Alation

How innovative lender Oportun met rapid growth with data governance

Oportun

Industry: Financial Services
Headquarters: San Carlos, California, USA
Interesting Fact: Oportun has helped almost 1 million people establish credit

Facing the Opportunities and Challenges of Rapid Growth

The typical customer at Oportun is the person that most banks turn away. The financial services company serves 100 million people in the US who have no credit score or limited credit history. Oportun has been wildly successful. The company has loaned more than $11 billion USD through approximately 4.5 million loans since 2005 and helped nearly one million people establish credit.

In recent years, Oportun has experienced rapid growth, acquiring customers and expanding into new US states. To sustain this exponential growth, leadership has launched a data migration project. The company is migrating to the AWS cloud platform, where data management can be scaled most effectively. Yet a new cloud environment introduces new challenges.

Business Results

$
Created a single window into trusted data for business reporting

📖
Scaled tribal wisdom through SME knowledge-sharing in the catalog

🔄
Facilitated cloud migration with automated metadata extraction and query log ingestion

Oportun needed to ensure that people could find the data they needed in their cloud repositories. Leadership sought to create a single source of truth for reporting to regulatory bodies, such as the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). At the same time, they needed to meet new regulatory reporting requirements as the company expanded into more states. For this, a more proactive approach to data governance was essential.

The company's external growth was mirrored by an internal expansion in the number of people accessing and using data. "As we grew, we realized we needed to capture all of the institutional knowledge of our people in a centrally available enterprise metadata repository," says Yash Bhagde, Data Governance Manager at Oportun.

> As we grew, we realized we needed to capture all of the institutional knowledge of our people in a centrally available enterprise metadata repository.
>
> **Yash Bhagde**
> Data Governance Manager, Oportun

Faced with these challenges, company leadership decided to implement a central, governed metadata repository. This single source would enable users across the business to access the data they needed for decision making. It was important that the right data be used for reporting while protecting sensitive customer information. For this, the data catalog implementation would need to balance data self-service with data governance.

Oportun evaluated several data cataloging and governance tools, choosing the Alation Data Catalog for its balanced approach to data democratization and bottom-up governance. Oportun found that Alation was the only platform that could provide business context around the cataloged data.

Balancing Data Democratization with Data Governance

Oportun is using the Alation Data Catalog to ensure that data is available, governed, and trustworthy for critical reporting and data-driven decision making across the company.

Oportun began its Alation implementation with the Risk team; this is the largest and most diverse team in terms of types of data, user skillsets, and outputs required from data analytics. The company continues to expand catalog usage to the Marketing, Finance, and Enterprise Governance & Cybersecurity teams.

As Oportun migrates their data to Amazon Redshift and Amazon S3, they catalog the metadata in Alation using automated metadata extraction, data profiling, and query log ingestion. As more metadata is cataloged in Alation, Trust Flags make it easy for users to know which data to trust, which has been deprecated, and which has been queried most often. SMEs and other data experts use the Articles feature in Alation to share knowledge across the organization. The Compose query tool promotes self-service data inquiries. It also allows analysts to create reusable queries that non-SQL-savvy users can leverage for data insights.

> "
>
> Alation empowers data-savvy decision makers, analysts, and data consumers to find shared data for faster, more accurate insights.
>
> **Yash Bhagde**
> Data Governance Manager, Oportun

Oportun is using a bottoms-up, people-focused approach to data governance. First, they used Alation to identify the top users of data, classifying them as data stewards for their specific data elements. These data stewards manage the governance policies surrounding the data to ensure that sensitive data is protected, and the company complies with data protection regulations.

Oportun also uses Alation to streamline compliance reporting. The Data Management and Business Intelligence team created a governed self-service model for SEC reporting that they can replicate for other state regulatory and compliance requests as they expand their footprint to most states in the US. The team captured all the critical SEC metrics in a single catalog Article. Permission settings on that article showcase the powerful privacy features at the data team's fingertips. Governance of that article includes limited visibility to protect sensitive data. Creators have also restricted the number of reviewers and editors to prevent unauthorized changes to the page. This instills confidence and trust in the data used for SEC reporting.

Empowering Decision-Makers with Trustworthy Data

Oportun is improving data literacy and data democratization across the company and sharing the critical tribal knowledge of experienced analysts. "Alation empowers data-savvy decision makers, analysts, and data consumers to find shared data for faster, more accurate insights," says Bhagde.

At the same time, teams are using Alation to improve data governance. Users leverage Trust Flags to inspire confidence in the data, and leaders identify data stewards to formalize their role. The business can easily recreate the governance model developed for SEC reporting for other areas of the business, including Marketing, Sales, and Human Resources.

It all comes down to trust and confidence. According to Bhagde, his team's mission is to "inspire confidence in our business stakeholders that data … is available, governed, cataloged, trustworthy, and protected." This allows leaders to focus on business strategy rather than data quality. They can have confidence that Alation can deliver cataloged data for data-driven decision making.

With Alation, Oportun has created a vibrant and robust community of catalog users. These folks always have critical data at their fingertips. They can self-serve quickly, and ask questions right in the platform. The best part? People are no longer intimidated by data.

Since Oportun adopted Alation in early 2020, the number of users grew from an initial group of 82to 273 registered users by October 2021. Within just 10 months in 2021, Oportun experienced greater than 75% growth in unique active visitors, and a 150% increase in Compose query executions. Their top ten Compose users have authored more than 3,200 queries!

About Oportun, Inc.

Oportun is a mission-driven financial services company headquartered in San Carlos, California. Their goal is to offer affordable credit to people who are often excluded from the financial mainstream – the more than 100 million people in the US who have either a low credit score or have been mis-scored because of their limited credit history. Oportun uses AI-driven models, which are based on 15 years of proprietary knowledge and billions of data touchpoints, to safely lend money to this underserved population so they can fund large expenses or emergency purchases. Since 2006, they have disbursed more than 4.5 million loans and helped over 2 million customers. Oportun donates 1% of their profits to charitable causes.

Data Environment: amazon REDSHIFT   amazon S3   MySQL   Infor **Birst**