

Solutions for Enabling Lifetime Customer Relationships.

Data Quality: The Foundation of Operational Effectiveness

WHITE PAPER:
DATA QUALITY

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OVERVIEW

MOST MANUFACTURERS WOULD NEVER THINK OF ELIMINATING THE QUALITY CONTROL FUNCTION FROM THEIR PRODUCTION PROCESSES. WITHOUT QUALITY CONTROL THE NUMBER OF DEFECTIVE PRODUCTS THAT MUST BE REWORKED, SCRAPPED, OR RETURNED WOULD DRAMATICALLY INCREASE. ALMOST ALL CONSULTING/SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS MONITOR THE QUALITY OF THE SERVICES THEY DELIVER TO UPHOLD THEIR REPUTATIONS, ENSURE SATISFIED CUSTOMERS, AND GENERATE REPEAT BUSINESS. AFTER ALL, WHO WOULD KEEP A PRODUCT THAT FALLS APART THE DAY AFTER IT IS PURCHASED, FLY ON AN AIRPLANE THAT DOESN'T CONDUCT PRE-FLIGHT CHECKS, WORK WITH A TAX CONSULTANT THAT DIDN'T CHECK HER MATH, OR EVEN CONTINUE READING THIS WHITE PAPER IF EVERY SENTENCE CONTAINED A MISSPELLING, TYPO, OR GRAMMATICAL ERROR?

YET ENSURING DATA QUALITY WITHIN OPERATIONAL AND BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE APPLICATIONS IS A DISCIPLINE THAT IS FREQUENTLY OVERLOOKED BY MANY ORGANIZATIONS. THE OCCURRENCE OF A MAJOR PROBLEM THAT OTHERWISE COULD HAVE BEEN AVOIDED OR MINIMIZED HAD THE ORGANIZATION MADE AN EFFORT TO ENSURE THE QUALITY OF ITS DATA OFTEN SERVES AS THE CATALYST FOR THE RECOGNITION OF THE IMPORTANCE OF DATA QUALITY.

ONCE THIS OCCURS, MOST ORGANIZATIONS QUICKLY REALIZE THAT ALMOST ALL OF ITS OPERATIONAL AND ANALYTICAL BUSINESS PROCESSES RELY ON A SOLID, HIGH-QUALITY, DATA FOUNDATION. WHETHER THESE PROCESSES ARE USED TO INCREASE THE VALUE OF CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS, GAIN ADDITIONAL LEVERAGE WITH SUPPLIERS, IDENTIFY OR PREVENT FRAUD, MINIMIZE EXPENSES ASSOCIATED WITH MAILING COSTS, OR MEET REGULATORY REPORTING REQUIREMENTS, THE JOB OF ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING A SOLID DATA FOUNDATION MAKES DATA QUALITY JOB NUMBER ONE!

POOR QUALITY CUSTOMER DATA COSTS U.S. BUSINESSES BILLIONS A YEAR IN POSTAGE, PRINTING, AND STAFF OVERHEAD

What is Data Quality?

Simply stated, data quality involves ensuring the accuracy, timeliness, completeness, and consistency of the data used by an organization while also making sure that all parties utilizing the data have a common understanding of what the data represents. For example, does product sales data include or exclude internal sales? Is it measured in units or dollars, or perhaps even Euros? The scope of a data quality initiative is not limited to the data generated by an organization's own operations; it must include data obtained from external sources. While some definitions would also include accessibility, this is not strictly part of the data quality definition, although it is certainly a desirable and pragmatic characteristic for the data to be of practical use.

Given the current emphasis on the need to maintain a “360 degree view of the customer,” some people naively assume that this involves the creation of one massive record for each customer. Rather, data quality involves being able to link all of a given customer's records together – a task that can only be accomplished with identifiers for the records associated with each customer.

> Tax regulatory compliance is often difficult to accurately administer. Yet, in the telecommunications industry, providers are responsible for knowing the appropriate tax jurisdictions for each account and face substantial fines if the proper taxes are not collected. Conversely, municipalities looking to collect their fair share of tax revenues need to ensure that neighboring municipalities are not incorrectly collecting their revenues. Data quality software provides for accuracy in the tax jurisdiction assignment process, thereby helping telecommunication companies remain within the law and helping ensure that customers and local municipalities are treated fairly in terms of taxation and revenue apportionment.

