



## Powerful Database Brings Brighter Outlook for Weather Forecaster

### Overview

**Country or Region:** Australia  
**Industry:** Media

### Customer Profile

The Weather Channel (TWC) broadcasts around-the-clock meteorological reports on the Foxtel and Austar pay TV networks. It also provides reports online.

### Business Situation

TWC wanted to expand its weather services, which included redeveloping its website and providing sophisticated content for mobile phones. It was held back by an outdated database and content management system.

### Solution

Microsoft Gold Certified Partner Artis Group recommended Microsoft SQL Server 2008 as the platform for a powerful new database. It used Microsoft .NET Framework to build the revamped website.

### Benefits

- Expanded media presence
- More reliable content

“The Microsoft SQL Server database has ensured the customer experience is greatly enhanced – more detailed, personalised weather reports more often... all of which will boost viewer and visitor numbers.”

Julian Delany, General Manager, The Weather Channel

The Weather Channel (TWC) provides a range of meteorological services including weather on demand, commentary and analysis for the Foxtel and Austar pay TV networks, as well as its own website. With more detailed meteorological data becoming available, TWC wanted to upgrade and expand its weather services. In particular, it wanted to redesign its website to provide more personalised information, and add a mobile service. To do this, it would need a database that could process greater amounts of data. Microsoft Gold Certified Partner Artis Group used Microsoft SQL Server 2008 and the Microsoft .NET Framework to build the database and provide the foundation for the new website. As a result, TWC now offers improved weather reports, including more customised and accessible content, regular updates and better mapping information. It also enabled TWC to explore new



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Julian Delany, General Manager, TWC

#### Situation

The Weather Channel (TWC) is a branded weather forecasting service. It provides a range of Australia-wide meteorological reports on the Foxtel and Austar pay TV networks as well on its own website. Part of the stable of pay TV channels owned by XYZnetworks (a joint venture between Foxtel and Austar), TWC's content includes commentary and analysis based on data from the Bureau of Meteorology, as well as a wide range of other sources.

With more detailed, real-time meteorological information available, TWC wanted to improve its weather forecasting service across an expanded digital media base, including both the online and mobile platforms. It believed that a more sophisticated service would increase the capacity to generate advertising revenue from its site and from data feeds. It would also promote the company's brand.

XYZnetworks was looking to overhaul Weather Active, the TV channel's on-demand weather forecasting service, as part of a broader project incorporating new interactive features. However, TWC's existing Magic Software content management system and database was seen as inadequate for handling the increased data feeds and supporting an expanded media service.

Upload times – the time between fresh data coming in from a feed, and an updated forecast being broadcast – took too long.

“Reliability, accuracy and timeliness are crucial to our brand,” says Julian Delany, General Manager, TWC.

TWC also wanted a much slicker website. It wanted to deliver richer, easy-to-navigate meteorological content, which was more personalised, more up-to-date, and displayed better mapping and radar information.

“We saw a real chance to converge our on-air and digital media brands,” says Delany. “The website was built initially to grow our TV brand. But the TV brand also assists our online brand. In the next 12 months, we want to be known primarily as a weather source, irrespective of the medium.

“Our old systems were too limited and prevented us from growing,” says Delany. “We envisaged difficulties using real-time weather data, doing anything new in the online and mobile space and rebuilding our interactive TV product. We simply couldn't move with the times.”

#### Solution

Initially, TWC issued tenders to 14 organisations to help revamp its website.

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Julian Delany, General Manager, TWC

“Once we began looking more closely at our specific needs, a new database became our priority,” explains Delany. “We needed a database from a trusted vendor that could manage the import and export of a large number of data feeds consistently and reliably to each of our media – TV, interactive, website and mobile.

“Reliability managing this data was absolutely critical,” he adds. “We can’t afford for the database to fail at any time, not for a minute. Too many people rely on our service. You can’t afford for the weather forecast to be old. If you’re not reliable, your brand’s credibility is shot.”

In April 2009, TWC chose Artis Group to overhaul both its database and website. The Microsoft Gold Certified Partner recommended Microsoft SQL Server 2008 for the database, with Microsoft .NET Framework for rebuild TWC’s website.

“We wanted an IT environment that was well supported and could be easily programmed as new weather data became available to us,” explains Delany. “Microsoft was the clear choice.”

