

SUCCESS STORY



**How a growing
manufacturing business used
Microsoft Fabric to bring
enterprise-level insights**



KEY INSIGHTS

2 Years in Production

Fabric supporting daily operations for nearly 2 years.

Daily Segment Profitability

Profitability visibility updated daily.

Daily Operational KPIs

Production and inventory performance tracked daily.

Faster Market Response

Decisions supported by current, shared data.

Reduced Overtime

Better visibility helped lower overtime needs.

HOW A GROWING MANUFACTURING BUSINESS USED MICROSOFT FABRIC TO BRING ENTERPRISE-LEVEL INSIGHTS

When Shawn Ham joined Canlak Coatings as Chief Financial Officer, the company continued to grow and mature its operations. Canlak Coatings is a North American manufacturer of wood coatings, serving customers across multiple markets. As the business expanded, systems were added over time to support different parts of the organization, and reporting processes evolved alongside that growth. Information was available across the organization, though creating a single, consistent view required coordination across teams and systems.

Shawn brought experience from larger manufacturing organizations where data played a central role in day-to-day decision-making. At Canlak, he saw an opportunity to strengthen how insight was generated and shared across the business using modern analytics, while remaining pragmatic about scale, cost, and disruption.

Microsoft Fabric became a key part of that vision.

RAISING EXPECTATIONS FOR HOW DATA SUPPORTS THE BUSINESS

Canlak's reporting approach had evolved alongside the company. Multiple ERP systems supported sales, production, inventory, and finance, each introduced to meet specific needs at different stages of growth. Reporting delivered the information required to run the business, largely through periodic summaries and manual consolidation.

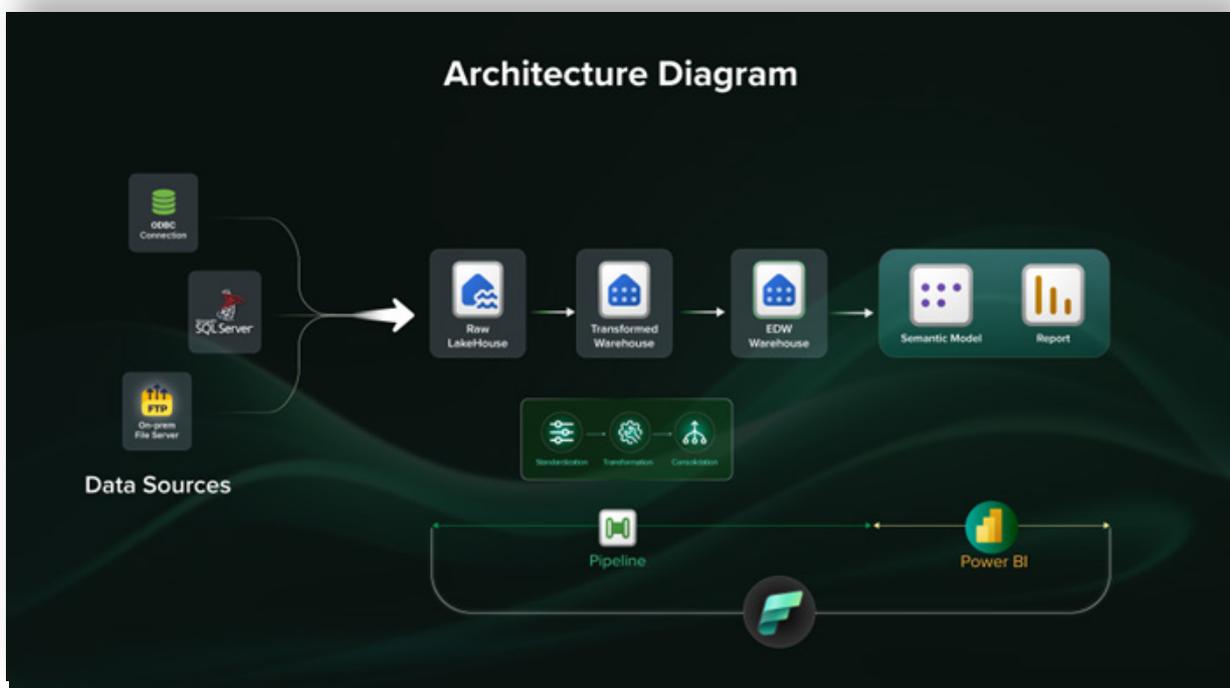
Shawn saw an opportunity to raise the standard for how data could support decisions as the organization scaled. His focus was on building on what already existed and improving consistency and accessibility across the business.

