

University of Washington Tacoma

MILGARD SCHOOL OF BUSINESS



Sound Credit Union's Analytics Journey

Don Clark, Jr. and Tony del Fierro discuss Sound Credit Union's Analytics Journey

Don Clark, Jr. is a UW Tacoma Milgard School of Business alumnus (MBA '14). Before starting the MBA program at Milgard, Don worked for [Sound Credit Union\[2\]](#) and within the credit union industry for over 20 years. "It's a great program- it has great teachers, great professors," Don reflected. After attaining his MBA, Don was promoted to the position of President/ CEO for Sound Credit Union on April 1st, 2016.

During the last 2 quarters of his MBA program, Don opted to work on an independent study course. Don's project, titled "Business Transformation through Big Data and Analytics for Sound Credit Union," focused on next generation of business intelligence (BI) and analytics for Sound Credit Union. His advisor for the project, Dr. Haluk Demirkan (Director of [Center for Business Analytics\[3\]](#) and [Master of Science in Business Analytics\[4\]](#) at Milgard School of Business, University of Washington - Tacoma), worked very closely with Don throughout the process.

The goal of the project? To find a way to take everyday data and use it to enhance the delivery models for members.

(From left: Tony del Fierro [Senior VP/ Chief Technology Officer] and Don Clark, Jr. [President/ CEO] of Sound Credit Union)



"Haluk was instrumental in educating me about what business intelligence is, the many applications of business intelligence, and who many of the players out there were," remarked Don. Dr. Haluk provided insights on various companies in BI and introduced the concept of data management to Don. Dr. Haluk analyzed Sound Credit Union's data warehouse schematic and provided input to management on managing the architecture. When Don was acquiring new knowledge about the value of the vast amount of data collected and processed by Sound Credit Union, Haluk was learning in parallel about credit union business models. This is a great example of value co-creation between a financial services industry expert (Don), and business analytics scholar (Haluk).

The first project was to find a way that Sound Credit Union could approve small business loans faster. The goal was to make relevant offers to specific members using aggregated data. The ability to capture important data such as credit scores, cash flow, and other underwriting elements was important to the success of this project.

Don's project blossomed from an independent study course into a full-blown business intelligence project for Sound Credit Union; a project that is still being worked on and implemented today.

When asked what the biggest challenge about the project is, [Tony del Fierro\[5\]](#), Senior VP/ Chief Technology Officer for Sound Credit Union, answered, "Finding easy data and application integration points that are relevant." Don also mentioned that data integrity is another big issue that they face. Having the proper data and software architectures in place are needed to alleviate system disconnect. Almost every organization faces [similar data integration issues\[6\]](#) when they are working on business intelligence and analytics projects designed to enhance efficiency and to better serve to their customers.

For Sound Credit Union, BI is neither a product nor a computer system. Instead, it is considered a constantly evolving strategy, vision, and architecture that continuously seek to align Sound Credit Union's operations and direction with its strategic business goals and operational decisions. Don and Tony described, "Building a roadmap" as the next step for Sound Credit Union's business intelligence journey. Business intelligence is about making smarter decisions and being more predictive with data and new insights. Having top-down support is key, and Don noted that "Failure is not an option".

Today, an abundance of knowledge and experience exists to achieve successful data and analytics-enabled decision-making systems. There is no question that Sound Credit Union's BI solution will enable them to unearth their big data and through BI analysts provide an abundance of new, strategic information. With a wealth of information at its disposal, Sound Credit Union is just waiting to serve their members more efficiently and effectively while making their businesses more successful.

"Haluk set us on this path; we had no idea how impactful this project would be for Sound Credit Union", remarked Don. Tony closed with, "This is where data meets action".

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WRITTEN BY: Tara Knutsen / April 19, 2017

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