Spotlight On
SCHUBERG PHILIS

SCHUBERG PHILIS

ILJA HEITLAGER

Schuberg Philis provides mission critical computer IT systems and guaranteed uptime to enterprise customers in the Netherlands. At the 2011 European Tableau Customer Conference, Information Officer Ilja Heitlager shared how his company is using Tableau to meet service management goals and provide transparency for customers. "Customer intimacy is the most important part of our service," he explains. "We used to have a once-a-month report, and now with Tableau we can just provide it on the fly with real time information."

TABLEAU:

How do you use Tableau at Schuberg Philis?

ILJA:

Our enterprise customers outsource their mission critical computer IT systems to us, and we take care of them. In our typical model, we say that we provide 100% uptime. For that we have dedicated teams, and they need to be supported with information. That's how we came across Tableau.

TABLEAU:

What kind of data are you looking at?

ILJA:

Different data sets. The initial question was to support our service management processes, so it's all about KPIs and service management on incidents, problems, performance of the systems— all of that. Once we started working with Tableau, it became obvious for us that it's a platform to support all of our information needs. We have different systems for financials, and for the technical part. We feel like we can replace everything and use Tableau as one standard approach to all of our data needs.t

"Once we started working with Tableau, it became obvious for us that it's a platform to support all of our information needs."

TABLEAU:

How many people at Schuberg Philis use Tableau today?

ILJA:

We started with a small group. We've been using Tableau now for a few months, and our company is about 150 people. Everybody will use Tableau in the end, and in the next quarter, we will expand the usage to our customers as well. We would like to share all our information with our customers and become fully transparent in our processes. I want to use Tableau to hand them the insides basically.

TABLEAU:

What do you see as the benefit to sharing all your information with your customers?

ILJA:

As a company, the two main advantages are full transparency towards our customers and real time decision-making. Furthermore, Tableau is so user-friendly that the initial question was about standardization, but it evolved into more exploratory data needs that we can fully support now with this platform.

TABLEAU:

Do you think this will make your customers more loyal? Or make them regard your company more highly?

ILJA:

Yes, the customer intimacy is the most important part of our service. Outsourcing system management is considered a commodity, but we have found the specific niche of mission critical systems. That requires a very intimate relationship with our customers. They expect to see everything, so we are fully transparent.

We used to have a once-a-month report, and now with Tableau we can just provide it on the fly with real time information. When they have specific questions, we can address them immediately and publish the information to them. That's the main benefit of this platform.

TABLEAU:

So, you're using both Tableau Desktop and Tableau Server?

ILJA:

Yes.

TABLEAU:

Tell me about your data environment. What kind of data are you using? Are you using multiple data sources?

ILJA:

Yes, we use multiple data sources. We have different systems like our EFP system for financial information, our dictating systems, and our monitoring systems, which all have different databases and data sets. These data sets weren't necessarily consolidated, and the data was not fully organized, but using this platform we can address that immediately. So we could start the data analysis without having central data.

TABLEAU:

Fantastic. What is the size of the data?

ILJA:

It ranges from megabytes to gigabytes. We're currently set up so that all of the environments are pumping all of their technical information into a central database that we can report from. And then we have all the separate teams starting with an extended set of reports. We will adjust them to further understand their environment.

TABLEAU:

How did you go about selecting Tableau?

ILJA:

We started to go through the web and look for the products. From my background in previous jobs, I used a lot of the traditional products. We didn't feel immediately like the traditional products were a fit for our needs. We selected a few and we started small, trying out Tableau. It seemed like it fit our purposes, so we started from there. It's basically a very simple selecting process where you find a few of the leading products. Tableau was actually a surprise to me. I didn't use it before in previous lives.

TABLEAU:

Have you made any efforts to quantify the benefits in time or money?

ILJA:

Not yet in money. Basically we had a wide range of different products we were using, anything from internal reporting systems to Excel to traditional reporting systems. The question was how do we go to the next level with our reporting? So there was the assessment in the back of our minds that this would be a tremendous time saver for the people involved. We could see that we would spend more time actually analyzing data, instead of repeating tedious tasks using the traditional tools.

"We could see that we would spend more time actually analyzing data, instead of repeating tedious tasks using the traditional tools."

TABLEAU:

If you were talking to another company similar to yours that was trying Tableau, what practices would you recommend to them?

ILJA:

I'd definitely recommend starting small. Just take one of your processes and use the tool and learn about the tool. Then you'll learn how many possibilities there are. Give the team the tool and just experiment with it. From that, we have standardized and implemented Tableau for a few processes and spread it throughout the company.

The second practice we use is that we have a core team, a few people going through the whole tool and finding out all the nifty features and spreading them out to the rest of the organization.

TABLEAU:

Explain how you use the in-memory capability. Are you using it to take the load off production systems?

ILJA:

Yes, basically the power of Tableau is that you can connect your production system immediately without needing an offline data warehouse or secondary system where all the data is assembled. You can use Tableau directly to connect to all of your data sources. If you give this power to end users, Tableau is very friendly in making the reports and doing the visualizations. But extracting the data can sometimes be a little bit dangerous. We've learned to set up a second database where new Tableau users can learn. Then, once they have grown to the next level, they'll probably take it form the production system immediately and do everything in Tableau.

TABLEAU:

So you're connecting Tableau directly to your data sources, and you're also using the in-memory capabilities. What's the value of being able to use either one?

ILJA:

We make mixed use of the direct connect capabilities and the in-memory facilities of Tableau. Basically, we develop reports for our end users and then publish them through the web system. These

reports are developed by a small group and used by a large group, and the large group wants the information in near real time.

Real time can be anything between one hour and a day, actually. It's not true real time, but we have different users calling the reports time after time after time. And having that capability allows us to help us to fulfill our report needs immediately. Basically, if the question is asked we can pull the data in-memory, build the reports, and then serve them time after time to various users.

"Basically, if the question is asked we can pull the data in-memory, build the reports, and then serve them time after time to various users."

We see a lot of customers using it in the same way, kind of mix and match depending on the use.

TABLEAU:
So, you're deploying web-based reports to your whole company?

ILJA:
Yes.

TABLEAU:
Can you describe the different types of users who'll be using those reports?

ILJA:
Schuberg Philis is all about mini services, so we're an IT company and our main population is engineers. Next to that is a team of customer operations managers and sales people.

The vital aspect of our company is full context, so each of our members has full access to all the data. They can see the technical information about our environments regarding availability, capacity, etc. They can see the service management part regarding incidents, problems, and those kinds of things. And the financial data too.

All of these groups have access to all of this information. The data comes from different systems, so having Tableau allows us to open up all of these systems and provide them in one way to all the users.

TABLEAU:
Any final thoughts on Tableau?

ILJA:
We selected Tableau looking for an answer to standardize our reporting needs, to be portable on the front end and give our Internet desktop capabilities. The backend was the initial question, but we like that Tableau is a whole world with a firm foundation in visualization and data analysis. That was the real surprise and the icing on the cake for us. We enjoy the product very much.