TWC requested that Artis conduct a database audit upfront, comparing the existing database with the Microsoft solution. The new database outperformed all benchmarks, and TWC

commissioned Artis Group to do the rebuild.

“Within Microsoft SQL Server, we made extensive use of SQL Server Integration Services (SSIS) to handle and enhance the data feeds moving in and out of the database,” says Peter Giudes, CEO, Artis Group.

The SQL Server database was finished first and went live at the end of 2009, feeding data for TWC’s TV broadcast and interactive services. The website was relaunched in March 2010.

“The website was given a completely fresh look, with a Flash-based mapping interface, three-hourly and 10-day forecasts, radar information and weather alerts,” says Giudes.

### Benefits

With Microsoft SQL Server 2008, TWC has a highly reliable and scalable database for managing the input and output of meteorological data feeds to its on-air, interactive, online and mobile media services.

### Improved customer service

The Microsoft SQL Server database has enabled TWC to strengthen and expand its offering with improved weather services.

"With the new database, we can crunch huge amounts of very detailed and complex weather data, which are updated every 10 minutes," says Delany. "This has enabled us to relaunch a vastly improved website and introduce a mobile service."

Accordingly, TWC now provides extensive personalised content that is easy to navigate through its interactive TV feature. In addition, the expanded website now provides 10-day rolling forecasts and three-hourly intra-day forecasts, as well as easy access to weather alerts and warnings.

"The SQL Server database has ensured the customer experience is greatly enhanced – more detailed, personalised weather reports more often," says Delany. "All of which will boost viewer and visitor numbers."

Delany says the company has also benefited. "A more reliable, consistent service has led to less downtime, which saves us money and improves staff productivity," he says.

#### **Faster updates**

The new database has significantly improved the time it takes to process weather data as well as the quantity of data it can handle. This means that the Weather Active TV service is much faster for the user, and there are a wider choice of

places from which forecasts can be requested.

The interactive TV Weather Active service is now available in 2,600 postcodes across Australia, rather than 1,400 as before. Updates to viewers now take an average of 105 seconds, compared to 12 minutes previously.

"Getting the latest weather information out as quickly as possible is crucial to our business," explains Delany. "The better you do it, the better it's going to reflect on your business and potentially that has enormous financial benefit."

On the website, updates to the Forecast Mapping site take 108 seconds whereas previously they took 150 minutes. The weather visualisation tool, Weatherscape, completes updates in 90 seconds against 20 minutes, and the Data Crawl – a ticker on the bottom of the screen on the pay TV channel – in seconds, instead of seven minutes.

#### **New advertising revenue**

The new website has enabled TWC to explore new business opportunities through highly targeted advertising campaigns.

"The weather information captured in the SQL Server database can be used in a far more timely and targeted fashion to open up new revenue streams," explains Delany.

## For More Information

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[www.microsoft.com/australia/business/bi](http://www.microsoft.com/australia/business/bi)

For more information about Artis Group products and services, call +61 2 8404 5800 or visit the website at:

[www.artisgroup.com.au](http://www.artisgroup.com.au)

For more information about The Weather Channel products and services, call 1800 151 997 or visit the website at:

[www.weatherchannel.com.au](http://www.weatherchannel.com.au)

"An air conditioning company, for instance, can tailor its advertising so it's only triggered in nominated areas when the temperature reaches a certain point, say 28 degrees Celsius. Or it can be a heating company, if the mercury falls below a certain temperature.

[www.microsoft.com/servers/default.aspx](http://www.microsoft.com/servers/default.aspx)

"A scattergun approach, such as standard banner ads, is dying out. Where advertising is used in our feeds, it is becoming more directly integrated with our website content, and so it's more relevant to our online audience. That means the more targetable our weather data, the more valuable the advertising space is."

## Growing the brand

The Microsoft database is now central to TWC's plans to expand and elevate the brand. In June 2010, TWC will launch a mobile application allowing customers to access weather reports from their handsets.

"In 12 months, we aim to jump two places to become the third most-used commercial weather website," says Delaney. "The Microsoft IT environment is key to achieving this."

Microsoft Server Product Portfolio  
For more information about the Microsoft server product portfolio, go to:

### Software and Services

- Microsoft Server Product Portfolio
- V

- Technologies
- Microsoft .NET Framework