



The Challenge:

To get customers back on the road more quickly, Safelite AutoGlass aimed to allocate resources to where they are needed most. To do so, the company needed to forecast demand accurately at each store.

The Solution:

Safelite worked with QueBIT to build an efficient, collaborative planning process on sophisticated IBM Analytics solutions – enabling highly detailed, remarkably accurate forecasts.

The Benefits:

Automation reduces time spent on manual work by 50 percent, cuts budget cycles by 40 percent and saves 450 person-hours a year. Sales forecast accuracy is an impressive 99.8 percent.

Safelite AutoGlass

Driving smarter business planning with deep insight and process automation from IBM Analytics

Founded in Wichita, Kansas in 1947, Safelite AutoGlass has grown to become the largest auto glass specialist in the United States. Operating around 600 brick-and-mortar outlets and 6,500 mobile stores, the company helps more than five million customers every year to repair or replace their vehicle glass.



On the fast-track to growth

At Safelite AutoGlass, a razor-sharp focus on fast, effective customer service has enabled the company to achieve spectacular growth and open branches across the nation.

To extend its lead over rival firms, Safelite aims to provide even better customer service, as Mike Lyons, Director of Financial Planning and Analysis, explains: “When our customers suffer damage to their vehicle glass, the best way we can help is by providing a rapid, reliable repair or replacement so that they can get back on the road with minimal hassle.”

“To provide top-notch service, we need the right staff in the right places with the right tools to complete each job. To plan ahead, we need answers to questions like ‘Which stores will need more staff in the next six months?’, ‘How many windshield repairs will each store need to perform in October?’ and ‘How does stormy weather affect our sales?’”



He recalls: “In the past, we performed enterprise budgeting, planning and forecasting using a network of spreadsheets created at corporate headquarters. The forecasts were based predominantly on historical performance, rather than input from local field managers, and we identified a disconnect between the plans and what was actually happening on the ground. With only limited information, we couldn’t make the best possible decisions for our business.”

“As the company grew, the time and effort involved in budgeting ballooned. To keep pace, we were going to need to hire more staff, increasing overheads. Without swift insight, we also risked being unable to identify and react to fresh developments before it was too late, blunting our competitive edge.”

“We set out to find a solution that could better support our booming business.”

Putting finance processes into gear

Safelite embraced IBM Analytics, augmenting its existing IBM® Cognos® Business Intelligence solution with IBM Cognos TM1® enterprise planning software and the IBM SPSS® Modeler Gold predictive analytics engine. QueBIT, an IBM Business Partner, provided support during the implementation.

“We have a real partnership with QueBIT, and they are fantastic to

50% less time spent on manual processes, so staff can focus on value-added analysis

work with,” adds Mike Lyons. “Their in-depth industry knowledge coupled with the cutting-edge IBM Analytics platform has helped us build a solution that is second to none.”

Today, 85 field managers across Safelite’s nationwide store network submit their own forecasts directly into TM1, which acts as a single source of truth. TM1 retains a full record of budgetary iterations, detailing which users made which changes at which time.

“We have cut budget cycles by 40 percent and halved the time spent on manual processes for financial planning, saving 450 person-hours annually,”

-Mike Lyons, Director of Financial Planning and Analysis

Solution components:

- IBM® Cognos® Business Intelligence
- IBM Cognos TM1®
- IBM SPSS® Modeler Gold

“We feed field managers’ in-depth knowledge of each local market into our predictions, giving us more accurate forecasts,” explains Mike Lyons. “In addition, process automation reduces the risk of human error, further boosting accuracy.”

Safelite’s finance team uses Cognos TM1 to create rolling 18-month forecasts on a monthly basis, distributing them to 125 managers across the country. Whenever changes need to be made, employees simply have to update the relevant figures once, and TM1 automatically adjusts the balance sheet, cash flow, and profit and loss statement.

To gain fresh business insight, Safelite relies on in-depth analytics and advanced scenario modeling from SPSS Modeler. As a cognitive solution, SPSS examines variances between sales forecasts and actual results, and learns from its mistakes, enabling Safelite to continuously improve the accuracy of its predictions.

Taking the road to success

Previously, planning was typically done at a regional level to save time. Harnessing automation from IBM Analytics, the company can now examine each store individually.

Mike Lyons continues: “With crystal-clear forecasts, we can match investments – such as hiring additional employees or opening new branches – more accurately on demand, achieving higher ROI. If circumstances change, we can update our plans in real time and reallocate resources to where they are needed most, strengthening our competitive advantage.”

By using SPSS to analyze historical weather data alongside sales performance, Safelite has unearthed fresh insights.

“We can see how seasonal variation affects sales at each store, and plan our staffing and inventory accordingly,” comments Mike Lyons. “If we hear about a weather event, such as a hailstorm, that is likely to cause a spike in demand, we prepare more effectively, enabling us to provide better service and get our customers back on the road more quickly.”



Safelite’s system forecast, automatically generated from the SPSS Models created by QueBIT utilizing variables like weather and advertising spend, have varied only .2% from actuals (99.8% accuracy) over the past year.

“We are also using SPSS to examine the effectiveness of various forms of advertising in boosting sales, helping us develop a smarter marketing strategy and gain a higher return on our investments.”

With powerful automation from IBM Analytics, Safelite has hiked the speed and efficiency of its budgeting process.

“We have cut budget cycles by 40 percent and halved the time spent on manual processes for financial planning, saving 450 person-hours annually,” remarks Mike Lyons. “That doesn’t just allow us to avoid hiring new staff as we grow; it also frees up our existing workforce to perform valuable analysis of the figures.”

“Field managers are much happier, because their views are listened to and reflected in sales targets. In fact, since we deployed TM1, field managers’ satisfaction with the budgeting process has risen by 17 percent.”

Building on its success, Safelite plans to expand its use of IBM Analytics in demand forecasting. In addition, the company plans to deploy IBM Incentive Compensation Management, which will simplify calculations of variable pay for sales teams.

Mike Lyons concludes: “We have only scratched the surface of what we can do with SPSS and TM1, and we have so much more to look forward to. Our journey with IBM started about ten years ago, and today the future is looking brighter than ever.”



About QueBIT

Trusted experts in analytics, QueBIT is dedicated to helping organizations leverage their data to make more intelligent decisions, that result in significantly improved business value. QueBIT has delivered analytics solutions for more than 450 organizations, including some of the largest and most successful companies in the world. QueBIT solutions span the entire spectrum of analytics, from data management, including Big Data strategy and implementation, Business Intelligence, Business Planning, Predictive Analytics and IoT Analytics. QueBIT’s unique CARE methodology coaches customers to achieve independence in solution ownership, while delivering rapid time to value. QueBIT has been recognized by many industry awards. www.quebit.com