



## Nichols plc

Nichols PLC is an international soft drinks manufacturer and home to the iconic Vimto brand. With over 100 years of heritage, the company was founded by John Noel Nichols, after he developed the world-famous herbal tonic recipe that would later become Vimto.

The popularity of this unique and delicious ‘Vim-tonic’ grew rapidly, and today the Vimto brand is enjoyed by consumers in over 73 countries worldwide and is the cornerstone of the distinctive Nichols brand portfolio.

### Pain Points

Whilst the existing platform for sales reporting had been fit for purpose for a number of years after its initial implementation, Nichols understood that the evolving reporting needs of the business, coupled with the emergence of cloud technologies, meant that a new data and analytics platform was required to meet user requirements.

With reporting typically delivered through Excel spreadsheets, and forecast data managed separately from operational systems, a considerable amount of time was being consumed creating regular reports for audiences across the business. This manual approach could potentially lead to the creation of multiple versions of the truth and posed a challenge to deliver consistent and timely insights to decision-makers, given the time and resources required to ensure information was accurate and dependable.

*“As part of our commitment to delivering an exceptional customer experience, we are always looking for new ways to enhance internal processes. After meeting with Circyl, we realised there was a lot of room to expand and develop our existing data strategy through the implementation of sophisticated technology. Throughout the journey, we have been impressed with Circyl’s ability to understand our long-term vision, offering solutions and suggestions that have been tailored to meet the unique requirements of the business.”*

**- Andy Freeman**  
*Business Systems Controller, Vimto*

The continued growth of the business meant that the time was right to identify a more sustainable long-term approach, with Nichols keen to implement a sophisticated and flexible solution that would create operational efficiency savings and deliver a modern reporting experience.

### Objectives and Approach

In response to these challenges, Circyl engaged with Nichols by working in partnership with business and technical stakeholders to understand how business performance is measured and explore aspirations for the new platform.

Starting with an initial Proof of Concept (PoC) solution based on a monthly financial report that was considered challenging to produce, Circyl were able to demonstrate the best practice methods of structuring data for reporting, and the features and benefits of using Power BI for data visualisation.

Following an enthusiastic response to the PoC from stakeholders across the business, Circyl proposed a new data and analytics solution utilising the Microsoft Azure Platform that would consolidate data from across the business centrally and allow users to analyse sales

and finance data together from a single location for the first time.

The creation of Power BI dashboards would provide users with an interactive tool for reporting and exploring data, with features such as filtering and user-specific security permissions removing the need for duplication of reports to suit specific audiences.

With Nichols' users already comfortable using Excel as an analysis tool, the new solution would allow them to connect to the same consistent source that feeds the Power BI reports, providing a single version of the truth for reporting and supporting a move to self-service analytics across the business.

With the business still developing its data culture, it was important that the delivery approach was broken into phases that delivered immediate value to end users and incorporated their feedback along the way.

## Outcomes and Values

With the new data platform now in place, Nichols users have access to key operational data from a range of sources, enabling them to access timely and accurate information with ease.

Given the large amount of data available to the business and the desire for additional features as the project progressed, the solution has evolved to cater for comparisons against previous time periods and additional data from locally managed Excel spreadsheets.

By utilising the Azure Platform, the solution developed can dynamically scale up during data processing and back down once complete, providing a cost-effective solution that can be pro-actively monitored to manage monthly running costs.

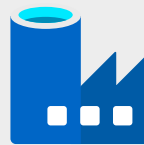
Through the automated extract of data from key systems and the creation of a business-friendly data model that uses terminology familiar to users, the solution has greatly reduced both the amount of time taken to create reports and duplication of key reports across the business. These efficiency savings mean that report creators can now provide a more pro-active service to the business, asking questions such as 'how can we do better?' rather than 'how did we do?' and uncovering insights that were previously unavailable.

*"Through our initial meetings with Andy and the wider Vimto team, we gained a much clearer understanding of the data and reporting challenges they were currently experiencing. To address these, we suggested a Proof of Concept approach that would demonstrate the key benefits of the technology and our role as a strategic partner. The client's willingness to develop a strong data culture within the business ensured the project delivery was smooth, as they now have a clear roadmap ahead of them that will allow them to achieve their long-term data objectives."*

**- Andy McLean**  
Head of Data and Analytics, Circyl

## Technologies Utilised

During the project, Circyl leveraged the following technologies:



**Azure Data Factory:** ADF is Microsoft's cloud-based integration tool for managing the extraction of data into Azure from a range of sources. The tool allows configurable pipelines to be developed that automate the data refresh process, keeping report data up to date and removing the need for manual effort.



**Azure SQL Database:** Azure SQL Database is Microsoft's cloud-based service that provides the database platform for the centralised data warehouse. With its range of service tiers that can be scaled up or down as demand dictates, Azure SQL Database provides the ideal combination of reliability and flexibility for an evolving data platform.



**Power BI:** Power BI is Microsoft's cloud-based enterprise and self-service analytical solution that provides data modelling and visualisation capabilities across a range of data sources. With its ability to facilitate both standardised and self-service reports and distribute insights securely across an organisation with tight integration with Microsoft 365, Power BI is the ideal solution for any organisation looking to empower its employees and develop a collaborative data culture.



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