

## CORDA Empowers National Retail Services to Display Merchandizing Data

The next time you enter a department store or a grocery store, look around and ask yourself: Why is that particular product on that particular shelf in that particular spot? National Retail Services employs data visualization solutions from Corda Technologies to help major retailers have the data they need to answer these questions.

### Background:

Founded in 1979, National Retail Services (NRS) is a highly respected national provider of complete merchandising services. Supporting this successful business is a veritable army of field representatives who visit more than 80,000 stores a month and make over 1 million store calls a year for leading brands across multiple product categories, and in all classes of trade. During each in-store visit, an average of 40 to 50 data points are collected for retail clients regarding product status and store conditions.

Many world-leading brands employ NRS to ensure that the right products are on the right shelves, in the right place, at the right time and at the right price. This seemingly Herculean effort requires a great deal of coordination among the teams responsible for gathering information about the products, the analysts who review the data and those who interface with the NRS clients to report the findings.

### Challenge: providing best-in-industry analysis and reporting

Companies make multi-billion dollar retailing decisions based on the information NRS provides. NRS was recently faced with the challenge of delivering the data to its clients in a way that better facilitated decision-making.

“We are known in the merchandizing services industry for our reporting and our reporting analysts,” said Chris Gillespie, Chief Information Officer for NRS. “We are unique in this industry in that we have a staff of reporting analysts who go through the data piece by piece to help our clients understand the true picture of what is happening in retail. We needed a solution that allowed us to create dynamic, customized charts and graphs that help communicate the information. The charts and graphs would need to be presented in a way that would match the client’s objectives.”

The analysts were consigned to manually create charts and graphs in Excel®. This was a time consuming process, to say the least and they needed a way to automate the process while still delivering for their clients. Gillespie understood and appreciated the power of information and was searching for a way to help NRS’ clients capitalize on it.

“The companies who truly understand the strategic importance of data are the ones who get ahead and succeed in today’s market,” he said.

### Solution: Driving Beyond Charts and Graphs to Executive Dashboards

Gillespie turned to Corda Technologies and its suite of data visualization and presentation solutions to raise the bar on how data is used in the merchandizing services industry.

·Corda’s PopChart® is a fast, robust, and versatile charting and graphing software. Since PopChart is one hundred percent Java, it can run on any platform and PopChart is flexible enough to take multiple data sources and put it into a single, intuitive chart or graph to provide a clear overall picture of what’s happening.

·OptiMap™ permits companies to take data and integrate it into interactive maps that can then be displayed in a Web browser. It can plot data according to areas such as cities, counties, states, or regions, and zip codes to give geographic reference to what is happening in a company.

·Highwire™ quickly and accurately transforms HTML into PDF files. It can take all of the charts, graphs, and maps compiled in PopChart and OptiMap and immediately convert them into PDF documents that can be easily archived, printed or emailed and distributed to the appropriate people.

Gillespie utilizes Corda’s solutions for two main functions: first, to present data in a way that best allows their clients to use it strategically to help plan out their business and product at retail, and second, to report to NRS clients the status of



the particular in-store program they are performing.

NRS' "Retail Intelligence Dashboard" is a customized Website specifically designed to meet the strategic needs of its clients. The Retail Intelligence Dashboard utilizes Corda's OptiMap and PopChart to allow NRS' clients to get to their core issue in just a few clicks.

"We've found that when clients click through the data, what they really want is a store listing and the subsequent store conditions," Gillespie said. "With our dashboard, we try to maintain a 3-click philosophy. Because of the drill-down capabilities in Corda's solutions, within three clicks our clients can get to the appropriate store listing. That is a very powerful tool."

NRS includes what they call an "alarm panel". If a client has 5 stores that are out of stock, they can click through the interactive maps to see a listing of the stores. Not only is the data presented geographically, users can also set up alarms for when conditions fall below certain parameters. Users can more easily visualize successes and red flags and act accordingly.

"Between OptiMap and PopChart, it gives us a wide range of visual mechanisms for us and our clients to visualize the data without having to wade through thousands and thousands of records," Gillespie said. "If you are collecting 40 data points from Wal-Mart which has several thousand stores, trying to figure out what is going on in-store would be nearly impossible. By using the various types of graphs, bar graphs, pie graphs, radar graphs, we are able to visualize very quickly the situation and to drill down to the underlying data."



For a more complete market view, NRS merges its data with data from its partners and incorporates it into a single dashboard. This allows NRS to include store conditions coupled with distribution information and more.

"We are creating a dashboard for a major aspirin retailer, not by retail location but by servicing distribution center. A retail chain may or may not have their own distribution chain, and even when they have their own distribution chain, they may not service a particular store. This will allow them to compare one distribution chain against another," he said.

NRS utilizes Corda's solutions in another situation—reporting its own actions to its clients. With such a widespread organization and ever-increasing demand for providing return on investment, NRS has integrated Corda's interactive charting, graphing, and mapping solutions to help streamline the process of organizing and reporting the massive amounts of collected data in a way that makes sense.

"We want to be more transparent to our clients," Gillespie said. "They want to know the status of the program they have hired us to execute. They want to know what stores we have done and what stores haven't been done. There is more and more demand for transparency on our part to our clients. We are able to do this effectively with OptiMap."

NRS incorporated OptiMap into a program it calls QuickLink, which is a Web-based reporting program that displays a map of the United States. This map is populated with data regarding the client's program progress and status. Clients can see the status of their service calls regarding store conditions by clicking through the map on a state-by-state basis. Reports can then be generated in PDF formatted documents.

"In the past we had to transmit spreadsheets over to the clients or convert the spreadsheet to PDF then send it to the client. That took a lot of time," he said. "Now, we use Highwire to render the data in a PDF format. The graphs and maps can be more easily used in presentations or documents, which greatly improves communication."

"Corda allows us to maintain the advantage we have in the marketplace. No other company in the merchandizing services industry has this type of data visualization solution," Gillespie said, "Corda allows our clients to see the trends, exceptions to the trends and important relationships that can be hidden in the massive amounts of data they receive. Being able to visualize the data empowers our clients to use it strategically to help plan out their business and their product life cycles."

And NRS' satisfied; empowered clients keep the shelves stocked with the products to satisfy consumers.