The Importance of Quality Data

Organizations make decisions based on the data available at that time. If an organization can improve the overall quality of this data, it can improve the quality of the resultant decisions and increase both its effectiveness and efficiency. This will enable the organization to better, and more profitably, serve its constituents, be they customers, employees, business partners, or stockholders.

Much attention has been focused on the data cleansing aspects of data quality. However, this is only one part of the equation. Other aspects include data integration and consistent business rules.

While data quality may once have been considered a nice-to-have initiative, organizations now realize that it is an absolute necessity especially for mission-critical applications or those that are required in order to meet governmental reporting and disclosure requirements. In fact, when applied to applications involving Homeland Security, data quality quickly escalates into a “bet your border” issue.

What is the Magnitude of the Problem?

According to a report published by The Data Warehousing Institute (TDWI) in 2002, “poor quality customer data costs U.S. business a staggering \$611 billion a year in postage, printing, and staff overhead.” TDWI cited several examples including a telecommunications company whose data entry errors incorrectly coded accounts and lost \$8 million a month when it couldn't send out bills. The true cost is undoubtedly much higher, as the \$611 billion dollar amount was limited to customer name and addresses data and even then did not include secondary effects such as those associated with alienating and losing a customer.

We also know that the problem is persistent. In a more recent 2009 study conducted by Gartner¹, participants

¹ Gartner (2009), “Organizations Perceive Significant Cost Impact From Data Quality Issues”

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estimated that poor data quality cost their organizations an average of \$8.2 million a year as a result of data quality issues. However, twenty-two percent of the respondents calculated their annual losses at \$20 million or more and four percent indicated annual losses as high as \$100 million. While losses of millions of dollars are significant, Gartner analysts believe these figures understate the true financial impact on most organizations.

Much attention has been focused on resolving name and address issues or consolidating multiple records in order to provide a single customer view or eliminating duplicate mailings to the same person or family. However, these are just a few examples of where data quality can be applied to benefit an organization.

Data quality applies to more than just customer name and address data. It applies to product numbers and associated descriptions, part numbers and units of measure, medical procedure codes and patient identification numbers, telephone numbers, email addresses, commodity codes, vendor numbers, and vehicle identification numbers, to name just a few. For example, if a global company reports European revenues in

Euros while reporting North America revenues in dollars, anyone comparing European and North American revenues must be aware of this and apply the appropriate conversion factor.

Additional Effects

Poor data quality can negatively influence how a company is perceived in the marketplace. The first impression should be one of quality. Just as visitors to a company's offices can be strongly influenced by their initial impression of the lobby and reception area, the way a company is perceived by others can be influenced by the quality of its data, especially if it results in miss-addressed mail, incorrect invoices, or erroneous shipments.

The inability to eliminate redundant name and address records results in unnecessary postage costs. Recipients of duplicate mailings can become frustrated and question the firm's overall operating efficiency.

If these redundant mailings each inconsistently misspell the individual's name or address, the frustration level may approach alienation or even a legal concern.

Add to this the cost of catalogs or even merchandise delivered to the wrong address (some of which will not be returned or, if returned, may now be considered as used), and the real magnitude of the problem only just begins to surface. Furthermore, if a single customer is included in a company's database multiple times, each time with a different value for the customer identifier, the company will be unable to determine the true volume of this customer's purchases. It could even be placed in the embarrassing situation of attempting to sell the customer an item that she has already purchased from the company!

Techniques and Solutions

Data quality is a multi-phase process involving data capture, data integration, data profiling, data cleansing, and data augmentation.

Has this ever occurred in your organization?

Issue: A company has several divisions, each of which purchases from a common vendor. However, instead of receiving the maximum obtainable discount based on total corporate purchases, every division received a smaller discount, based only on its own purchases.

Cause: Each division has its own vendor file and its own procedures for assigning vendor numbers. Although the company prided itself on tracking and aggregating a customer's purchases across all of its divisions, it had not applied this technology to the tracking of purchases it made from its own suppliers.

THE QUALITY OF DATA USED BY AN ORGANIZATION WILL HAVE A MAJOR IMPACT ON ITS OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY

Capturing and Collecting the Data

Data capture involves the capturing and collection of source data. It can include a wide variety of sources and input mechanisms and can be conducted in both real-time and batch modes. Customers entering orders over the web, problem and resolution codes in call center logs, and point-of-sale data collected by cash registers are all examples of primary data collection sources.

While data can be cleansed at any point, it is optimal to ensure its accuracy from the start. Once an error is introduced into a system, it is usually more expensive to correct it after the fact than it would have been to take the proper steps to avoid it in the first place.

