VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY USES SNOWFLAKE TO ADVANCE DONOR ENGAGEMENT AND DATA LITERACY

EDUCATION

V VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

COMPANY Vanderbilt University
LOCATION Nashville, Tennessee

SNOWFLAKE WORKLOADS USED

COLLABORATION | DATA ENGINEERING | CYBERSECURITY | AI/ML | APPLICATIONS

DATA WAREHOUSE | DATA LAKE | UNISTORE

Vanderbilt University is a private research university in Nashville, Tennessee. Vanderbilt's internationally recognized programs, 7:1 student-to-faculty ratio, and beautiful campus help it rank as a leading institution for student satisfaction and quality of life. To engage 13,710 enrolled students and over 150,000 living alumni, Vanderbilt ingests and analyzes large amounts of institutional data.

STORY HIGHLIGHTS:

Extensive network of connectors, drivers, programming languages, and utilities
Ingesting constituent data from Salesforce makes it easier to support the data needs of Vanderbilt's development and alumni relations teams.

Collaboration
Accessing data via Snowflake Marketplace bolsters Vanderbilt's ability to enrich data and build sophisticated models.

Data governance
Snowflake aligns with Vanderbilt's proactive approach to ensuring data governance and data literacy.

> **"** **Our data strategy is focused on reducing the complexity of our technology stack. Our ability to now use Python through Snowflake's Snowpark feature will further advance our data engineering and infrastructure team."**
>
> **—JOSH VINCENT,**
> Senior Director, Office of Continuous Improvement, Vanderbilt University

CHALLENGE:

Efficiently managing resources and ensuring stellar student experiences
Vanderbilt is focused on ensuring optimal resource usage, while continuing to build a stellar student experience and conduct transformational research.

Data is essential for achieving the right balance, but Vanderbilt's on-premises data environment made it difficult to unify and leverage data. Answering questions often required considerable data wrangling by Vanderbilt's technical staff. Siloed data and prevalent spreadsheet usage posed data governance challenges.

Seeking to overcome these roadblocks, Vanderbilt developed a comprehensive data strategy. "The core of the data strategy is that people at Vanderbilt can access trustworthy data to do their jobs," says Olivia Kew-Fickus, Chief Data Officer & Executive Director, Data & Strategic Analytics at Vanderbilt University.

SOLUTION:

A platform for scalable institutional insights
Realizing the need for a modern data environment, Vanderbilt turned to Snowflake's Data Cloud™.

The first Snowflake use case was ingesting constituent data from Salesforce. This made it easier to support the data needs of Vanderbilt's development and alumni relations teams. Powering visualizations with Tableau and Snowflake streamlined the delivery of timely insights to development officers. Snowflake's optimized storage and elastic performance engine helped Vanderbilt increase analytics while controlling costs.

4x
Improvement in Salesforce ETL throughput with Snowpark

Snowflake Marketplace bolstered Vanderbilt's ability to enrich data and build sophisticated models. "We're bringing data sets together, updating data in near real time, and improving the experience for decision-makers," says Josh Vincent, Senior Director, Office of Continuous Improvement at Vanderbilt University.

Unified data in the Data Cloud led to fewer data silos and increased transparency at Vanderbilt. According to Kew-Fickus, "Snowflake helps give people access to data while also helping with data governance and data literacy."

RESULTS:

Elevating donor and alumni engagement with data

Enriching and analyzing constituent data with the Data Cloud helps Vanderbilt develop strategies for engaging alumni, donors, grant-giving agencies, and other stakeholders. "We're using Snowflake to understand our donor base, the propensity of alumni to give, and how best to reach and engage them," Vincent says.

Vanderbilt's development officers rely on embedded Tableau dashboards, powered with data stored in Snowflake, to identify outreach opportunities, inform donor conversations, and track interactions. Donor engagement data also helps Vanderbilt assess the impact of its advancement efforts and optimize development officers' portfolios.

> **Leveraging Snowflake, Salesforce, and Tableau together has helped us develop sophisticated reporting for donor and alumni engagement, which is an important use case for any university. This model enables us to strategically expand operations."**
>
> **—OLIVIA KEW-FICKUS,**
> CDO & Executive Director, Data & Strategic Analytics, Vanderbilt University

Advancing data literacy through proactive data governance

Vanderbilt ingests virtually everything from its Salesforce instance into Snowflake, enabling healthier conversations about data. According to Kew-Fickus, "The best way to roll out data governance is on an active project—when people are motivated to engage. As we go through each project with Snowflake, we work closely with people to understand their data, capture data definitions, and enable increased access to data."

Vanderbilt's data task force meets regularly to explore data usage, develop documentation for data classification, and discuss Snowflake use cases. For example, the team used Snowflake to rapidly surface reliable insights about Vanderbilt's graduating classes. "We used Snowflake in a rapid development environment rather than a waterfall approach," says Daniel Kirby, Director, Data Governance & Solutions at Vanderbilt University.

Proactive data governance ultimately helps Vanderbilt advance data literacy across the institution. "Informing people about the data we have and what it represents is one of our key sub-strategies. We're doing that by ingesting Salesforce data into Snowflake and making it operational," Kirby says.

> **As we make data more operational through Snowflake, we're trying to be good stewards of the governance process to make sure everybody is fully aware of what the data represents."**
>
> **—DANIEL KIRBY,**
> Director, Data Governance & Solutions, Vanderbilt University

Scaling data-driven decision-making and collaboration

Success with the Data Cloud has required a mindset shift among Vanderbilt's data leaders.

According to Kew-Fickus, "Our primary use case for Snowflake was and is as a bigger, faster data warehouse. However, we've realized that Snowflake gives us other opportunities as well."

Architecting on Snowflake puts Vanderbilt in a better position to extract and centralize more data with less technical effort, democratize data analytics for a variety of teams, and develop innovative solutions that drive efficiency. For example, "We've been able to improve Salesforce ETL throughput by 4x by switching to AWS AppFlow and Snowpark for Python. As a result we were able to improve load times and reduce vendor dependency and associated costs," says Vincent.

Snowflake is also contributing to Vanderbilt's exploratory AI work. "Bringing in an external data source to enrich data and identify insights is something we haven't done in the past, and Snowflake enabled it," Kirby says.

FUTURE:

Accelerating data's impact with Snowflake

Optimizing data pipelines with Snowpark, loading additional data sets into the Data Cloud, and enriching data with Snowflake Marketplace will help Vanderbilt reduce complexity and increase data ROI. Vanderbilt anticipates leveraging the partnership with Snowflake to unlock new insights about students, alumni, research, and operations.