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SOFTWARE

Spotlight On
ZULILY

zulily

zulily is a daily deals site offering quality products for moms, babies and children. Founded in 2009, zulily has become a global shopping destination. zulily is headquartered in Seattle with offices in Reno, Columbus and London.

Senior Director of Technical Operations Don Allen has a mission: to support and help manage zulily's meteoric growth through technology. Allen and his teammates worked to balance data security requirements with business users' need to access information. The Manager of Business Intelligence (BI) for zulily, Aaron Duke, and zulily BI Developer Alex Rainey often found themselves pulled away from higher-value work in order to spend days designing and running reports for internal users. The team realized that Tableau Server could empower users while allowing the technology team to feel confident in the integrity of zulily's databases. They decided to participate in the Server Rapid Start offering from Tableau Professional Services to help jump start their implementation.

TABLEAU:
How much data are you handling at zulily?

DON ALLEN:
zulily has analytics and reporting challenges that aren't typical at traditional retailers. We work with thousands of vendors to launch up to 5,000 SKUs every day—and each product is only live for three days. In addition to our constantly changing catalog, we send a daily email to millions of customers and we're signing up new zulily members every day. Plus, we have diverse marketing strategies and multiple sales channels. Our analytics and reporting need to be flexible, speedy and able to scale quickly.

TABLEAU:
What made you decide to use the Server Rapid Start through Professional Services?

AARON DUKE:
We needed to turn around the implementation in as quick a manner as possible. We knew that we didn't have much insight into installing and configuring Tableau Server or best practices around setting up datasets. We really wanted to make sure that we got a good jumpstart there.

TABLEAU:
Can you describe the Server Rapid Start experience?

DUKE:
We worked with Stephanie from Tableau for four days. She quickly determined our knowledge level on the product and identified what we needed to learn to get Tableau Server up and running. She went over security—that's very important as an online retailer. Then we started working with the data, creating data extracts and learning best practices.

TABLEAU:
How did zulily benefit from using Server Rapid Start?

ALLEN:
It definitely saved time.

DUKE:
We had given ourselves a four-week deployment schedule for installation, creation of initial datasets, and rolling out the first set of reports for our organization. That deadline would have been very difficult to meet without the Rapid Start program. Having Stephanie available for guidance on best practices, installation options, and configuration techniques contributed greatly to our success. I would

estimate that we saved at least two weeks of implementation time and the program definitely increased our confidence with our initial launch of Tableau.

ALEX RAINEY:
Having that initial jump start—I found that to be very helpful. It gave us a really solid background in understanding Tableau. I'm pretty confident in our knowledge of Tableau at this point.

DUKE:
Rapid Start really helped us get to know the product and learn how to get the greatest value out of it. Stephanie focused on teaching us to do things ourselves. Prior to the Rapid Start program we had seen some demos of Tableau Software and had some comfort level with the Desktop tool. Now we have a very strong foundation in Tableau Server.

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>
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TABLEAU:
It sounds like you're feeling pretty comfortable using and managing Tableau.

DUKE:
Between what Professional Services taught us and the knowledge base and the videos, it has given us—and the other users around the company—a ton of foundational knowledge.

RAINEY:
Once you have Tableau up and running it's pretty easy to manage, which is great.

TABLEAU:
How much time do you spend maintaining Tableau?

DUKE:
From a maintenance perspective it's very little. Other than the occasional request of "Oh, it looks like an extract has failed," and we go troubleshoot that…We're putting in two to three hours a week, maybe. Automating Active Directory synch through batch script really reduced our maintenance.

RAINEY:
I am spending about an hour a week, and that's permissions-related. I spend about an hour a week going in there, cleaning things up. I can't even think of a time when it was something more complicated than permissions, Active Directory synch—stuff like that.

TABLEAU:
What differences do you see now that zulily has Tableau?

DUKE:
First of all, Tableau allows people who aren't experts in database technology or SQL to build complex reports. They don't need to come to us with report requests. We have removed that choke point.

RAINEY:
Also, Tableau lets users do things in the visual world to drive the data home. They are presenting data in a way that is really interesting. That is something that Excel is not going to do. Dropping a chart, creating a pie chart—it's not that impressive.

DUKE:
The goal is about amplifying what users can do. We want to make it our job to have a platform for analytics, to make sure that it's getting fed the right data, and to incorporate data streams as necessary to stay current with constantly changing business models. We want to do that work so that the others don't have to. What we don't want to do is be a choke point when a user needs to create 30 reports. We want to facilitate that kind of request by having the platform and access to the data so users can help themselves.

TABLEAU:
How do you see Tableau impacting your role at zulily?

DUKE:
Tableau allows us to focus on the data and not on creating reports—that allows us to get into more complex analytics. Before Tableau, we would try to focus on the data but we spent a lot of time just creating static reports. Instead of spending half our day just generating a report, we really get to work with the technology teams and figure out how we're going to design our underlying star schemas, for example. We can work on more strategic efforts.

RAINEY:
I've done reporting in Excel for my entire life. I've written tens of thousands of pages of macros for reporting. It's amazing how Tableau makes all that macro work unnecessary. It's just drag and drop. Now I am spending my time on more value-added projects like creating new datasets and improving existing datasets. We want to continue to incorporate new data streams as the business models change—and they are constantly changing.

Not only is this a better use of my time, it has helped my career because I'm able to get more experience in the complicated stuff. With Tableau, I can think further ahead and it opens up a big world of functionality and options. I can start to look around and think about the data in a creative and conceptual way.