It is interesting to note that with the increased reliance upon web-based order forms completed by consumers; these individuals have now become data entry clerks. However, unlike data entry professionals who are trained on the meaning of every field, many consumers are satisfied merely to accurately enter only the data that is needed to ensure the receipt of their order.

Catching and correcting errors at the source can significantly reduce the magnitude of data collection errors and reduce problems further downstream, for example, by utilizing software that can verify an address to see if it actually exists. An invalid delivery address strongly suggests a data entry problem that in a real-time environment could be corrected on the spot. Other software exists that can determine appropriate state and local tax jurisdictions and associated tax rates and apply these to customer purchases to determine the correct tax amounts. These are especially effective if implemented at the data entry source, integrated with the transaction system, and available in real-time. Even if professional data entry clerks entered the data, as is often the case when placing an order via the telephone, it is important that the data be collected in a format suitable for both its immediate (e.g., order shipment and payment)

and long-term (e.g., analytical purposes such as identifying future up-selling and cross-selling opportunities) needs.

Many organizations have successfully utilized data validation and correction services available through an application services provider (ASP) by linking their transactional systems to software and databases hosted by the ASP. This is useful not only for initial data entry and validation, but also for verifying existing entries and capturing value changes that occur when a customer moves or changes a phone number. Some ASPs charge for their services on a per use basis, allowing smaller companies, or small branches of larger organizations, to cost-effectively utilize services they might not otherwise have afforded.

> A healthcare organization that acquired several other smaller healthcare organizations discovered that a newly acquired company was quite careless in its data entry procedures. Social Security numbers, used as the patient identifier, were routinely entered inside of a freeform patient name field. The placement was seemingly random as the Social Security number sometimes appeared at the beginning of the name field, sometimes between first, middle, last names, and sometimes even within one of these names. Only after the company deployed data quality software capable of recognizing the pattern for a Social Security number was it finally able to merge the patient records of its newly acquired company with the patient records of its other companies.

Data Integration

Organizations collect data from multiple sources. In many cases these sources each have their own data format. Data integration involves combining the data from these multiple, disparate sources. These may include data contained in packaged enterprise application software systems, subject-oriented databases such as a parts master file, or call logs from a customer support help desk. While many organizations have tried to write their own data integration

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software, even those that have succeeded quickly realize that this becomes a never-ending task as the application-specific extract modules must be continually maintained and synchronized with each new release of the application software. Most organizations have found that it is more efficient to utilize third-party data integration software rather than trying to develop and maintain custom program code.

Data Profiling

It is not uncommon that the file specification documentation does not always accurately reflect the actual file contents. This is especially true in legacy environments where programmers have continually modified homegrown applications and may have added new data fields, or used existing data fields to store new data elements without documenting these changes.

By examining individual record fields or columns, data profiling tools can determine whether these fields conform to their assumed content, including data type and allowed values or value ranges. In addition, they can validate intra-record and inter-file dependencies. Checking that a person's sex does not contradict the salutation associated with his or her name is an example of intra-record dependency; checking that a part number in a customer order matches a valid part number on the part master file is an example of an inter-file dependency. An example of both is checking that an employee's salary falls within the range specified by his or her job code. In order to determine if the job code and salary on the employee's record are consistent with each other, the salary range associated with the job code must be determined by checking the appropriate entry on the job code file.

Data profiling frequently accompanies the data cleansing process or precedes it to identify areas of concern or to validate assumptions. The earlier in the data quality process that data profiling is conducted, the sooner problems can be discovered and the work required to correct them is minimized.

Data Cleansing

Once the data is collected and merged from these multiple sources, it must be cleansed to correct inconsistencies and errors. While verifying and correcting data as it is entered into the system can minimize errors, this won't necessarily catch inconsistencies across systems.

For example, if each division creates its own vendor file and uses a different identifier for the same vendor, it will be necessary to reconcile these files in order to recognize that what appears to be several different vendors can in fact be one. Data cleansing should also ensure that the data values are timely.

When comparing two records to determine if they contain the same data values, it is beneficial to have the data values in the same format. Telephone numbers, dates, names, addresses, identification numbers (e.g., customer, employee, vendor, product, procedure codes, etc.) can all be better compared if the data values for a given field are in a common, standardized format. While many data integration tools can convert source data from disparate files to the desired target format by, for instance reformatting telephone numbers to eliminate non-numeric characters such as parentheses, decimal points, or dashes, their ability to further cleanse the data is limited. They can't check that a home phone number area code is consistent with the ZIP Code for the home address, for example.

