

The University of St Andrews uses NodeGraph to visualize and understand QlikView data

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- Hannah Coutts, BI developer at The University of St Andrews

Solution overview

Institution: The University of St Andrews

Industry: Higher Education

Years using QlikView: 2009-2017

Summary

- Overall satisfaction with Qlik Solution
- Installing process and initial thoughts
- Using NodeGraph
- User case
- Overall satisfaction with NodeGraph

Challenge

- × Maintaining control and understanding of data as input grows

Solution

- ✓ Visualize your Qlik environment from data source to end-user application
- ✓ Investigate data dependencies
- ✓ Easily keep your data up-to-date
- ✓ Save time with automated documentation

Introduction

The University of St Andrews uses QlikView to analyze their student records, student applicants, estates, research grants, etc. Although they find that QlikView offers extensive insights, they wanted a tool that could help them to understand and properly document their data.

Challenge

Data collection and analysis have become crucial sources of both competitive advantage and customer acquisition. However, as the amount of available data increases, it becomes challenging for organizations to maintain control and understanding of their data. As a result, questions like “Where does the data come from?”, “How is it calculated?” and “Is it trustworthy?” become prevalent in all areas of business.

This subsequently creates a demand for BI functions to develop better, and more efficient, analysis applications, allowing for clarity and comprehension even within the most complex application.

Solution

NodeGraph enables you to investigate, visualize and discover hidden elements of your QlikView and Qlik Sense environment. By using NodeGraph, you can visualize dependencies within your data as well as see exactly where the data stems from.

Ultimately, NodeGraph allows you to analyze your Qlik solution all the way from the data source to end-user applications, on a field level.

Overall satisfaction with the Qlik solution before installing NodeGraph

The University of St Andrews uses a Data Warehouse to supply data from various source systems, HR, Finance, Estates, Student Records, etc. Data is loaded into QlikView, transformed and stored as QVDs before loading into the front-end QVW applications. This flexibility to either perform ETL outside the Data Warehouse or to use the data as it comes is a great strength of QlikView.

QlikView is a very mature product and offers a lot of flexibility in terms of front-end design, back-end ETL, section access and associative filtering. We find there is very little that is not possible to achieve in developing reports and dashboards, particularly with the support of the Qlik Community pool of knowledge and extensions built by other QlikView enthusiasts.

Installing process and initial thoughts

Installing Nodegraph was very straightforward. There is a certain amount of set-up to be done, both in NodeGraph and in the QlikView file environment, to ensure you get the clearest understanding of your data flows. It also shows up all the orphaned test files lying around, but this is no bad thing for housekeeping.

Using NodeGraph

On trialing NodeGraph the team found it does exactly what I need it to and it seems like an indispensable tool for any QlikView user with a sizeable estate. I've looked for a tool that does just this for a long time.

When a field changes in the source system it is trivial to trace this change through to the QVWs affected. It even takes into account where the field is renamed or used for mappings.

User case: Understand data-flows through various ETL layers

We have several legacy QlikView applications where the developer has left and there is little or no documentation. A large part of reverse-engineering another person's work is understanding the data-flows through the various ETL layers but this is very time-consuming to document - I tried this myself in Excel a few years ago and gave up after several days! NodeGraph provides this information in seconds and is very easy to navigate.

Occasionally there is a need to extract directly from source systems or look-up spreadsheets. From being a worrying undocumented wilderness it is now easy to keep track of these and know exactly what needs to be updated.

Overall satisfaction with the Qlik solution after installing NodeGraph

This product complements any reasonably sized implementation of QlikView. Now that I have it I couldn't live without it. I only wish there was something similar for our Data Warehouse.

My favourite feature is the 'Last Modified' heatmap, showing how long ago all QVDs were last refreshed. This has highlighted several missing links in our ETL process.

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