



Certifying Your Data Suppliers' Data

Reliance on data suppliers requires trust on the part of the data consumer and a proven track record on the part of the supplier. Cultivating valuable supplier partnerships is key. Yet collecting, aggregating, manipulating, reporting or re-using another organization's data can entail risk: oftentimes the integrity of data is suspect. Data may be incomplete, inaccurate or inconsistent. So how can consumers of external data keep tabs on the quality of data they bring in?

When we consider industries that rely heavily on external sources of data, certain sectors come to mind, like direct marketing and financial services. However, a useful example of data supplier certification comes not from the commercial world, but from the K-12 public education system. In fact, the enormity of the education system's data feeds would cause most commercial enterprises to balk. The U.S. Department of Education is highly reliant on a vast system of data suppliers: a nationwide network of states, which includes more than 16,000 school districts and over 97,000 schools. Each local entity reports student, teacher and school data to its superior funding entity; that is, schools report to districts and districts report to states, with each state reporting to the federal government.

The stakes for producing good-quality data are high. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which became federal law in 2002, requires states to issue yearly report cards on schools and school districts. Local entities that receive federal funding must demonstrate that they are meeting achievement goals, and can be subject to sanctions if they don't meet federal benchmarks. In addition,

Certica Solutions emphasizes four main tenets of data certification, to promote validity and consistency of supplier data:

1. **Validate incoming data at the point closest to its origin, i.e., before it is transmitted to the receiving organization, or at least before it has had a chance to migrate to critical data stores;**
2. **Validate data quality at the table and column level, before it is consolidated, aggregated or transmitted;**
3. **Use a systematic and objective approach to verify adherence to data standards and business rules; and**
4. **Make data quality certification an ongoing, repeatable process wherein trends in improvement can be observed and reported over time.**

An inline data certification process allows organizations to provide an objective stamp of approval that data is of certified high quality.

pro-active data quality management has started at the top. Galvanized by data-intensive reporting for initiatives like NCLB, the U.S. Department of Education has pushed the nation's state education agencies to apply high-tech solutions and local accountability to the problem of data quality management. In doing so, the education system is doing what so many private sector IT managers wish they could do—push real responsibility for the quality of data back into the hands of their data suppliers—before the data reaches consumers. And some in the education field have begun to implement pioneering solutions to manage the quality of data they take in from their suppliers.

Since 2001, Certica Solutions has worked closely with state-level education agencies, helping them improve the quality of the data that they collect from districts and schools, and that the states, in turn, supply to their federal regulators. Three states— Massachusetts, Missouri and New Hampshire—have integrated Certica's inline data certification solution, Certify™, into their data collection processes. As data arrives from schools and districts, it passes through a series of stringent validations, to ensure that data is not corrupted, duplicated or out of compliance with pre-determined rules. The collection process kicks off an automated web service that performs a check of the data and returns alerts and error reports to data suppliers. Data suppliers can easily review their faulty data online, record-by-record, and take corrective action at the source of the problem—usually at the school or district level.

This rapid cycle of automated data submission, validation, error review and correction is improving the quality and timeliness of data across the education spectrum. The New Hampshire data submission system has evolved to the point where automated validation cycles can run hundreds of times per day, providing



Certica Solutions' Certify™ software provides a structured, systematic approach to data quality management, and can be applied to all types of data—in any organization or industry—across multiple database platforms.

specific information about errors to data suppliers.

Implementing an inline data certification solution allows organizations, whether in the public or private sector, to provide an objective stamp of approval that data is of certified high quality.

About Certica Solutions

Certica Solutions is a leading provider of data certification solutions. Certica helps corporate and government organizations address specific business challenges with a structured, systematic approach to identifying, reporting and monitoring data quality issues. Certica's business-specific solutions, based on the company's Certify™ software, enable organizations to identify costly data errors and omissions, comply confidently with regulatory requirements, improve data in a shortened time period, and certify their data suppliers' data.

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