Most pure data integration tools also cannot directly parse addresses into standardized values (e.g., St for Street) or convert a free-form entry into the appropriate individual fields (e.g., separating an unstructured name field into last name, first name, middle name, and title entries), or perform the necessary matching in order to recognize that "J. Smith at 1234A Lois Lane" is probably the same person as "Smith, James at 1234 Lois Ln." And only a data cleansing tool can recognize that in New York City, Avenue of the Americas is another name for 6th Avenue.

DATA QUALITY IS AN ABSOLUTE NECESSITY FOR MISSION-CRITICAL APPLICATIONS AND THOSE REQUIRED TO MEET GOVERNMENTAL REPORTING AND DISCLOSURE REQUIREMENTS

Taking this one step further, the ability to link individual family members to the same household is clearly a task for the data cleansing, not the data integration, tool. A good solution should accurately resolve most data cleansing problems and identify those that it can't and place them in a "suspense file" for follow-on resolution by a knowledgeable individual. Some products allow users to specify a threshold level as to the degree of ambiguity required before human involvement is required.

The power of data quality software is clearly enhanced by being integrated with robust data movement technology and the ability to share tasks as appropriate. This is usually accomplished either through strong technical partnerships between data quality and data integration vendors or by having a single vendor provide both. In general, when a single vendor provides both, the integration is likely to be more transparent and tighter.

Data Augmentation and Enhancement

In addition to the data a company collects from its own systems, it frequently needs to augment and enrich this with other data from external sources. Demographics, tax jurisdiction information, geocode data such as longitude/latitude and Census tracts, credit information, and lifestyle information are some of the broad classes of data that can enrich consumer records.

Customer data is frequently enhanced with geocode-related data. This intelligence can be used to determine if an insurance applicant is in close proximity to a coastal waterway or flood zone, or if a telephone customer desiring DSL service is within the requisite distance of the central switching office.

While much attention has been focused on the value of data augmentation to enrich customer records for marketing purposes such as identifying prospect targets, its applicability extends to many other areas. These can

include medical records used to research and discover possible common characteristics in a group of patients with the same disease or even Homeland Security applications involving the identification of suspected terrorists.

Data cleansing involves:

- Converting data fields to a common format (a process often shared with the data integration phase).
- Parsing entries to convert unstructured group fields into their individual components
- Identifying and correcting errors
- Eliminating inconsistencies
- Matching records to eliminate duplicates
- Filling in missing values

Today Data Quality is More Important Than Ever

In the past many organizations didn't truly recognize the need for data quality until it became apparent after an expected high-return company initiative, usually related to customer relationship management or an enterprise data warehouse, failed due to poor data quality. Even if the organization took the additional time and effort now required to successfully resolve its data dilemma, momentum was lost, and confidence in the initiative, as well as the reputation of its sponsors, were oftentimes severely impaired.

A forward-thinking organization should include data quality as a part of its everyday operations. While, clearly, this cannot be accomplished overnight, recent regulatory and Homeland Security initiatives such as compliance with the regulations of the U.S. Department of Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), Sarbanes-Oxley, the USA Patriot Act, and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), all require a solid data foundation. This need will cause even lagging organizations to recognize that an effective data quality program is quickly becoming a near-absolute requirement.

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While many think that HIPAA mainly addresses privacy issues and health insurance portability, it also includes reporting requirements that are targeted at catching and eliminating fraud, in part by recognizing inappropriate and inconsistent claims. The ability to accurately link medical provider and the supplied procedures and medications will rely on consistent, high-quality data.

The Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) of the United States Department of the Treasury administers and enforces economic sanctions against countries and groups of individuals, such as terrorists and narcotics traffickers. OFAC publishes a master list of Specially Designated Nationals (SDNs) and Blocked Persons. U.S. persons and companies are generally prohibited from dealing with any person or organization on the list and are subject to substantial penalties for violations, if they do.

Sarbanes-Oxley requires that CEOs and CFOs certify the accuracy of their company's financial statements. However, if the underlying internal controls system relies on poor

data, no matter how well-designed the software is, how comfortable are these executives going to feel about certifying the resultant reports?

The Patriot Act requires financial institutions to verify customers' identities and link transactions together to identify, for example, possible money-laundering activities. These might encompass a series of seemingly separate purchases of money orders that collectively exceed a reporting threshold.

