentcash Inc. has created a successful nationwide retail chain under The Cash Store, Instaloans and Insta-rent banners. It operates 330 stores in 90 cities across Canada

### Business Situation

Rentcash needed a reporting and tracking platform that could accommodate its rapid growth, and help ensure that the company had access to timely business data to remain agile

### Solution

Rentcash enlisted the aid of Microsoft partners Ideaca and ProClarity to upgrade its reporting system using a product based on Microsoft SQL Server 2000 software

### Benefits

- Improved data visibility
- More efficient use of staff
- Easier to use
- Enables better decisions
- Faster access to data

“Staff don’t have to come in late at night anymore to extract data, and they no longer have to manually cut and paste figures into documents. It’s saved us many hours of time, and that’s huge.”

Michael Smith, vice-president, technology, Rentcash

Founded in 2001, Edmonton-based Rentcash Inc. has created a successful nationwide retail chain under The Cash Store, Instaloans and Insta-rent banners. Rentcash operates 330 stores in over 90 cities in nine provinces and two territories, and was Canada’s sixth-fastest growing company in 2004. The stores offer payday cash advances and rental brand-name furniture, appliances and electronics. Rentcash needed to update its tracking and reporting capabilities; collecting sales data from each of its stores was a challenge that hampered its head office’s ability to make timely decisions. To improve visibility and ensure a smoother flow of information, Rentcash enlisted the aid of Microsoft® technology partners ProClarity and Ideaca, and deployed software based on Microsoft SQL Server™ 2000 to build an agile and easy-to-use business intelligence solution that has helped boost staff efficiency.

## Situation

Founded in 2001, Edmonton-based Rentcash Inc. has created a successful nationwide retail chain under The Cash Store, Instaloes and Insta-rent banners. Rentcash operates 330 stores in over 90 cities in nine provinces and two territories, and was Canada's sixth-fastest growing company in 2004. The stores offer customers payday cash advances and rental brand-name furniture, appliances and electronics. The company has established an accelerated path to profitability while keeping overhead and start-up costs to a minimum.

The rapidly expanding company had outgrown its aging sales reporting and tracking system. Rentcash was using a custom-built, legacy COBOL system to track its daily store activity, which required constant manual intervention. Each day three different Rentcash staff members had to produce reports by culminating data from each individual store. "Based on our Cashstores alone, they were dealing with 160 separate databases," says Michael Smith, vice-president, information technology, Rentcash. "It was very time-intensive to get each store's information loaded into the system to produce our required reports. And if there was a new requirement, we had to call a COBOL developer which could take up to a week to have the necessary code deployed and get the changes made."

The information Rentcash generated with the COBOL-based system was not properly secured, and the company found it difficult to re-use or analyze the data it collected. As well, in order for regional and divisional executives to view reports, another Rentcash staff member needed to cut and paste data from the information generated by the tracking system into more user-friendly documents.

"It was difficult to do business analysis when all you saw were a bunch of numbers on a

sheet of paper, which is what the old system generated. So we had to create our own spreadsheets, which was very time-consuming and made it hard to figure out how our business was running, and how we could make it more efficient," says Smith.

Rentcash realized it had to upgrade and standardize its reporting and analysis software to accommodate and better track its rapid growth, and make sales information available to those who needed it most, regardless of their location or position. After looking at several options, including a major ERP software package, Rentcash enlisted the aid of Microsoft® partners Ideaca and ProClarity to upgrade its reporting system with a solution built on Microsoft SQL Server™ 2000.

## Solution

Rentcash needed a business intelligence platform that could accommodate its rapid growth, and help ensure the company remained agile. After looking at several competitive products, Rentcash selected ProClarity Analytics. "We looked at a package from SAP, but we felt it was too cost-prohibitive for us," says Smith. "ProClarity seemed to offer us everything we wanted. Looking back, that decision was clearly the right one."

As a leading OLAP front-end tool for Microsoft SQL Server, ProClarity helps organizations make better sense of their data. The software is based on SQL Server 2000, and in particular takes advantage of SQL Server Reporting Services - a comprehensive, server-based reporting solution that can author, manage and deliver both paper-oriented and interactive, Web-based reports - and SQL Server Analysis Services, which helps users create and analyze OLAP data cubes. SQL Server runs on the Microsoft Windows Server™ 2003 operating system.