MANAGING COMPLEXITY ACROSS SYSTEMS AT DIFFERENT STAGES OF MATURITY

As Canlak expanded, its systems landscape became more diverse. Some areas of the business operated on newer ERP platforms backed by SQL Server, while others relied on long-standing systems that remained critical to daily operations.

One system required scheduled file exports and batch processing, while another supported database connectivity with constraints. Each system continued to serve its purpose, but combining information across them required increasing effort as reporting needs grew.

This environment is common among mid-market manufacturers and reflects natural growth rather than poor system choices.



BUILDING AN ANALYTICS FOUNDATION WITH MICROSOFT FABRIC

Canlak focused on creating an analytics layer that could work with existing systems and scale as the company grows through acquisition. Under Shawn's leadership, Microsoft Fabric was selected to unify data and support a consistent Power BI reporting foundation.

Fabric enabled data from sales, production, inventory, and finance to be integrated into a single analytics environment while operational systems continued to run without disruption.



We were able to provide the data the business needed to make decisions, regardless of technology skills, on whatever device people were using.

Shawn Ham

Chief Financial Officer, Canlak Coatings



This reduced manual reconciliation and allowed reporting to move closer to real time without extended implementation timelines.

FROM PERIODIC REPORTING TO DAILY OPERATIONAL INSIGHT

As Microsoft Fabric and Power BI were introduced into production, reporting shifted toward more frequent, automated updates. Leaders and managers gained access to current performance data daily, supporting faster reviews and more informed decisions.

With Power BI and Microsoft Fabric, we aligned sales and financial data across our ERP platforms and created a centralized dataset and dashboards that let leadership and the sales team see key metrics on a daily basis.

Shawn Ham

Chief Financial Officer, Canlak Coatings



Finance adopted the platform as part of its daily workflows, with deeper financial initiatives addressed separately.

OPERATING IN PRODUCTION OVER TIME

Microsoft Fabric is no longer a topic of evaluation at Canlak. **The platform has been supporting daily operations in a live production environment for close to two years.** Over that time, Canlak has relied on Fabric every day as part of how the business operates. In that context, broader questions about whether Fabric is “production-ready” remain largely theoretical. Canlak’s experience is grounded in sustained, real-world production use.

Over the course of operating in production, Canlak’s use of Compute Units (CUs) has become increasingly efficient. Compute Units measure how much Microsoft Fabric capacity is consumed as workloads run across the platform. As dataflows were refined and updated, Fabric capacity usage declined, resulting in an estimated 25 to 30% reduction in CU consumption. These improvements have delivered consistent efficiency gains for day-to-day operations.

The business will soon have daily profitability by segment, inventory management, and production KPI reporting. It will help Canlak react to the market quicker, prevent inventory build-up and stockouts, and reduce overtime.

Shawn Ham

Chief Financial Officer, Canlak Coatings



While these efficiency gains are meaningful, they were not the primary driver of the initiative. The most significant value was realized early, when Canlak achieved a level of operational visibility that would previously have required years of effort and significant investment. Microsoft Fabric enabled the company to reach that point far sooner and at a scale appropriate for a mid-market organization.

WHY IT WORKED

BEFORE MICROSOFT FABRIC	AFTER MICROSOFT FABRIC
Periodic reporting cycles	Daily operational insight
Manual data consolidation	Integrated analytics layer
Fragmented system views	Consistent cross-functional reporting
Higher ongoing effort	Reduced reporting overhead
Static environments	Scalable analytics foundation

Several factors contributed to Canlak’s success:

- » Clear leadership ownership from the Chief Financial Officer
- » A pragmatic focus on outcomes over system replacement
- » A platform capable of integrating systems at different levels of maturity
- » Early adoption followed by continuous refinement

WHAT'S NEXT

With a stable analytics foundation in place, Canlak is positioned to expand its use of Microsoft Fabric further. Future initiatives include deeper financial analytics, planning and forecasting capabilities, and continued optimization as new data sources are introduced.

The groundwork established over the past two years allows the company to pursue these next steps with confidence, building incrementally on a proven production environment.

BRINGING ENTERPRISE INSIGHT TO A GROWING BUSINESS

Canlak Coatings' experience shows how leadership vision and practical technology decisions can elevate how data supports the business. **By adopting Microsoft Fabric early and committing to its use in production, the company established enterprise-level insight without unnecessary complexity.**

Throughout this journey, Canlak partnered with Data Crafters to design and implement an analytics environment aligned with real operational needs, creating a durable foundation that supports both day-to-day decision-making and future growth.

READY TO BUILD YOUR OWN UNIFIED PLATFORM?

Let's talk about how Microsoft Fabric
can help you scale with clarity.



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