> An online marketer that required users to first register in order to view its content and place orders thought that it had 18 million users. The company was about to make a major investment in a high-end operational CRM system when it discovered that many of the registered users had names of cartoon characters or well-known politicians; one of the most common was George Bush of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. After eliminating the obvious fictitious entries, the number of valid entries was reduced to approximately 6.5 million. Using de-duplication software to eliminate multiple entries for valid users who simply registered again when they forgot their passwords, the number of unique users was further reduced to less than 2.5 million. The existing CRM software could easily handle this volume and still provide sufficient headroom for reasonable future growth. The purchase of the new, and expensive, software was postponed indefinitely.

Has this ever occurred in your organization?

Issue: One branch of a professional services organization consistently had a higher utilization rate for its consultants than the other branches. The other branch managers argued that their consultants were just as productive and that "something was wrong with the numbers."

Cause: Although utilization was defined as billable hours divided by total available hours, the definition of available hours was not consistent across the company. The branch with the high utilization was not any more productive than the other branches; rather it measured available time based on a 7.5 hour day, while the other branches utilized an 8 hour day.

Data Quality is a Continuous Process and a Way of Corporate Life

While data quality may be imperative, it is definitely not a onetime process. Although in a perfect world, all data would be verified and cleansed as it enters an operational system, we live in a world where things change. If a woman marries and changes her last name, a customer moves to a new address, or one vendor merges with or acquires another, a company should be able to account for these changes rather than assuming any new transactions originate from a new customer.

AS THE FOUNDATION OF ALMOST ALL ORGANIZATIONAL FUNCTIONS, DATA QUALITY IS AN ON-GOING PROCESS THAT MUST BE CONTINUALLY MAINTAINED

Data quality should be built into application system design. For example, most order entry and shipping systems were originally concerned with making sure that collected addresses were in a format acceptable to the U.S. Postal Service or the appropriate foreign postal services; they were not necessarily designed from the perspective of being able to integrate all customer activity.

If not already established, a strong data management program including well-defined data definitions and associated business rules should be implemented. Internally developed applications should adhere to these rules and packaged software evaluated relative to how well it conforms, or how easily it could be modified to do so. In addition to avoiding the name and address issues mentioned above, a data management program would have prevented the metrics issue associated with consultant productivity cited in the earlier sidebar. As the data definitions would include attributes such as that unit-of-measure, it would establish consistency across the enterprise so that when consolidating numbers the company wasn't comparing "apples to oranges" or more likely "pounds to dollars," "feet to inches," or even "feet to meters."

Audits should be conducted to check on data quality. Adding a "date last updated" field to each master file entry

(e.g., employee, customer, product, vendor, organizational structure), helps determine its "freshness" and could also be used to select the records to be audited. In addition, an audit trail of data transformations should be maintained so that the source data is traceable. One simple way of accomplishing this is to retain the original data values and create new fields for the resultant standardized values.

Components of a Data Quality Solution

Begin at the beginning: A strong data quality solution should begin at the source where data entry errors can be minimized and information content standardized and verified. While standardizing name and address fields is somewhat obvious, additional steps should be taken to prevent the same entity (e.g., customer, part, employee, vendor, medical procedure, etc.) from being represented several times in the database, each time with a different key identifier, and thus considered as several different entities. **Verify Assumptions:** an investment in data profiling is worth a thousand assumptions.

A good data quality product will provide a wide range of tools and optional extensions. In addition to performing the traditional validation, standardization, matching, householding, and de-duplication functions, it should be

Has this ever occurred in your organization?

Issue: After receiving the latest quarterly company metrics and statistics report, the head of sales is somewhat alarmed to see that the total number of customers has declined from 700 last quarter to 600 this quarter. Yet after asking her sales people to inform her of the number of new customers and the number of lost customers, the collective numbers indicate that the company gained 60 new customers while losing only 10, for a net gain of 50. Is the report wrong?

Cause: The report is correct. The apparent customer count inconsistency was due to the fact that the company discovered some customers were represented more than once in its database. During the quarter, the company discovered 150 "duplicate customers." After cleaning the database to consolidate and remove these duplicate entries, the actual number of unique customers was 550, rather than the 700 that had been reported at the end of the previous quarter. Adding the net gain of 50 customers that occurred during the quarter to the true 550 number at the end of the prior quarter, demonstrates that the correct number is indeed 600.

