Ready Mix USA

Construction Company Builds Solid Foundation for Customer & Product MDM

Mastering their product and customer data and revolutionizing their business process efficiency

Ready Mix USA is a group of five companies that form one large regional provider for construction products, services, and accessories. Through its five arms, Ready Mix USA offers a legion of highly diverse product lines: numerous quality concrete lines, high lift grout, aggregate materials, concrete and architectural masonry units, natural stone, hardscape pavers, retaining wall units, and block construction accessories. Its physical network is comprised of twenty warehouses across six states, three cement terminals, numerous specialized contractor showrooms in four states, and more than 240 plants across the Southeast. Ready Mix USA's branding is focused on quality assurance and involvement in its many local host communities. At the time of their master data management implementation, Todd Allison served as the company's IT manager and Keith Rickles served as CIO; however, both were transitioning out of Ready Mix and into 323 Technology Solutions, a Profisee consulting partner serving a variety of industries focused on expiring inventory and logistics.

Business Challenge

The only thing larger than Ready Mix USA's product repertoire is its master data. Before teaming up with Profisee, a company standard for recording and organizing master data such as customer and product lists was virtually nonexistent. They had no way to harmonize their records across numerous locations, divisions, and production systems. The result was a cacophony of unusable data, making daily tasks laborious and adding heavy manual labor to simple analytical objectives. During Ready Mix USA's transition to a master data management solution, an already

MDM Domain
Customer
Product

Industry
Construction

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tough economic climate for the construction industry only worsened, making business process efficiency even more important. For all of these reasons and more, Ready Mix USA needed a way to simplify their data.

"For starters," President of 323 Technology Solutions Keith Rickles says of Ready Mix USA, "their data sets were severely fractured because they were created in so many different source systems. Because they lacked a master data tracking tool, pertinent information about customers, products, and locations was highly dispersed and therefore invisible to reporting tools and business users." Ready Mix USA needed a way to augment their master data by aggregating not only lost data, but gathering additional information that was not supported by their operational systems.

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Because of this fracturing, Ready Mix USA did not have a way to track a single customer's transactions across multiple divisions of the company. A highly decentralized business model is common for regional suppliers like Ready Mix USA, especially where growth is driven through acquisitions. However, with so many divisions doing business simultaneously, Rickles realized that, "The ability to map multiple customer IDs to one master customer was a business imperative that would allow the company to perform at a much higher level of business analysis and drive many economies into clerical functions." Specifically, Ready Mix USA needed to universalize customer information across all systems. "It was absolutely essential for us to find a tool that could facilitate customer status changes across all of Ready Mix USA's many systems. We were told of many instances in which one division placed a customer on credit hold for non-payment while another division was allowing the same customer to accumulate more debt. While we all knew this was unacceptable, we had no solution for the problem until we embraced master data management," explains Rickles. Compiling a

holistic list of their customers was also important for coordinating customer mailings. "Ready Mix USA was spending money on costly mailers to communicate important messages to their customers," says Rickles, "but without a master address list, customers were becoming understandably irritated at receiving numerous duplicates that were in turn an unnecessary cost for Ready Mix USA."

Maestro Solution

Ready Mix USA found resolution for their fragmented master data through a collaborative solution comprised of Microsoft Master Data Services (MDS) and Profisee Master Data Maestro software, combined with strategic deployment and application management by 323 Technology Solutions and Profisee.

At the heart of Ready Mix USA's data quality problem was their disjointed information flow. 323 Technology Solutions immediately saw that MDS and Maestro were a great fit for Ready Mix USA's initiative to establish centralized, consolidated master data. "For Ready Mix USA, we decided to take advantage of the multi-domain hub capabilities in MDS, which allowed us to organize customers, products, locations, divisions and many other subjects in one place," explains Todd Allison, Senior Systems Manager, 323 Technology Solutions. This deployment of MDS is sometimes described as a "hub-and-spoke" architecture, where MDS functions as a central repository for data and a communication liaison between source systems. Allison says, "There was no single system that contained a superset of all Ready Mix USA's customer or product records except for their read-only data warehouse." MDS stores a copy of all important, shared data, plus data that source systems do not have. Pooling mastered data in this way greatly enhanced the quality of Ready Mix USA's reporting capabilities and facilitated reports that were not feasible before. Additionally, Ready Mix USA is able to monitor data quality standards with MDS business rules. For instance, when a new source record is incomplete according to predetermined business rules, MDS now notifies the Ready Mix USA data steward and all concerned parties.

After the successful implementation of MDS, Profisee

Master Data Maestro Desktop (Maestro Desktop) was added for enhanced productivity and personalization. The out-of-the-box MDS web-based interface was sufficient for small-volume contributions and for receiving notifications during the implementation phase; however, "For the master data augmentation phase, we needed a nimble interface to perform mass updates and edits because the data volume is large and initially required a lot of cleansing and patching," Rickles illustrates. "We found that Maestro Desktop enabled us to complete many operations in a fraction of the time MDS would need to produce the same result."