The ProClarity solution ensures that data from individual Rentcash stores is stored in a central directory, where it is extracted using SQL Server Data Transformation Services and placed into a SQL Server datamart. Then, taking advantage of SQL Server Analysis Services, the data is put into a format of the user's choosing using a ProClarity dashboard application, which helps make needed information easily accessible and digestible. Additionally, because ProClarity includes support for Microsoft Excel, users can have reports automatically generated in spreadsheets for easy consumption.

"Using ProClarity, a user can sit at his or her desk in the morning and see, for example, how much more revenue was generated this month versus last month, or rank stores in terms of earnings. This insight helps them make better business decisions," says Smith.

Enlisting the deployment services of Ideaca, a Calgary-based Microsoft Gold Certified partner and systems integrator, Rentcash and ProClarity implemented the first phase of the solution in just six weeks. The recently completed second phase has now completely eliminated the need for manual intervention in the company's reporting process.

"We worked with Rentcash to help everyone understand how we would integrate data, and how we would cut down on manual processes," says Richard Hines, consulting manager, data group, Ideaca. "It was a smooth process. We are impressed with the robustness of ProClarity, and how it helps business users better understand the data."

### **Benefits**

Having migrated away from its aging, inflexible COBOL-based legacy system, Rentcash is realizing the benefits of a BI solution built on Microsoft SQL Server 2000 Analysis Services, SQL Server Reporting

Services and the ProClarity Analytics Platform.

Rentcash now has access to a quick and easy-to-use tool that helps it track and analyze daily sales and operating activity, enabling the company to maintain its aggressive level of growth and ensure executives are making decisions based on timely data.

"We can now do everything in-house, without having to call in third-party consultants - it's really exciting. Even on the store level, people are looking at some of the reports and saying, 'Wow, so this is how our business runs.' We're re-learning our business just based on this implementation," says Smith.

### ***Better insight into data***

Equipped with ProClarity software, and taking advantage of SQL Server-based technology, Rentcash executives are able to see month-to-month growth and sales figures when they sit down at their desks each morning. This capability helps them make faster, more informed decisions, and take the necessary measures to help Rentcash capitalize on short and long-term business opportunities.

"Our CEO has talked about changing his strategic decision-making simply because he has this information right in front of him. We can tell what every store is making on a month-to-month basis and rank stores based on revenue. This would have been something we wouldn't have known for weeks using our old system," says Smith.

### ***More efficient use of staff resources***

Using the previous COBOL-based custom software, several Rentcash employees would spend hours pulling together store sales data and pasting them into reports that could be easily read by executives. Smith estimates that since migrating to the SQL Server and

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For more information about ProClarity, call (208) 344-1630 or visit the Web site at: [www.proclarity.com](http://www.proclarity.com)

For more information about Ideaca, call (866) 231-4332 or visit the Web site at: [www.ideaca.ca](http://www.ideaca.ca)

For more information about Rentcash Inc., call (780) 408-5118 or visit the Web site at: [www.rentcash.ca](http://www.rentcash.ca)

ProClarity-based system, Rentcash has freed up at least 120 person hours per week.

“Staff is no longer required to come in late at night to extract data, and they no longer have to manually cut and paste figures into documents. It’s saved us many hours of work, and that’s a huge benefit,” says Smith.

### ***Improved simplicity***

Based on an intuitive, Microsoft-based interface, Rentcash business users are finding ProClarity is easy to learn, helping them realize its benefits quickly. This has helped make training a smooth process, and has enabled staff across the organization to get comfortable with a major new technology addition that helps boost their productivity.

“The methodology for reporting and analysis is now totally logical. It is very easy for our people to do it themselves. Showing them how to use the technology hasn’t been difficult at all because it is so intuitive,” says Smith.

## Microsoft Windows Server System

Microsoft Windows Server System is a comprehensive, integrated, and interoperable server infrastructure that helps reduce the complexity and costs of building, deploying, connecting, and operating agile business solutions. Windows Server System helps customers create new value for their business through the strategic use of their IT assets. With the Windows Server operating system as its foundation, Windows Server System delivers dependable infrastructure for data management and analysis; enterprise integration; customer, partner, and employee portals; business process automation; communications and collaboration; and core IT operations including security, deployment, and systems management.

For more information about Windows Server System, go to: <http://www.microsoft.com/windowsserversystem>

### Products and Services

- Windows Server 2003
- ProClarity
- Analytics
- SQL Server 2000
- SQL Server Reporting Services

### Partners

- Ideaca
- ProClarity

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