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able to run on a variety of hardware platforms and integrate with optional, but nonetheless important, data integration, data profiling and data augmentation components. The suite should be able to operate in both real-time and batch modes. Real-time is frequently appropriate for data collection, while batch may be more suitable for periodic data verifications and audits. It should present a common look-and-feel for all capabilities and allow any address to be verified from a single interface, rather than requiring a separate interface for each country.

Provide an Audit Trail: Even the best software or subject matter expert can produce a reasonable but incorrect result that will need additional investigation. A simple way to accomplish this is to retain the original values while storing “standardized values” in additional fields rather than replacing the original values.

Maintain Data Currency: Recognize that people will change their names and addresses while vendors will also move and merge with other organizations. Additionally, street names and ZIP Codes can change. Consequently, it is necessary to monitor this during subsequent interactions and periodic audits, perhaps in conjunction with software

that monitors changes from the U.S. Postal Services’ Change of Address System or periodic updates from third-party data augmentation and enrichment suppliers.

Deploy Good Data Management Techniques: An enterprise-wide data management program to establish consistent data definition formats, units-of-measures, and business rules will go a long way towards preventing data inconsistencies and identifying those that do occur. Data is a corporate asset and should be treated as such.

Data management also involves the selection of key identifiers. For example, while some organizations use a telephone number as the primary key for identifying customers, valuable customer history is often lost when the customer moves and acquires a new phone number.

Be Able to Integrate a Wide Variety of Sources: As most organizations utilize packaged software from multiple vendors, the ability to “capture data at its source” must be extended to include a variety of potential sources. Even if an organization desired to write its own data integration software, it would have to keep up with the steady stream of modifications and enhancements that the application

Has this ever occurred in your organization?

Issue: A customer places a call to a company’s support center. While inquiring about her problem, the support center specialist accesses her records to view her previous support interactions with the company. As the support specialist inquires about the nature of her current problem, she yells into the phone that “this is the same problem I complained about in last week’s email and why I do need to explain it to you again?!”

Cause: Although the company thought it had implemented a CRM solution that permitted it to track all of its

interactions with a customer or prospect, the customer’s email interaction was initiated from her work computer, not from her home computer. While the customer records in the company’s database were able to link together her correct name, address, phone numbers, and home email address, her work email address, was not linked to these entries. There were, however, another set of records, containing her work email address, that were assumed to be for another customer with the same name! Simply asking the customer if she had previously reported the problem might have resulted in prompting the support specialist to link her two sets of records together and gone a long way towards appeasing her.

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vendor released each year, in particular those that modify the underlying file structure. Fortunately, data integration software is available to address this issue both at the database and application-specific levels.

Consider Third-Party Data Augmentation Sources: It is highly unlikely that your own systems will yield all the information you would like to obtain. Third-party data augmentation and enrichment vendors can be a valuable source for obtaining additional customer or vendor-centric data. This can include telephone numbers, geographic overlays, consumer demographics and lifestyle information.

Provide a Variety of Ways to Access Data Quality Software: Ideally, a well designed data quality software offering should be accessible as needed. The technology should be offered both as a hosted service and a licensed offering. Additionally, it should be executable in both batch and real-time implementations. While most tools offer their own application programming interfaces in order to be callable from custom applications, there should be a current ability or short-term plan to also make the functionality available as a web service.

Work with Experienced Data Quality Vendors: Just as callers to a vendor's support center don't want to be told that the cause of the problem rests with some other vendor and they must now contact the other vendor themselves for problem resolution; companies seeking to implement a data quality solution want to deal with an experienced company. Proven vendors are able to take responsibility for the complete solution as they offer a comprehensive product line augmented by strong partnerships to fill in the missing pieces.

Summary

Data quality is at the foundation of almost all organizational processes, both operational and analytical. The quality of the data used by an organization will have a major impact on the organization's overall effectiveness and efficiency. While data quality has sometimes been ignored until a major, and usually

highly visible initiative gets underway, many organizations now recognize that data quality should be a part of its everyday operations and is certainly not limited to customer-centric initiatives. These organizations also realize that data quality is not a one-time exercise, rather, it is an on-going process that must be continually maintained.

Fortunately, as high data quality becomes an established organizational best practice, maintaining quality becomes relatively easier. Effective data quality not only includes data cleansing but also data integration, consistent business rules, and a strong dose of common sense. Success involves not only software tools and solid data management practices, but, more importantly, a commitment to make data quality a number one priority.

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