As an added time saver, Maestro Desktop provides a high-performance and personalized experience. "For instance," says Allison, "a common task for Ready Mix USA is that of associating records from disparate systems, like tying an employee record from an operations system to its counterpart in an HR system. Many times this will require looking at numerous attributes (hire date, title, etc.) to confirm the correct choice. Using the MDS web interface, this could mean opening the target record list, narrowing the records to a small group using a filter, and then exporting the list to Excel for use as a reference when returning to the operations list. However, with Maestro Desktop's customizable workspaces, I'm able to have both lists open simultaneously, toggle between them, and even save that view to be used repeatedly or emailed to a data steward."

Ready Mix USA's data also required cleansing in preparation for high level reporting tasks. For this undertaking, the company turned to Master Data Maestro Server (Maestro Server). "Verifying data accuracy is important for any company, but for a construction company in the current economy it has never been more critical. Master data management was a tool Ready Mix USA could no longer work without," says Rickles. To increase confidence in matching results and to improve the quality of Ready Mix USA's address data, 323 Technology Solutions used Maestro Server's address verification capability, providing seamless integration with Bing Maps' address database to help the user ensure that addresses are complete, accurate, and up-to-date. "It didn't matter how many addresses we needed to verify or whether we automated address corrections or manually verified them; all of these

services were contained in Maestro Server and will never cause Ready Mix USA to incur any additional data validation or augmentation costs," remarks Rickles. "This was a huge advantage in comparison to competitor products we had initially considered." For added functionality, the Bing Maps service is also able to return Geocode data so that a map link to individual customer locations could be automatically generated as an attribute to the customer master. "With the accuracy that Maestro Server's address service brought to our customer addresses, we were creating powerful initial matching and address verification strategies within two days of hands-on training," states Allison.

While the initial matching returned groups of customer records based on unique location information, the next step was for 323 Technology Solutions to fine-tune the

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matching process with Maestro's unique synonym replacement technology. "Many of Ready Mix USA's customer names include the word 'construction', so with Maestro Server we were able to eliminate this redundant qualifier and hone matching strategies to focus on the unique components across customer names," says Allison.

Notably, Maestro Server's matching process does not eliminate key references to source systems or original source data, but instead it maintains the connection between a source record and the corresponding record in MDS. This allowed Ready Mix USA to see how those records were related, organize them, and master the best information into a single golden record. "The data that Maestro Server's match engine compiled was incredibly transparent and easy to analyze, which was vital to successfully organizing information from source systems," says Rickles.

Out of the total body of data that Maestro Server's matching engine analyzed, 98% was able to be

approved automatically. Of the remaining 2%, many records were approved without change. Rickles explains, "Maestro Desktop provided a complete data review experience out-of-the-box to make the mastering process quick and easy. We were able to immediately place it in the hands of the right business users, which was an advantage we didn't recognize until we were confronted with the task of a hand-off." With Maestro, Ready Mix USA's data quality maintenance is

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easy. Once their matching strategies were locked in, 323 Technology Solutions elected to automate incremental runs of the matching process as new records trickle in from source systems. Because Maestro Server makes full use of all existing matches as the user chooses, problems with automating a complex task like this are avoided.

Results

"MDS and the Maestro suite were integral in enabling Ready Mix USA to fill holes in their business processes," says Rickles. In addition to other such business process results was the most important receivables objective—"After cleansing our customer information, the Maestro Server matching engine facilitated an achievement we had been chasing for years: credit status cohesion for a single customer across all divisions of the company," describes Rickles. "For example,

something we always knew but never had the ability to control was that the same customer would often have an account in two different divisions of the company, each setting a credit limit of $50,000. This effectively granted a $100,000 line of credit.

"By generating reports utilizing the matched customer records, we were able to provide the business effective tools for managing receivables for these often large customers doing business across product lines and divisions."

For their issue of incoherent data, 323 Technology Solutions created for Ready Mix USA a centralized repository with MDS where multiple hierarchies and augmented attributes could be managed, a function which was not available in any of their existing systems. Tracking customer data across the company is no longer an issue for Ready Mix USA. The master records created from the matching strategy that 323 Technology Solutions implemented via the Maestro Server continue to function as the golden records they were created to be. Finally, the disjointed customer record-keeping system was mended with Maestro Server's address verification function. When combined with the many business rules that 323 Technology Solutions put in place to monitor data quality going forward, these Maestro and MDS capabilities have drastically increased Ready Mix USA's efficiency in reporting, analytics, decision making strategies, and operational activities.

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Profisee is a master data management software company focused on delivering enterprise-grade MDM capabilities through its Master Data Maestro software suite. As a Microsoft Gold Application Development Partner, Profisee has a worldwide reputation for Master Data Management expertise and competence with Microsoft Master Data Services.

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