Oceans of Digital Possibilities for Team SCA
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Summary
The Volvo Ocean Race is one of the world’s most grueling sailing competitions. Covering more than 40,000 nautical miles, it takes nine months to complete and features teams of nine crew members who sail for more than 20 days at a stretch to win the coveted trophy. SCA, the hygiene and forest products company, created an all-female team to go head-to-head with the other all-male crews. To help them, SCA employed Accenture’s digital services to give the crew an edge – both online and offline.

Client Background
There’s no doubt that technological innovation continues to improve performance in sports, and in all other aspects of life. Changes in yacht rigging, materials, new instrumentation and techniques have all contributed to improved results over the years. Consider this: In the first Volvo Ocean Race (then called the Whitbread Classic) in 1973, the winning team went 305 miles in 24 hours. In 2008, the winning team went almost 600 miles in the same time.

All-women crews have competed in the Volvo Ocean Race in the past. But for this race, SCA wanted to give them every possible advantage to increase their chances of winning.

The Challenge
In 2015, for the first time, the Volvo Ocean Race regulations required all teams to sail an identically constructed vessel. So competitive advantage comes from the crew on board and the information steering their decisions. To give Team SCA an edge, the company chose Accenture as their principal Team SCA digital supplier to provide data analytics and visualization tools that shaved precious seconds off time.

How Accenture Helped
Accenture partnered with Team SCA to gain critical insights through analytics on their performance onboard by helping them:

• Calibrate boat speed
  Data from sixty different sources including boat-speed sensors and GPS-based speed measurements was analyzed at ten-second intervals to determine the speed of the water current and how to choose the fastest track towards the finish line. Using live sensor data combined with historical data, the calibrated boat speed was featured in the navigation software onboard, and applied to other calculations including performance reports and data visualizations such as polar diagrams (a calculation of the maximum potential speed of a vessel in any given condition).

• Anticipate weather conditions
  Routing decisions based on expected weather conditions were made by analyzing both historical weather data and actual weather data as the race unfolded. The analytics results were displayed through data visualizations.

• Get regular progress reports
  By analyzing both the boat sensor data and manually recorded data from the team – including sail usage and configurations and crew member roles –custom reports and post-leg performance summaries supported the team’s performance. The reports typically compare actual boat performance to the polar diagrams that suggest data-driven decision options including different sailing configurations or helmsmen.
As the race progressed, it was clear that the performance of Team SCA’s crew improved. That was partly thanks to the insights fed through boat sensors that optimized every aspect onboard. The team could stay in sight of the other boats for longer than ever before. And thanks to this contact with the fleet and with the calibrated boat speed data, they managed to improve their overall boat speed. Accenture’s work on the boat speed calibration resulted in a more accurate way to rate the team’s performance against the actual potential of the boat in given conditions. And made it easier to spot both areas of improvement and high performance sailing. The calibrated boat speed data also helped gauge the effect of currents in the ocean, which in turn resulted in a huge advantage when sailing several thousand nautical miles in one leg.

When sailing through tricky areas –near shore, with tides, obstacles and transitions –the team benefited significantly from using routing recommendation based on expected weather conditions done by analyzing both historical data and actual weather data. Accenture provided the enhanced weather data in a format that allowed the team on board to load it directly into the routing software in the boat’s computer. A fast and more user friendly way of handling significant amounts of data.

But the real proof that analytics paid off in Team SCA’s performance happened in leg eight, the next to final part of the competition. Leg eight featured difficult sailing conditions from Lisbon, Spain to Lorient, France. Yet Team SCA won, crossing the finish line after 3 days 13 hours 11 minutes and 11 seconds. It was an intense 647-mile leg marked by light winds at the start to brutal upwind conditions blowing at 30 knots (35 miles per hour) toward the finish. The team received insights that steered them toward a more offshore course as they headed into the Bay of Biscay. And came in first against the rest of the fleet.
About Accenture

Accenture is a leading global professional services company, providing a broad range of services and solutions in strategy, consulting, digital, technology and operations. Combining unmatched experience and specialized skills across more than 40 industries and all business functions—underpinned by the world’s largest delivery network—Accenture works at the intersection of business and technology to help clients improve their performance and create sustainable value for their stakeholders. With more than 358,000 people serving clients in more than 120 countries, Accenture drives innovation to improve the way the world works and lives. Visit us at www.accenture.com.

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